



# Quick overview: Regulation of the Press

## Henry VIII ruled 1509–47

### Act of 1534:

- prevented “aliens” becoming printers
- concentrated the production of books in London

### Proclamation of 1538 against “naughty printed books”:

“no book in English was to be printed without the approval of a royal licenser” (Blagden 30–1)



# Edward VI

(Protestant)

ruled 1547 – 1553

Edward is fiercely Protestant; imposes the Book of Common Prayer in 1549 (replaced Latin services with English)

proclamations against popish books are issued by Edward

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Mary I  
reigned 1553–8

- 1555: royal proclamation prohibits the printing or importation of the works of Luther, Calvin, Tindale, and other reformers
- 1557: the Worshipful Company of Stationers receives royal charter (purpose is to prevent propagation of the Protestant Reformation)
- very small membership has sole right throughout England to print, publish, and sell printed works
- 1558: proclamation directed against heretical and treasonable books including the service books of Edward VI

# What was in the 1557 Charter?

- Only freemen who were members of the Stationers' Co. or those with royal permission were allowed to print books
- Stationers' Co. authorities had the right to “search the houses and business premises of all printers, bookbinders and booksellers” (Blagden 21)

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Elizabeth I  
reigned 1558–1603

- 1558: *Injunctions given by the Queenes Majestie*: no book or paper to be printed without license of the Queen, her privy council, Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Bishop of London, or chancellors of both universities
- 1566: the Star chamber issues a decree against the printing, importing, or selling of prohibited books
- 1579: John Stubbe has his right hand cut off for his critique of proposed marriage of the queen and Duke of Anjou
- 1584: William Carter, printer, condemned for high treason and hanged, bowelled and quartered

no manner of book or paper should be printed unless it:

“be first licenced by her maiestie by expresse wordes in writynge, or by .vi. of her privy counsel, or by perused and licensed by the archbysshops of Cantorbury, and yorke, the bishop of London, the chaunselours of both universities, the bishop being ordinary, and the Archdeacon also of the place where anye suche shalbe printed, or by two of them, whereof the ordinary of the place to be alwaies one. And that the names of such as shal allowe the same to be added in thende of every such worke, for a testymonye of the allowaunce thereof.”

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James I  
reigned 1603–25

- 1603: James issues Stationers' Company letters patent that grant the rights to publish in perpetuity print primers, psalters, psalms in meter, the *ABC with the little Catechism*, and almanacs and prognostications — the Stationers' Company becomes a capitalist venture (members become publishers)
- 1620: proclamation “against excesse of Lavish and Licentious Speech of matters of State”
- between 1620 and 1660 almost eight thousand separate issues of a variety of newspapers appear in England

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Charles I  
reigned 1625–49

- 1637: Charles introduces new Prayer Book in Scotland, causes riots
- 1637: decree of Star Chamber reiterates existing regulations, makes licensing policies stricter, requires deposit of copy with Stationer's Hall for registration, penalties for printing illegal or unauthorized books drastically increased
- 1641: Star Chamber abolished
- 1642: Civil War
- 1644: John Milton writes *Areopagitica*, for the freedom of the press
- 1640s: absolute freedom of the press



“it will be primely to the discouragement of all learning, and the stop of Truth, not only by disexercising and blunting our abilities in what we know already, but by hindring and cropping the discovery that might bee yet further made both in religious and civill Wisdome.”

John Milton, *Areopagitica; a Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing, to the Parliament of England* (1644), p. 4

“Books are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them....a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm’d and treasur’d up on purpose to a life beyond life. ... We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men, how we spill that season’d life of man preserv’d and stor’d up in Books; since we see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdome, and if it extend to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elementall life, but strikes at that ethereall and first essence, the breath of reason it selfe, slaies an immortality rather than a life.”

John Milton, *Areopagitica; a Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicens’d Printing, to the Parliament of England* (1644), p. 4

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Oliver Cromwell  
Lord Protector of England  
1649–58



Richard Cromwell  
Lord Protector of England  
1658–59

- Interregnum: state control over printing lapses

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Charles II  
reigned 1660–85

- 1662: Printing Act tries to limit number of master printers in England to 24
- 1662: Licensing Act, a form of pre-publication censorship, establishes register of licensed books (deposit administered by Stationers' Company which is given powers to seize seditious or heretical books)
- 1670s: birth of Whig opposition and development of party politics → declining gov't and Stationers' Company control
- 1679: Licensing Act lapses (until 1685)

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James II  
reigned 1685–88

- 1685: Licensing Act reintroduced
- 1688: Glorious Revolution

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- 1695: Parliament fails to renew Licensing Act (pre-publication censorship in England ends)
- neither Whigs nor Tories support an unchecked political press but neither side wants the other in control of the press
- number of master printers in London no longer restricted by law

William & Mary of Orange  
reigned 1689–1702

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Anne  
reigned 1702–14

- 1705: 65–70 printing houses in London alone
- competition for commercial control of publishing
- birth of the modern literary marketplace
- 1710: “The Statute of Anne,” 14 years’ right to copy, possible not just for guild members but also for authors

# The Statute of Anne England, 1710

An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by vesting  
the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or  
purchasers of such Copies, during the Times therein  
mentioned



# The Statute of Anne 1710

- gave authors of books the rights to their own work, including the right to choose the publisher of their work
- for books in print at the time of the Statute, granted the sole right to republish the work for a period of 21 years
- for subsequently published works granted copyright protection for 14 years, with an option to extend that protection for another 14 years
- intended to protect the rights of authors as well as to prevent printer and publishing house monopolies

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George I  
reigned 1714–27

- 1680–1730: enormous expansion of the book trade
- **The Marketplace of Literature**
  - i. patronage → capitalist enterprise
  - ii. literature as a commodity: quantity, variety, newness; market research
  - iii. readers: middle class, women, servants
  - iv. circulating libraries
  - v. birth of the novel form; & newspaper generic instability
  - vi. challenge to tradition, collective values (“Ancients” vs. “Moderns”)
  - vii. patriarchal, social, sexual, economic status quo vs. a new individualism