

## Notes about "Newes from Scotland"

1. "Newes from Scotland" is a pamphlet reporting on the witchcraft trials which had taken place in Edinburgh during the winter of 1590-91. It takes a particular interest in the case of a schoolmaster named Doctor Fian, who was executed, we are told, "in January last"; and that implies that this pamphlet was published not more than twelve months later. We are being told that this is "news" -- so we expect it to be fairly fresh.

2. As to the authorship, the piece is "sometimes attributed to James Carmichael" (ESTC), on the evidence of a passing remark in Sir James Melville's memoirs (ed Thomson 1827:396). Possibly Carmichael wrote the "Scottish copie" which this pamphlet cites as its source, but he did not write this pamphlet. The author was certainly English: all the way through, he speaks of Scotland as of a foreign country.\* It is not unlikely, however, that the passages printed in roman type (sigs A3r-v, D3r) were being translated word for word from the "Scottish copie". Even in an englished form, the concluding paragraph sounds like the work of some sycophantic Scot -- someone who hopes that the king may condescend to read his words -- not of some hack writer in London.

\* For example, "an instrument called in Scottish a Turkas, which in England wee call a payre of pincers" (sig D2r).

3. There are seven surviving copies, and they represent two editions. The first edition, which has five illustrations, extends over four quarto sheets -- 15 leaves plus a blank leaf at the end. The second edition, which has only two illustrations, fits neatly into three sheets -- 12 leaves. I think we can be sure of the ordering: an untidy edition was being made tidy, not the other way around.

4. Three copies of the first edition are known.

(1) The Bodleian Library has a good clean copy, "Printed for William Wright" (ESTC S120634). Ferguson (1897:47-8) gives a fairly detailed description; one small fact which he omits to mention is the date "June 1608" written alongside "FINIS" at the foot of sig D3r by some previous owner. This copy arrived in Oxford as part of the huge collection of books bequeathed to the Bodleian Library by Francis Douce, who died in 1834. How he had acquired it in the first place does not appear to be known; but it was certainly in his possession by 1807, when he quoted some passages from it in his book about Shakespeare (Douce 1807 1:32-3, 2:91-2).

(2) The Houghton Library at Harvard has an incomplete and damaged copy of "Newes from Scotland". Six leaves have gone missing (sigs C1, C4, D1-4); the ten that remain are reported to be a match for the Bodleian copy. This was one of three items purchased from Bernard Quaritch Ltd in Aug 1976;\* beyond that I do not know anything about its history.

\* My thanks for this information to Emily Walhout.

(3) Lambeth Palace Library has a good clean copy, "Printed for Thomas Nelson" (S92532). Apart from that alteration (see below), it is almost perfectly identical with the Bodleian copy.\* Again, Ferguson (1897:48-9) gives a fairly detailed description. It is one of five witchcraft tracts, dating from between 1589 and 1600, which were bound up together in one volume for Richard Bancroft. When Archbishop Bancroft died, in 1610, he bequeathed his library to his successors in the see of Canterbury, and (except during the interregnum) it has been at Lambeth ever since. Excellent images are available through the library's website.

\* The only discrepancy that I have noticed is at sig B4r5-6. In the Bodleian copy a letter has dropped out at the beginning of line 5; in the Lambeth copy these two lines have been reset.

5. It is one sign of the untidiness of the first edition that the last quire (sheet D) was set by a different compositor. It is notable, for instance, that the ligatured forms of "ct", "ee" and "oo" are used always or almost always in quires A-C, never in quire D. Or again, that the word "devil" is generally "Diuell" in quires A-C, "deuill" in quire D. And so on.\* I just mention the fact that this difference exists; I draw no conclusions from it. In details of this kind, compositors were allowed and expected to use their own discretion; everyone knows that already.

\* There is more to it than that. The man who set sheet C left blank lines between paragraphs here and there, as if he was stretching the text out. The man who set sheet D did not indent the first line on D1r. Some botching was afoot, but I doubt whether it is of any interest.

6. The woodcuts used as illustrations are a distinctly odd assortment. There are four of them, one of which was used twice. (1) A montage of scenes, including the devil preaching from a pulpit (A1v, C2v). (2) Four women being threatened with a beating (B1v). (3) A montage of scenes, including Dr Fian and the infatuated heifer (C4v). (4) A man being taken to prison (D3v).

Two of these woodcuts, (1) and (3), resemble one another in style, and both were definitely made for a book about the

Edinburgh witch trials -- yet definitely not for this book. These are the facts to take note of. (i) On one occasion, it was said, Dr Fian, riding at night, made candles sprout out of his horse's ears, "and gaif sic licht, as gif itt had bene day lycht" (Pitcairn 1829:212). The artist excelled himself in depicting this incident; but there is no word of it in the pamphlet printed for Wright. (ii) It was also said that a poor pedlar, travelling towards Tranent, was "in a moment conveyed at midnight" from Scotland to Bordeaux in France, "beeing places of no small distance between". The artist draws the pedlar for us twice -- first falling asleep by the side of the road in Scotland, then waking up inside a cellar in France. This story does get mentioned in the pamphlet printed for Wright -- but only in order to be denounced as "moste false". The story about the pedlar was one of the "manifolde untruthes" which this pamphlet aimed to counteract. It follows, I think, that these two woodcuts were made for some other book, earlier and bigger than this one, and that the publisher, regardless of the inconsistency, not caring whether the author would approve or not, decided to make use of them again.

Woodcut (2) was certainly being reused. It was made twelve years before, for a pamphlet telling the story of four witches from Windsor who were tried and hanged at Abingdon in Feb 1579.\* In its original context (sig Blv) this drawing makes perfect sense. (The elderly man in the chair is Robert Handley, "Citizen and Grocer of London", who suspects that he had been "bewitched in his limmes"; the man standing next to him is the author of the pamphlet, who has rounded up four women whom he believes to be witches; the man with the cudgel is a "Student in Phisick" who is helping with the interrogation (B2r-v).) In "Newes from Scotland", however, it hardly makes any sense.

\* The only known copy of this pamphlet (ESTC S124945) has lost its first leaf; so the title is not known. The author identifies himself as Richard Galis (sig A2r-v). Scot knew of Galis and his book: "what follie and frensie he hath uttered in it; I am ashamed to report; and therefore being but a two pennie booke, I had rather desire you to buie it, and so to peruse it, than to fill my booke with such beastlie stuffe" (1584:543).

Woodcut (4) is a puzzle which (as far as I know) has not yet been solved. A well-dressed man is getting his comeuppance. He is off to gaol. To his left, a woman is holding him by the ear. To his right, a gaoler (with a bunch of big keys hanging from his belt) is politely showing him the way. For some reason, the gaoler has a long scroll in his hand. Perhaps there ought to be some words on it which would tell us what is happening. In "Newes from Scotland", however, there are no words; this woodcut is just being used to fill up a blank page. That is as much as I can see: an expert eye could doubtless see much more.

7. This edition was shared between two different publishers. At some point, while sheet A was being printed off, the printer removed the words "William Wright" from the foot of the title page and replaced them (rather clumsily) with the words "Thomas Nelson". There is precisely one known copy which carries Nelson's imprint, and that is the copy in Lambeth Palace Library.

8. Sooner or later, a second edition was called for, and this (as far as is known) was entirely the property of William Wright. "Ianuary last" on the title page is still "Ianuarie last" -- which, taken literally (as I suppose it should be), would prove that the second edition, like the first, was published no later than Jan 1592.

9. The second edition can be distinguished at a glance. Apart from being differently set, the title page lacks four words which are present in the first edition. Towards the top, after "life", the words "and death" are omitted; towards the bottom, before "printed", the words "AT LONDON" are omitted. From here on, by increasing the number of lines per page (from 29 to 31) and by dropping the two irrelevant illustrations, the compositor was able to neaten things up -- and economize on paper -- by packing the text onto three sheets. As is to be expected, there are numerous differences in the spelling; in substance, however, the text is very nearly the same. (I have not collated it in detail.)

10. At least four copies of this edition are known to have survived, at least long enough to be taken note of.

(4) George Steevens acquired a copy, after 1778, before 1785. He had already known that such a pamphlet existed, but had never seen a copy before. Having at last acquired one, he arranged for some passages from it to be quoted in the footnotes to "Macbeth", at the next opportunity (Reed 1785:468-9). Steevens's copy came up for sale (lot 1791) when his library was auctioned off in 1800 (King 1800:115). It surfaced again (lot 3007) at the sale of the Beckford Library in 1882 (Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1882:224). Though I assume that it still exists, I do not know where.\*

\* This copy is not listed by ESTC. If it surfaces again, it ought to be readily identifiable, because it has a note on the flyleaf: "I have frequently quoted this Pamphlet (of which I never saw another copy) in my notes on Macbeth. -- G. S." (Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1882:224).

(5) The Huntington Library in San Marino, California, has a good copy (S105575), with an eventful past behind it. The earliest

recorded owner was John Brand, who wrote his name into it on 8 Jan 1802. When his library was sold in 1807, this copy (lot 5864) was bought by somebody named Place (Stewart 1807:219), whom I have not been able to identify. Not much later, it passed into the possession of Francis Freeling;\* this is the copy which was reprinted for the Roxburghe Club in 1816, at the expense of Freeling's son, George Henry Freeling.† Its subsequent history is well documented. It was lot 2177 at the sale of Freeling's library in 1836 (Evans 1836:130), lot 312 at the sale of Thomas Corser's library in 1868 (Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1868:25), lot 2852 in the sale of Henry Huth's library in 1913 (Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1913:827-8).‡ After that, it was bought for the Huntington Library, where it found a permanent home in Oct 1923.

\* It was Freeling who augmented this copy with tracings of the two illustrations omitted from the second edition: he made them from Douce's copy of the first edition.

† He had one copy printed on vellum and sumptuously bound, as a present for his father (Martin 1834:468-9, Evans 1836:130).

‡ It was described in some detail in the printed catalogue of Huth's library (Ellis 1880 2:513-14).

(6-7) Glasgow University Library has two copies, one of which lacks the first leaf. They were both bought in 1921, among a large part of the collection put together by John Ferguson, regius professor of chemistry at Glasgow, who died in 1916. Presumably Ferguson would have known how he acquired them -- but apart from that he had "no clue" as to their previous history (Ferguson 1897:47).

11. Finally, a few loose ends.

(i) The entire text of "Newes from Scotland" was reprinted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1779,\* and what the printer used was a rather loose transcript -- supplied by "a Constant Reader" -- from a copy "printed for Thomas Nelson". The presumption has to be that this was the Lambeth copy; but there is no proof of that, and I confess to feeling some slight doubt. I have no idea who the "Constant Reader" might have been.†

\* *Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug-Sep 1779, 393-5, 449-52.

† Whoever he was, he was guilty of one vulgar error. He repeatedly writes "lay" when what he means is "lie".

(ii) From an entry in Gough's *British topography* (1780 2:672-3) combined with an entry in Herbert's *Typographical antiquities* (1790 3:1345-7), I think it has to be inferred that Richard

Gough, at that time, was in possession of a copy of "Newes from Scotland" -- complete, first edition, printed for William Wright. Either that copy has disappeared -- or else it is the same copy which belonged a little later to Francis Douce. Though I cannot say that I am sure of it, I am inclined to think that this copy did change hands. Perhaps it was swapped for some book of Douce's which Gough was keen to have.

(iii) A copy of "Newes from Scotland" appears (lot 2054) in the catalogue for the sale of Samuel Tyssen's library in 1801 (Leigh, Sotheby and Son 1801:61-2). At the time, it was one of three tracts bound together -- first an account of the trial of witches in Lancashire and Yorkshire in 1612-13 (S114979), then "Newes from Scotland", lastly an account of the trial of witches in Lincolnshire in 1618 (S102363) -- but that volume might conceivably be taken apart, by some subsequent owner, for one reason or another. It was sold on 17 Dec 1801: three weeks or so after that (see above) John Brand wrote his name into a copy of this pamphlet, as if he had just acquired it. That could be coincidental, but I hardly think so. If it is not, Tyssen's name should be added to the list of previous owners of the Huntington copy. But again -- I cannot say that I am sure of that.

## References

- Ames rev. Herbert 1790     Joseph Ames, *Typographical antiquities*, rev. William Herbert, vol. 3 (London, 1790).
- Douce 1807     Francis Douce, *Illustrations of Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (London, 1807).
- Ellis 1880     F. S. Ellis (ed.), *The Huth library. / A catalogue of the printed books, manuscripts, autograph letters, and engravings, collected by Henry Huth, with collations and bibliographical descriptions*, 5 vols. (London, 1880).
- Evans 1836     *Catalogue of the curious, choice and valuable library of the late Sir Francis Freeling, Bart. F.S.A.* (London, 1836).
- Ferguson 1897     John Ferguson, 'Bibliographical notes on the witchcraft literature of Scotland', *Publications of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, 3 (1899 for 1895-8), 37-124. Also issued separately, with altered pagination.
- Gough 1780     Richard Gough, *British topography*, vol. 2 (London, 1790).

Herbert 1790 see Ames rev. Herbert 1790

King 1800      *Bibliotheca Steevensiana. / A catalogue of the curious and valuable library of George Steevens, Esq.* (London, 1800).

Leigh, Sotheby and Son      *A catalogue of the entire and valuable library of the late Samuel Tyssen, esq.* (London, 1801).

Martin 1834      John Martin (comp.), *A bibliographical catalogue of books privately printed* (London, 1834).

Pitcairn 1829      Robert Pitcairn (comp.), *Criminal trials in Scotland ... embracing the entire reigns of James IV. and V., Mary Queen of Scots, and James VI.*, vol. 1, part 2 (Edinburgh, 1829).

Reed 1785      Isaac Reed, *The plays of William Shakspeare*, vol. 4 (London, 1785).

Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1868      *Catalogue of the first portion of the valuable & extensive library, formed by the Rev. Thomas Corser* (London, 1868).

Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1882      *The Hamilton Palace Libraries. / Catalogue of the first portion of the Beckford Library, removed from Hamilton Palace* (London, 1882).

Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge 1913      *Catalogue of the famous library ... collected by Henry Huth ... / the printed books and illuminated manuscripts / third portion* (London, 1913)

Stewart 1807      *Bibliotheca Brandiana. / A catalogue of the unique, scarce, rare, curious, and numerous collection of works ... being the entire library of the late Rev. John Brand* (London 1807).

Thomson 1827      Thomas Thomson (ed.), *Memoirs of his own life by Sir James Melville of Halhill* (Bannatyne Club, 1827).

C.F. Dec 2025