

**Guns, Barges, and Books:
Reassessing the Stationers' Company of Early Modern London**
A Folger Shakespeare Library podcast

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Fame, Fortune & Theft: The Shakespeare First Folio
Folger Shakespeare Library

Ian Gadd was introduced by Steve Enniss, the Librarian of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Many thanks, Steve. It's an enormous pleasure and privilege to give one of the lectures accompanying this year's Folger exhibition, to be allowed, as it were, to strut and fret an hour upon such a wonderful stage. And I'm very grateful to you, Steve, and to the Folger for this invitation. As you've just heard, I've been based here at the Folger since January in what has been an extraordinary intellectually enriching experience.

And in particular, I'd like to thank Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues at the Folger Institute, who invited me to lead that semester-long seminar on the Stationers' Company in the spring; to the Folger's fellowship committee for awarding me a fellowship that has enabled me to stay on here through to the summer; and to the library staff for their guidance and fortitude in dealing with a somewhat clueless reader.

As many of you will know, we are currently about 50 feet away, maybe more, maybe less, from the greatest concentration of First Folios in the world, that is, copies of the first collected edition of Shakespeare's works, published posthumously in 1623. The Folger holds—you all know this—over 80 copies in various states of completion, about one-third of the copies known to have survived. As the current exhibition in the Great Hall makes clear, the First Folio has become an increasingly prized artifact capable of attracting extraordinarily high prices at auction, as well as the unwanted attentions of the nefarious.

Its title page, with its emphatic celebration of Shakespeare the man, is probably the most recognizable in the English-speaking world, while the First Folio as an object must rank amongst the most studied secular artifacts in the world. Not surprisingly, the

individuals who were crucial in creating the First Folio are well known to scholars. John Heminges, Henry Condell, Shakespeare's former colleagues, acted as editors. The book itself was printed at William Jaggard's printing house in London, where it was set by at least nine compositors, one of whom was most likely an apprentice. And we know that because there are passages in the First Folio where the typesetting is really rather poor.

The primary publishers, Isaac Jaggard, son of William the printer, and Edward Blount, appear on the imprint. Two other publishers were involved on a much more modest scale and, accordingly, the names of William Aspley and John Smethwick only appear on the colophon that comes at the end of the book.

However, it's not the individuals involved in the First Folio that interest me today, but the organization to which five of them, William and Isaac Jaggard, Blount, Aspley, and Smethwick, those five, it's the organization to which those five belonged that interests me today, the Stationers' Company. Their membership in this organization is not surprising. In 1623 every London printer was a member of the company, as were most booksellers.

But what was the Stationers' Company? Why did so many members of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century London book trade—printers, booksellers, book binders, stationers—why did they join this organization? What did it do? What role did it play in the printing and publishing of books like the First Folio?

My primary purpose tonight is to try to answer some of those questions, to give you some idea of what the Stationers' Company actually was. But I also want to go a little further. As my subtitle indicates, I'm intending to reassess the company. And it's not that scholars working on Shakespeare and his contemporaries haven't paid attention to the Stationers' Company, because they have. If you read any biography of William or Isaac Jaggard, you'll learn when they were apprenticed and when they became freemen of the Stationers' Company. Or, if you read any account of the publishing history of the First Folio, you'll encounter a reference to the Stationers' Register, one of the key records maintained by the company.

But that, in many cases, is all the mention the company gets. And even when scholars do go further, their views of the company are often shaped by two related assumptions. First, that the Stationers' Company was only interested in books, and, second, that because of that interest in books, the company had a unique political and cultural status, especially in its dealings with the crown.

As I will argue in this lecture, I believe both assumptions to be flawed. And to give you a flavor of what I mean by this, here are just some of the features of the Stationers' Company I'll be mentioning in the next 40 minutes: a seventeenth-century musket, a ceremonial barge, a thermonuclear bomb, Northern Ireland, Stationers' Hall, a reference to the Stationers' Register, the University of Oxford, Rupert Murdoch, and the Folger catalog for the 1991 exhibition on the First Folio as curated by Peter Blayney, and available at the Folger bookshop for the ridiculously low price of eight dollars, while stocks last. I hope that Peter won't mind me squeezing him between a gun, a barge, and the CEO of News Corp. Although knowing Peter, he will.

I include his catalog here partly because it remains the best introduction to the printing and publishing of the First Folio and gives an invaluable account of the relationship between the First Folio and the Stationers' Company, partly because Peter's name takes on a powerful resonance within these walls, given his many years here as a scholar in residence, and partly because he's currently writing a history of the Stationers' Company between 1501 and 1616. That history isn't finished quite yet. He tells me that he's nearly completed volume one, which will get the story to 1557, but he has written a brief history of the company between 1403 and 1557, which was published in 2003. I realize the title there is quite small: "The Stationers' Company Before the Charter, 1403 to 1557."

And while we're on histories of the company, I would recommend two more works for those of you who are keen: a collection of essays edited by Robin Myers and Michael Harris, which was based on a conference held at Stationers' Hall in 1996 (Robin Myers was archivist of the Stationers' Company for many years), and Cyprian Blagden's 1960 history of the company, which remains the only one-volume history of the company.

These are books for the eager and patient reader. But if you want a pithy description of the Stationers' Company and its significance, where do you turn? Given that the company is most often cited by literary scholars, one obvious place is the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*. This is what the revised sixth edition, published in 2006, says about the company. I'll read it out:

The Stationers' Company: Was incorporated by royal charter in 1557. No one not a member of the company might print anything for sale in the kingdom, unless authorized by special privilege or patent. Moreover, by the rules of the company, every member was required to enter in the register of the company the name of any book that he desired to print, so that these registers furnish valuable information regarding printed

matter during the latter part of the sixteenth century. The company's control of the printing trade waned during the seventeenth century, to be revived in a modified form under the Copyright Act of 1709.

I don't think you need to know anything about the company to find that an unsatisfying description. In fact, if you don't know anything about the Stationers' Company, I fear that this account leaves you absolutely none the wiser. It doesn't tell us what the company was, where it was based, or indeed, except by implication, who belonged to it. There is a murky sense of when, a possible birth in 1557, and then the suggestion that it in some way extended beyond 1709. Moreover, what is here is based very much on those two assumptions I mentioned earlier, that the company was only interested in books and that it was in some sense unusual. There is no wider context here to the company and its activities.

As I said, this entry appears in the revised sixth edition, published in 2006, which was advertised as "an extensively revised, expanded, and updated edition of the classic guide to English literature for the new millennium." I should put in brackets here, I am a former employee of Oxford University Press, and also, as you heard from Steve, working on part of a project of history into Oxford University Press. So what follows doesn't give me particular pleasure. So this was this new edition, several hundred new entries, first time OUP mention for J.K. Rowling, Phillip Pullman.

However, the entry on the Stationers' Company haven't been revised nor expanded nor updated. In fact, it was the same entry, word for word, as the entry on the company that appeared in the very first edition, way back in 1932. It is, I admit, a short entry in a very large book, but that it could remain untouched for over 70 years seems extraordinary; 70 years during which those histories I just mentioned appeared; 70 years during which new editions of the company records were published along with dozens of articles engaging with the company; 70 years during which scholars have become increasingly interested in the history of printing, publishing, and authorship. I'm delighted and not a little relieved to say that the entry has now been revised for the very latest edition in 2009. But the fact that it took quite so long reveals something, I think, telling about the general scholarly view of the Stationers' Company.

So if the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* is no use, because if it was, you could have gone home by now, what was the Stationers' Company? It was one of 60 or 70 craft and trade associations active in London during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. These associations were, with a very few exceptions, known as companies, but they were not business organizations in any conventional sense.

Instead they were, to adopt the terminology of economic historians, guilds. And from that perspective, the Stationers' Company was London's book trade guild, overseeing most of the crafts and trades associated with the book trade in the city.

These companies exerted a powerful influence over London's economy and society from the late middle ages until the eighteenth century. To be a freeman or citizen of London, in other words, to be economically active in the city, one had to belong to one of these London companies. And one of the non-stationers involved in the First Folio, the actor John Heminges, was, in fact, a freeman of the Grocers' Company, which just shows how extensive the company system was in London in this period.

Nearly all of the London companies were first recognized by the city authorities, who granted them certain rights within the city; a number then went on to seek royal charters, often at great cost, to confirm and enhance those rights. And that process of seeking recognition from external authorities encouraged conformity and imitation amongst the companies. And so, for example, the Drapers' Company—which was one of the most powerful companies in London—its legal status, its structure, powers, and responsibilities, made it directly analogous with a much more lowly company like the Stationers' Company. And that congruence enabled the companies to act in concert with one another, whether it was in petitions, in elections, in city parades, in transferring members between one another. It also made it much easier for the city and national authorities to impose obligations and responsibilities on them, whether it was the crown seeking money or the city authorities regulating the labor market.

So our book trade organization looked much the same as any other trade or craft organization in London and this similarity of structure was mirrored in a similarity of functions. Most of what the Stationers' Company did was not peculiar to it, but was typical of a London company. And in the account that will follow, I'll be considering both those aspects of the Stationers' Company that it shared with other companies and those that were particular to it. I'll be focusing primarily on the period 1550 to 1700, but it's important to realize that the Stationers' Company's history extends far longer than that.

In a 1645 petition to London's Lord Mayor, the company referred to itself as having been "governed for the space of 240 years" without interruption, which was a reference to its formal establishment by the city in 1403. In 1557, under Philip and Mary, it received its first royal charter, which was then confirmed by Elizabeth I. In the 1680s, as part of a campaign to gerrymander the city's parliamentary elections, Charles II forced all the London companies to surrender their charters and seek new ones, which would include causes about political allegiance. The Stationers' Company was the first to

secure a new charter in 1684. But following the Revolution of 1688, all such new charters were declared null and void, and the companies' earlier charters were restored.

The Stationers' Company operated under the terms of its 1557 charter until 1937, when a new royal charter was granted and that charter formalized a merger between the Newspaper Makers' Company, which was a much newer company, obviously, and the Stationers' Company, which had taken place in 1933. And during those intervening years, the then-Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, served as master of the company. And company legend has it that the day he abdicated, his shield fell down in Stationers' Hall.

In 1957, the company celebrated the 400th anniversary of its 1557 charter and its guest of honor was Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, a stationer by virtue of his family's publishing firm, for which he worked before becoming a politician. Macmillan gave a speech in which he declared himself explicitly to be a mere stationer, which, given that less than ten days later, he authorized the testing of the first British thermonuclear bomb, means that the Stationers' Company is presumably the only London company to be able to claim a nuclear capability.

The Stationers' Company has remained active, although not in that way, to this day and perhaps its most famous, or should I say most notorious, current member is Rupert Murdoch, whose endorsement of the company appears on its website, and I realize that's quite small, but anyone who is leading these important industries today would benefit from being a member. I want to focus here, though, on the years between 1550 and 1700 and consider first the question of who belonged to the Stationers' Company.

And the answer may seem blindingly obvious—printers, booksellers, book binders—but that's not quite the whole truth. Under London custom, it was perfectly possible for a member of one London company to follow the trade regulated by another. And the primary reason for this was that one of the privileges that a London citizen had was the right to make his son, and later daughter, free of his own company and, hence, the city, by what was called patrimony, regardless of what craft or trade that son or daughter was trained in. One can find members of the London book trade in this period in practically every other London company—the drapers, the goldsmiths, the merchant tailors, the haberdashers, the leather sellers, and so on. And just to give you an idea of this, this is a list—you don't need to worry about the names, but I've blown up the headings—this is a list drawn up by the Stationers' Company in 1685 of all the members it knew of in the London book trade who belonged to other companies.

Equally, there were many members of other trades active within the Stationers' Company—bakers, brewers, joiners, mathematical instrument makers, silk weavers, and so on. Thomas Dockwray, the stationer named as the master of the company in its 1557 royal charter, was, in fact, an ecclesiastical lawyer. While one of the leading mathematical instrument makers of the late seventeenth century, Robert Jole, also a clockmaker, was a member of the company, the Stationers' Company, throughout his career. That's not to say that the majority of members of the Stationers' Company weren't active members of the book trade; they were. And it's not to say that the majority of members of the London book trade did not belong to the Stationers' Company; they did. But not every successful member of the company owed his success to books. And not every successful printer or bookseller in London was a member of the company.

Nor is it quite true that the company oversaw the whole of the London book trade. In 1403, several different groups of craftsmen petitioned the city authorities to be recognized as a single organization and they were: the text writers, that is, scribes who handled everything apart from legal documents; limners, who illuminated or illustrated manuscripts; book binders; and booksellers. And that organization would become the Stationers' Company, although the term stationers, or stationer, which simply meant bookseller, didn't appear in its title until 1417, and it wasn't until 1441 that the organization became known exclusively as the stationers. That, of course, predates the arrival of printing in England in the 1470s. And as Peter Blayney argues, once the new technology arrived, there was no self-evident reason that it should have fallen under the jurisdiction of the Stationers' Company.

It was obviously allied with the book trade, but there were lots of examples of allied trades that were split amongst different London companies. Moreover the first English printer, William Caxton, was a member of the Mercers' Company, the most important company in London. And it was only in 1557, 80 years after printing was established in England, that printing was formally placed under the company's jurisdiction. Printing, bookselling, book binding remained the company's responsibility for centuries after that, although, in the mid-seventeenth century, there was a half-hearted attempt by some printers to establish their own company.

The Stationers' Company seems to have had no formal jurisdiction over papermaking or paper selling, although, by the eighteenth century, there seems to have been a very important group of paper stationers active within the company. And its oversight of manuscript writing and illuminating, which was there in 1403, seems to have dwindled away. There's no mention of them in 1557 charter. And the regulation of legal scribes,

which were never part of the Stationers' Company's jurisdiction, remained the responsibility of a different company entirely, the Scriveners' Company.

The Stationers' Company was not very large. In 1557, it numbered perhaps 120 or 150. By the end of the seventeenth century, there were possibly as many as 600. And to give you a sense of scale, some London companies in this period numbered many thousand. Nearly all of the members of the company were men. However, in the second half of the seventeenth century, women were bound as apprentices, that you see at the top, made free, the middle one, and, in turn, bound their own apprentices. The number, though, was tiny, less than one percent of the apprentices in this period. Also, although women cannot in this period own property, London custom allowed widows of citizens to carry on their husband's business and we know of a number of widows active in the book trade.

London was famously a city of migrants. Thousands of apprentices from the provinces flocked there every year, and those apprenticed to members of the Stationers' Company were no exception. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, over 80 percent of stationer apprentices came from outside of London. By the last decade, this had fallen to 65 percent. They came from all over. Many from those counties just outside London, but a good number from farther afield; Yorkshire, for example, regularly provided about 6 percent of stationers' apprentices up to 1640. Strikingly, of the five stationers involved through the First Folio, four of them were Londoners. Only William Aspley was born elsewhere and he was only up the road in Hertfordshire. About 2 percent of stationers' apprentices in this period came from Wales, with a handful coming from Scotland and Ireland and a few came from even more exotic climes—New England, Connecticut, and even one from Barbados.

Under London custom, apprentices had to be at least 24 before they were freed. Most apprenticeships lasted seven years, which means most entered their master's houses around the age of seventeen. Out of every five apprentices bound to stationers, only two, that's 40 percent, were likely to finish, and that proportion is much in line with the experience of other London companies. We know that Henry Hardy, bound to the printer Thomas Johnson in 1659, had his indentures canceled in 1665, as he had apparently gone to Virginia, but in the vast majority of cases, no reason was recorded for non-completion. A large number of apprentices must have died, particularly during periodic epidemics of disease. But it seems that a significant proportion may have just felt that after a few years worth of training, that was sufficient for them to return to their home towns and set up on their own.

Apprenticeship was not the only way to become a freeman of London, but it was the way that the vast majority of stationers joined the company. Some entered it by virtue of their father's membership, that is, by patrimony, which I mentioned earlier, and some, a smaller number, entered the company by redemption, that is, they just paid their way in, or by translation, which allowed freemen of other companies to transfer to and from Stationers' Company. No foreigners could become freemen of London unless they were denizens, that is, naturalized aliens. However, in the mid- to late sixteenth century, over 80 foreigners joined the Stationers' Company as brothers, which was a kind of associate membership. And among them was the famous Arnold Birkman, a Guerman book importer and the member of a large international bookselling dynasty.

Upon his freedom, a stationer received certain privileges from both the city and the company. As a citizen of London, he was able to set up shop in the city, to follow a craft, to be exempt from tolls, to vote for and to participate in civic government. As a fee-paying member of the company, a stationer had the right to bind and free apprentices, to use the Stationers' Register, to seek the company's help in resolving trade disputes, to seek support for himself and his family should they get into financial difficulties, and so on. He also became eligible, at least in principle, to seek office within the company.

And like other London companies, the Stationers' Company was highly structured, and I apologize in advance for this slide. It's very small and those of you at the back won't be able to read it and those of you at the front will be able to confirm it's not the most interesting of text. But basically, each of these is a category of membership or officer. Apprentice down here, yeomen, which is a basic freeman, and then I'm going to be talking about everything above that.

This is disproportionate. The vast majority of the Stationers' Company was made up of the apprentices, and then the next largest group was the freemen, and it then rapidly came to a point. Fewer than one in six would reach the livery. Such individuals could wear the company's colors on civic occasions, could vote in city elections, and were also allowed extra apprentices. And so becoming a liveryman was an important step for an ambitious stationer, and one's aspirations, wealth, behavior, loyalty to the company all must have played a part, but patience, too, was required, as it often took many years before one was elected. Strikingly, of the five stationers involved in the First Folio, four of them were liveryman at the time of publication. Isaac Jaggard was still rather young, but he became a liveryman. Those four were all made liveryman in the same year; three of them were elected on the same day. Which says something, I think, about their relationship.

A liveryman could aspire to serve as a company officer. First, as one of the renter wardens, who oversaw the collection of membership fees, then as a member of the Court of Assistants, which is this group up here, the company's legislature, judiciary, and executive. The assistants were a small group, between about 15 and 30 in number, of the most senior and powerful members of the company, appointed for life. From their ranks, the topmost offices, master, upper warden, under warden, were elected by the court on an annual basis.

The Stationers' Company was a lowly company. It was ranked in the low 30s and 40s in civic parades and such like. And so, in our period, only a few members made an impact on city politics. A handful were elected as alderman, that is, representatives of the city's 26 wards, who formed the city's governing body, the most powerful people in London. But for the most part, these stationers declined the offer, presumably because of the considerable burdens and cost that came with office.

The first to serve a full term as alderman was the bookseller Thomas Davis, who was elected as alderman in 1667. Nine years later, he was Lord Mayor of London, the first member of the book trade to serve in that position. And at that time, only members of the top twelve companies in London could serve as Lord Mayor, so Davis translated into the Drapers' Company. Jonathan Swift's printer, John Barber, became the first printer to serve as Lord Mayor in 1732, but he too needed to translate, into the goldsmiths.

And that translation requirement ended in the 1740s, and what's interesting is that there's a marked contrast between this early history of the company and the later history. Between 1785 and 1831, nine stationers served as Lord Mayor, that's one every five years. And as the company's own website proudly points out, more stationers have now served as Lord Mayor than any other company.

The mention of wards and aldermen brings me to a brief consideration of where the company was based, and the immediate answer, of course, is London. Although what we really mean is the City of London, what now corresponds, broadly speaking, to the financial square mile. And as this map shows, Westminster over here, the seat of royal and parliamentary power was a separate city. And it's often assumed that the city's jurisdiction, City of London, reached only as far as its walls, which are now almost all destroyed. But that's not quite true. The power of the Lord Mayor and the aldermen stretched to points outside the walls known as the city's bars. Nonetheless, the area was small. From Temple Bar in the west just beyond Fleet Street to the Tower of London in the east; from Suffolk over the river to Moorfields and Spitalfields to the north. By 1600, about 200,000 people lived in or immediately around London. And as the city

began to grow, people began to settle in those areas outside of the direct control of the city authorities. And by 1720, you can see how much London has grown and, by this point, the population is well over half a million.

Not every London company had a hall. The Stationers' Company only got one in the 1550s, but all were within the city limits. And given the traditional importance of St. Paul's churchyard for the London book trade, it's not surprising to find Stationers' Hall close by. This is a nineteenth-century map on which the locations of the hall are superimposed. Initially, it was located to the southwest of the cathedral, and briefly to the east, before settling in the early seventeenth century to its present location. Here, members would come to bind or free apprentices, to resolve disputes, and so on. It was also the setting for annual feasts and other company events. The hall was amongst 44 companies destroyed by the Great Fire, but was rebuilt. It was rebuilt again after the Blitz, and this is what the inside of the hall looks like today, and this is where the Court of Assistants meets.

And while we're on the subject of the hall, it's worth briefly mentioning the company's own insignia. As a legally incorporated body, it had its own seal in order to sign legal contracts, and so on. And the seal shows St. John the Evangelist, the saint most commonly associated with the book trade across Europe, as well as the company coat of arms, and I'll show you the coat of arms, which changed around the mid-sixteenth century. And the one on the right, which is a woodcut representation, is pretty much what the arms look like today. The company leased out properties elsewhere in London. It was also involved in James I's Ulster Plantation project, a citywide investment in what is now present-day Northern Ireland.

From the early seventeenth century until the late nineteenth, the company received regular rents from its share of a 45,000 acre estate just to the southeast of present day Londonderry. One thing that is often cited about the Stationers' Company is that it had national rights over the trade, and this is true. By virtue of its royal charter in 1557, no one in England or any of its realms—the king or queen's realms—could print, unless they were either a member of the company or had direct permission, effectively a printing privilege received from the crown. And that was quite a commercial coup, in that it severely hampered outside competition at a stroke, but as the charter's preamble indicates, it was evidently pitched to the crown as a means of controlling illicit book production. Scholars have used that preamble to declare that the company was clearly established as an agent of censorship—overlooking, I feel, the company's own economic motives.

A national jurisdiction in a craft like printing was also much easier to maintain, at least in principle if not in practice, when the craft was small and the equipment involved was sizeable and costly, such as it was with printing. In addition, the charter granted the company the right to search nationally for all books "printed contrary to the form of any statute, act, or proclamation."

Nationwide search rights were not unprecedented amongst the London companies—for example, both the Pewterers' Company and the Goldsmiths' Company had them—but the Stationers' Company does not seem to have been very active in searching the provinces, possibly because of its relative poverty. Whereas the Pewterers' Company and the goldsmiths sent out teams of searchers on a near annual basis, we know of only a few occasions where the Stationers' Company sent searchers outside of London. And by the late seventeenth century, all the London companies were finding it increasingly difficult to impose that authority outside of the capital. And so when a key parliamentary statute that had confirmed the Stationers' Company's rights over printing, national rights, lapsed in 1695, the company evidently felt unable to reassert its chartered rights, and provincial printing became a reality from 1695 onwards.

The 1557 charter didn't quite grant a full monopoly over printing, as there were others who held printing privileges. But it meant the printing was, for the most part, confined to London. The two most notable exceptions were the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which claimed, by virtue of privileges granted direct to them, the right to print whatever they wished. The company and the London trade more generally could tolerate the universities' publications of expensive scholarly works, but became fiercely protective when the university presses began to print Bibles, which were covered by a different royal privilege in London, as well as school books and almanacs, a privilege which the Stationers' Company itself had been granted by James I.

Protracted commercial and legal wrangling ensued. But one outcome was a series of agreements between the universities on the one hand, and the company and key members of the London book trade on the other. These agreements declared that in exchange for an annual payment, universities agreed not to print certain kinds of work. And those agreements endured well into the eighteenth century, providing a sizeable and regular income for the universities. When the company's monopoly over almanacs was overturned at law in 1775, it simply stopped making those payments. Such was the financial impact on the universities that the government agreed to replace the lost income with a regular subsidy based on an almanac tax, the start, in effect, of state funding of higher education in the UK. So the Stationers' Company had its role in that.

All this brings me to a wider question, what actually did the Stationers' Company do? Well, it raised and it spent money. Income came from dues, fees, fines, requests, rent. And the company spent its money on its hall and its staff, including a clerk who maintained the records. It lent money. It provided welfare and pensions. It even offered university scholarships. It funded court actions and sought legal advice or paid for legal advice and, as we've seen, it often paid an annual sum to the two universities. As a London company, the company also formed a crucial part of the city administration. It provided seemingly endless sums of money for loans, assessments, and subsidies, especially during the Civil War years. It mustered men for military campaigns and even allowed its ceremonial barge, normally used for the annual Lord Mayor show, for William of Orange's forces to take Tilbury Fort in the late 1688, following the abdication of James II.

It stored grain and gunpowder for the city. It maintained its own small arsenal of weaponry and, rather wonderfully, a Stationers' Company musket survives in the royal collection at Windsor. We are about as far as we can get, I think, from books here. More pertinently to the book trade, though, the London companies as a whole could be employed as a means of selling or suppressing books. So copies of Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Geneva Bible were marketed in this way, while on occasion the crown used the companies, not Stationers' Company, but all the companies, as a way of calling in copies of seditious or heretical works.

The company, of course, was a regulatory body. It oversaw the training of apprentices. It arbitrated in disputes between members. It fined members for misconduct, which could range from tardiness to assault, and it could even occasionally suspend members from office. It set wages, it fixed prices, it established working practices, and occasionally even checked product quality, although it didn't do much of that.

Most famously, of course, it established a system to prevent members from reprinting works that other members had already published. Before printing a new work, a member had to seek permission from an officer of the company and he could then also pay the clerk an extra fee to enter that permission in the company's register. And those written entries, which eventually became sufficiently important to warrant their own separate volumes, make up what we now call the Stationers' Register. And for Edward Blount and Isaac Jaggard, looking to publish a collected edition of the works of Shakespeare in 1623, the Stationers' Register proved crucial in shaping the form that volume took.

Not all of the plays have been printed before. Eighteen, in fact, appeared in the First Folio for the first time, which greatly simplified matters. In this entry here for Blount and Jaggard is the entry of those unpublished previous works. Nonetheless, this doesn't represent all of them. Blount and Jaggard needed to negotiate deals, either an outright purchase of rights or a temporary leasing, with at least nine other stationers who already owned rights to a Shakespeare play, and they were, for the most part, successful. Two of the men they approached, Aspley and Smethwick, who we've already met, even agreed to become partners.

A few, though, refused. *Pericles* wasn't included and it looked like *Troilus and Cressida* would have to be omitted as well. And to underline the point, there is no question about these plays' attribution. That isn't why they don't appear in the First Folio. It's because of the right to republish them, that was the sticking point. And it was only when Blount and Jaggard asked the stationers' clerk to search for previous Shakespeare entries in the Stationers' Register that they found an earlier entry for *Troilus and Cressida* that enabled them to broker a whole new deal to include the play after all. And strikingly, the same search revealed that Blount had forgotten, you can see here, *Antony and Cleopatra*, he'd forgotten he already owned the rights to *Antony and Cleopatra*. "O, my oblivion is a very Antony, and I am all forgotten."

It has often been assumed that the Stationers' Company had a uniquely special relationship with the crown, in which it acted as the crown's primary means of censorship of the printed word. However, this is not the case. The Stationers' Company was not the only company that the crown listened to or acted upon, nor is the crown the only institution the company gravitated towards. Nor was the company the only regulatory authority for the book trade.

There were statutes, proclamations, decrees, requirements that all books be licensed, that is, approved prior to publication, restrictions about what books could be printed or imported, limitations on the number of printers, and so on. And the system of licensing, for example, was run almost entirely outside the jurisdiction of the company. And plenty of other London companies were able to gain similar kinds of economic and regulatory privileges from the crown or had their authority bolstered or enhanced by legal judgments or decrees. So the Stationers' Company wasn't different.

However, it is a distinctive feature of the Stationers' Company that it became increasingly dependent on such external regulation to underwrite its own authority. And when these regulations were relaxed, as they were periodically, as in 1695, the company found itself unable to reassert as much power over the trade as before.

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I'm nearing the very end of my time here, but I want to talk very briefly about the company's own archive, which survives more or less intact at Stationers' Hall in London. There are some notable gaps. The 1557 charter is lost. The records for the 1570s are incomplete, and it's clear that there were other records that the clerk kept that no longer survive. Nonetheless, the archive is remarkably full and it covers the company's activities from the 1550s through to pretty much the present day. For most of that time, the archive was secret. Only the clerk and senior officers of the company had access to it. But this was no different from any of the other companies.

However, from the late eighteenth century onwards, certain individuals were given limited access, especially to the Stationers' Register, which was, obviously, of particular interest to literary scholars. In the 1870s, Edward Arber published a transcript of the Stationers' Register from 1554 through to 1640, one of the great pioneering works of English literary scholarship, and it's a set of volumes that is still in regular use today. Subsequent to that, the registers up to 1708 have been edited, as have the minutes of the Court of Assistants, the governing body, up to 1640. The details of every Stationers' Company apprentice up to 1800 have been published in index form. Most of the records were microfilmed in the 1980s, and just recently, the company has begun planning for a full digitization of its archives.

And digitization will not only make these records much more available, but will also enable us to analyze the company much more effectively. The relationships between individuals, books, and the company will be so much easier to map digitally, I feel, than they are at present in print. A history of the Stationers' Company must, of course, draw extensively on these archives, as I've done in this lecture, but just as a full biography of an individual can't rely on just that person's personal papers, so a full history of the Stationers' Company needs to draw on material outside of its archive.

Our scholars have done a great deal of that work already. For example, we know much more about the books that members of the Stationers' Company printed, published, and sold than the products of any other London company. And we also know of a good number of key documents in the state records that relate to the company.

However, as Peter Blayney's work into the early history of the company underlines, there is still much to discover, in law cases, in the city records, in the archives of other companies and the two universities, as well as in the less accessible parts of the Stationers' Company's own holdings. The evidence emerging from these sources helps

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overturn those two assumptions I noted at the beginning, that the company was only interested in books and that it was a unique kind of organization.

The Stationers' Company was just one among many London companies and it was not the most important, the largest, the richest, or the most powerful such company. The history of the Stationers' Company is not quite the same as the history of the English book trade, nor the history of English printing, nor the history of English censorship, nor even the history of the book in England. It's an important part of all those histories, but it cannot be subsumed within any one of them.

It is our belief in the cultural value of books, and especially in books like the First Folio, that brings us to the Stationers' Company, but, as I hope I've showed today, the Stationers' Company's activities and interests were far more wide-ranging and diverse than scholars have long assumed. I hope you'll agree that there is much more of interest to be found in the Stationers' Company records than just this entry for a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays. Thank you.

