Lost Print in England: Entries in the Stationers' Company Register, 1557–1640

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Introduction

On 8 August 1588, Queen Elizabeth I of England was riding to Tilbury to give a speech on the Spanish Armada. As it turned out, the most urgent danger posed by the Spanish fleet had already passed: blown off its station by gales, the great Armada had already at this moment passed the Firth of Forth on its painful journey back to Spain. However, neither the Queen nor the crown were aware of this: this famous oration was therefore an important event both for the 17,000 troops in the camp, and for the morale of the country.¹ How the great number present would all have heard the Queen is not recorded; happily, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, news of the Tilbury speech was soon circulating widely. This was not least due to enterprising London publishers who printed and sold ballads immortalising the occasion. Records show that at least twenty-eight ballads were printed on the Armada between June and November 1588, describing the attack and celebrating the victory.² Out of these twenty-eight ballads however, only four have survived.³ This was not unusual. Unless collected soon after printing, the chance that ballads and other ephemeral print would survive was incredibly low, and the reporting of the Spanish Armada is only one of a number of events where this type of printed record has been lost. Fortunately, as book production in England was centred on London and dominated by the members of the Stationers' Company, their records contain valuable additional material with which to augment the evidence of surviving printed texts. In particular we may rely on the Stationers' Company Register, which, with some exceptions, contains the titles of all the books authorised to be printed during the Elizabethan, Jacobean and early

1 Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker, *The Spanish Armada* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 236.

2 John J. McAleer, 'Ballads on the Spanish Armada', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (1963), pp. 602–612, at p. 602.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 603.

Caroline periods. This makes the Stationers' Company Register a unique source for printing in early modern England, as it provides a contemporary list of many printed works which cannot be traced to a surviving copy. Studying these entries will greatly enhance our knowledge of those books that have been lost, and provide us with a better and more comprehensive understanding of early modern printing.

The Study of Lost Books

Lost books is a relatively new area of bibliographical and historical study, and only a few works have tackled the problem of how to study and analyse something that has not survived. There are two main methods of calculating the extent of lost print. The first involves using established mathematical formulae to estimate the numbers of copies and editions from data on surviving works.⁴ The second method involves correlating printed works from a contemporary list, inventory or bibliography with modern catalogues to produce a list of titles that were printed but have not survived.

One of the challenges of using bibliographies and catalogues in this way is that contemporary records often ignore more evanescent or ephemeral items. The contemporary bibliographies used by Alexander S. Wilkinson to study sixteenth-century French printing were compiled by their authors, La Croix du Maine and Antoine du Verdier, to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of French literary culture. They therefore made extensive use of evidence from private collections, but excluded ephemeral and less intellectual works which they deemed unworthy for inclusion.⁵ Franklin B. Williams faced a similar problem with an English printed books catalogue by the English bookseller Andrew Maunsell, as Maunsell had concentrated on works of divinity and science, once again omitting many of the cheaper, more ephemeral works available.⁶ The Stationers' Register, however, is a very different type of source, providing evidence of the day-to-day practice within the English book trade.

4 See Goran Proot and Leo Egghe, 'Estimating Editions on the Basis of Survivals: Printed Programmes of Jesuit Plays', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 102 (2008), pp. 149–174 and Jonathan Green, Frank McIntyre and Paul Needham, 'The Shape of Incunable Survival and Statistical Estimation of Lost Editions', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 105 (2011), pp. 141–175.

5 Alexander S. Wilkinson, 'Lost Books Printed in French before 1601', *The Library*, 10.2 (2009), pp. 188–205, at p. 194.

6 Franklin B. Williams, 'Lost Books of Tudor England', *The Library*, 5.1 (1978), pp. 1–14, at p. 3.

It offers a precious and detailed log of the projects undertaken by the Company's members, free of any particular overt or covert obfuscating intellectual agenda.

The Register is not, for all that, a comprehensive survey of London publishing activity. One thing that the Register cannot fully show is the number of copies printed for each book authorised. It is known that the Stationers' Company limited print runs to 1,500 copies, and 2,000 copies after 1635, with exemptions for works such as almanacs and calendars.⁷ Accurate information on actual print runs, however, is often quite elusive. This makes it difficult to assess not only how many editions may have been lost, but also how many copies may have been printed of each. John Barnard compared the number of editions and copies of psalters, ABCs and primers ordered by the Treasurer of the Stationers' stock between 1660 and 1700 with the entries in Wing, the seventeenth-century continuation of the original STC.⁸ The research shows a huge level of loss, as out of the hundreds of thousands of small format primers that were printed, only one copy survived.⁹ Such dramatic scales of loss are not rare: the study of lost works thus becomes crucial for a better understanding of overall print activity.

The Stationers' Company and Printing in England

The Mistery of Stationers was founded in London in 1403, over half a century before the invention of printing with moveable type. The freemen of the group represented a number of different occupations and skills, including textwriters, illustrators and bookbinders, though the term stationer was mainly associated with booksellers.¹⁰ When printing finally arrived in England with Caxton in 1476 the main printers, however, were not freemen in the mistery, and the guild would remain small until the end of Edward VI's reign.¹¹ During this period the majority of printed works required by English readers continued to be printed abroad and imported from continental Europe.

7 W.W. Greg, *Some Aspects and Problems of London Publishing between 1550 and 1650* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 16.

8 J. Barnard, 'The Survival and Loss Rates of Psalms, ABCs, Psalters and Primers from the Stationers' Stock, 1660–1700', *The Library*, 21.2 (1999), pp. 148–150, at p. 148.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

10 Peter W.M. Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London 1501–1557. Volume 1: 1501–1546* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 13.

11 Peter W.M. Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London 1501–1557. Volume 2: 1547–1557* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 933–934.

It was not until 1557 that the stationers were granted a charter by Queen Mary, providing the company and its members with a monopoly over printing in England. Historians have long debated who benefitted most from the charter; the monarchy or the stationers. W.W. Greg argued that the charter was a joint venture between the Crown and stationers, not only creating a monopoly for the members, but also making it easier for the Crown to tackle heretical books.¹² D.F. McKenzie though believed that the charter was a natural progression from its guild status and that, despite the benefits to the company, it was the Crown that always had the final say over what could be printed.¹³ More recent research carried out by Peter W.M. Blayney questions both these interpretations, suggesting that before the charter the stationers were not so dominant that a monopoly was the next natural step.¹⁴ Blayney believes that the opportunity only came about after Mary purged the non-stationer printers who had dominated Reformation printing under Edward.¹⁵ The company took advantage of the uncertainty, using the threat of heretical books to promote the necessity of a printing monopoly and presenting themselves as ideal candidates for the task.¹⁶ Crucially, it meant that the printing jobs undertaken by members of the company would henceforth be systematically monitored and recorded.

Not all the books published in London appear in the Register. For instance, the monarch appointed a King's/Queen's printer for government publications and this gave that printer the freedom and responsibility to print official ordinances without further reference to the Stationers' Company. The same applies to privileges and patents that were awarded for the printing of certain works, or categories of work. Thomas Marshe, for instance, was given a twelve-year privilege for two Latin schoolbooks in 1572.¹⁷ The granting of privileges and patents led to a number of internal problems within the company, with many of the poorer members of the company feeling that there was insufficient work available once all the more profitable jobs, such as schoolbooks

12 W.W. Greg and E. Boswell, *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company, 1576–1602: From Register B* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1930), p. lx.

13 D.F. McKenzie, 'Stationers' Company Liber A: An Apologia', in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *The Stationers' Company and the Book Trade 1550–1990* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1997), pp. 35–59, at p. 41.

14 Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London 1501–1557 Volume 2*, p. 923.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 935.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 932.

17 Peter Blayney, 'William Cecil and the Stationers', in *The Stationers' Company and the Book Trade 1550–1990*, pp. 11–34, at p. 23.

and catechisms, were in the hands of a small number of privilege holders.¹⁸ Some institutions, such as the city of London also had their own printers.¹⁹

For the works produced without privilege or patent, members were required to obtain a licence before they could print an item. Even though the original charter was destroyed in the fire of London in 1666, copies reveal that books had to be authorised by the wardens or other officials before they were licensed, although the efficiency of these checks varied over the period.²⁰ This system was formalised in 1559 when the charter was re-granted to the stationers by the new monarch Elizabeth. Item 51 in the Injunctions specifically stated that,

because there is a great abuse in the printers of bokes...whereby arriseth great dysorder by publicatyon of vnfrutefull, vayne and infamous bokes and papers: The Quenes maiestie straitly chargethe and commaundeth, that no manner of person shall print any manner of boke or paper, of what sort, nature, or in what language soever it be, excepte the same be first licenced.²¹

To this end, a register was created to keep track of works licensed in this way, providing a contemporary list of a large proportion of the printed works printed in England from the creation of the charter in 1557 until the upheaval of the 1640s. It is by correlating the entries with data on extant copies in the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), that a lost world of ballads, news and other ephemeral print can be revealed.

The Register

Between the years 1557 and 1640, there were four Registers, titled A, B, C and D. There were also two types of entry, relating to those printers gaining a licence and those assigning rights, although the proportion changed as the stock system became more prevalent in the seventeenth century, with ever more rights

18 Cyprian Blagden, *The Stationers' Company: A History, 1403–1959* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 65.

19 Mark Jenner, 'London', in Joad Raymond (ed.), *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture. Vol. 1: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 294–307, at p. 303.

20 Greg, *Some Aspects and Problems of London Publishing between 1550 and 1650*, p. 41.

21 'Item 51, Injunctions given by her Maiestie' (1559), cf. Edward Arber (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640* (London: Privately printed, 1875–1877), vol. 1, p. xxxviii (hereafter referred to as *Arber* 1, 2, 3 or 4).

to works collected together by the company and stock members.²² Whenever a member wanted a licence, he went to Stationers' Hall where this would be entered into the Register by one of the elected wardens. There were a small number of female stationers during this period, but they rarely entered items in the Register. Most entries made by women only occurred when they were selling or retaining licences held by recently deceased husbands. Each entry contained the name of the licensee, the title of the work, the date entered and the price. The first entry in 1557 was for a ballad and contained the bare minimum of information: "To William pekerynge a ballett called *a Ryse and wake*, iij^d".²³ As the decades went by, however, entries became more detailed and precise. Below is an entry from 2 November 1598, and in addition to the standard entry details, it also shows who had examined it, the author and the translator.

Edward Aldee. Entred for his copie vnder the hands of the bishops of LONDON and CHESTER. and of the wardens a booke called *Three books of the Redempcon of mankind* Wrytten in Lattin by JACOB KIMEDONCIUS and Inglished by H. Ince. &c...vj^d.²⁴

Interestingly, there does not appear to be an extant copy for either entry.

There are, of course, some limitations to the Register entries that need to be taken into account. For example, it might be that, on occasions, a printer might publish a book without having applied for the relevant licence. Hyder E. Rollins argued that the fines and punishments doled out to those who printed without a licence were not particularly harsh, and that the Company was much stricter when it came to punishing those who violated another member's licence or privilege.²⁵ For the majority of printers who walked the thin line between profit and loss, however, the potential fines imposed for not gaining a licence were not worth the risk involved, and could result in their losing out on subsequent profitable privileges in the future.²⁶ The harsh punishments for those printers who transgressed another printer's licence, also emphasise how each

22 Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 22.

23 *Arber* 1, p. 74.

24 *Arber* 3, p. 130.

25 Hyder E. Rollins, 'The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad', *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association*, 34 (1919), pp. 258–339, at pp. 283–284.

26 Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 18.

licence became the 'legal proof of ownership' for a work, preventing it from being printed by other members.²⁷ Maureen Bell's study into extant works concludes that at least 75% of English first editions were printed legally. Further, a correlation of entries with the Short-Title Catalogue, suggests that the Register represents 60% of all first editions printed in England.²⁸

Another question that arises with regard to the Register is whether or not each entry actually resulted in a printed edition. Printing was a risky business, and needed a lot of capital, especially for large projects which could take months, even years. Entries could therefore include projects that were abandoned before the anticipated edition could be printed. It is quite possible that some printers obtained a licence to print a work simply in order to prevent a rival pre-empting them with a potentially profitable project. They might indeed have intended to publish it; sometimes, perhaps, they never did. However, such considerations were more likely to apply in the case of larger books involving considerable production costs: foreign editions, for instance, where a translation would first have to be commissioned. This was far less likely in the case of many of the books entered in the Stationers' Register which cannot now be traced to a surviving copy. The lost entries tend to be cheap, ephemeral works; in these cases given the speed and low risk of producing such works, there is little plausible reason for abandoning such a project after going to the expense of obtaining a licence. The relatively high cost of gaining a licence meant there would be little benefit in pre-emptively entering a single-sheet ballad or news pamphlet and then not proceeding with the project.

Some books were not entered for entirely comprehensible reasons. For instance, the fact that the Register was part of a system of pre-publication censorship meant that seditious or contentious works were often published without the permission of the Company: this included Catholic works or pamphlets criticising the government or the church. We have a better chance of reconstructing this demi-monde of subterranean print from rare surviving copies, or from evidence of fines, or documents on book seizures and burnings. For example, the printer William Powell was fined two shillings and sixpence in 1563 for printing someone else's copy of Nostradamus.²⁹ A number of controversial works were also referenced by entries in the Register for books which responded to seditious works, such as the ballad entry by Alexander Lacy in

27 John Barnard, 'Introduction', in Maureen Bell, John Barnard and D.F. McKenzie (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume 4: 1557–1695* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1–26, at p. 16.

28 Maureen Bell, 'Entrance in the Stationers Register', *The Library*, 16 (1994), pp. 50–54, at p. 54.

29 *Arber* 1, p. 216.

1565–1566 entitled ‘A Replye agaynste that sedicious and papesticall written ballet late caste abroad in the stretes of the Cetiē of London.’³⁰ The offensive ballad referred to here cannot be identified.

Preliminary Findings from the 1590s

The 1590s is often regarded as either the decade of crisis in Europe or, in England, as a great age of literature, with writers such as William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser.³¹ In terms of printing, there was a steady increase in book production in England over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although studies on key years demonstrate that certain events such as plague, the accession and death of a monarch and war, all made an impact on the demand and availability of print.³² In the 1590s, 1,238 entries were made in the Register, and figure 7.1 illustrates the ratio of lost books to those entries that can be linked to an extant copy. The Register ran from July to July, with the graph based on year of entry, rather than year of completion, and records entries by 130 separate individuals. The graph shows how the number of entries fluctuated over the years, with a dip in the years 1592–1593 because of printers leaving London to escape the plague. More importantly, the graph demonstrates that roughly half the entries from the 1590s cannot be matched to a copy in the ESTC.

Figure 7.2 reveals the different categories of books that were being entered. Books ranged from heavy tomes on religious doctrine and philosophy, as well as smaller newsbooks and almanacs, to broadsheets on the latest sensational stories and ballads. These works catered for a wide range of readers, even within a particular genre. For example, medical books encompassed both expensive works in Latin made for an educated market, as well as manuals for home remedies and cures for people who could not afford doctors and medicines.³³ There are also a number of instructional and administrative items entered in the Register, showing the increased use of print not just for reading, but also for record keeping and education. Unsurprisingly, a large proportion of the works are of a religious nature, including a large number of catechisms, sermons and

30 *Arber* 1, p. 311.

31 See Peter Clark (ed.), *The European Crisis of the 1590s: Essays in Comparative History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985).

32 Thomas Cogswell, ‘1625’; Jesse M. Lander, ‘1588–1589’; Matthew Woodcock, ‘1603’, in Raymond, *Popular Print Culture*, pp. 589–598, 557–577 and 578–588 respectively.

33 Mary Fissell, ‘Popular Medical Writing’, in Raymond, *Popular Print Culture*, pp. 417–430, at p. 249.

FIGURE 7.1 Graph showing the ratio of lost and found entries in the Stationers' Register, 1590s.

FIGURE 7.2
Chart showing overall entries in the Stationers' Register by category, 1590s.

prayer books; this even though most Bibles and primers were part of patents and privileges and consequently were not licensed.³⁴ It is also interesting to note the high number of works of fiction being entered. The popularity, or supposed popularity of playbooks, has already caused much debate, and there was clearly a decent market for all kinds of literature during the 1590s.³⁵ The high number of ballads and news items will be explained in more detail later on in the article.

34 Bell, 'Entrance in the Stationers Register', p. 53.

35 For the debate, see Peter Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', in David Scott Kastan and John D. Cox (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 383–422 and Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 56 (2005), pp. 1–32.

FIGURE 7.3 Charts comparing lost and found entries in the Stationers' Register, 1590s.

A very different picture of this book market emerges however when the entries are separated out into separate categories, for those that can be traced in one or more surviving copies and those that are lost altogether (fig. 7.3). If we were to study the Register solely from the point of view of extant works it would suggest that there were no ballads being printed during the 1590s, which is clearly untrue. (In fact, a couple do survive, but so small a number that statistically this is represented by 0%). Figure 7.3 contains 581 lost entries, demonstrating that the works least likely to survive were clearly ballads and fiction, although it is interesting to note that news items overall have a decent survival rate despite the transient nature of their subject matter. Genre clearly had a significant impact on survival rates and this in turn has a great impact on what we know of the output of individual stationers. In the 1590s, Robert Dexter and Edward White both made thirty-four entries in the Register, but whereas we have an extant copy of over half of Dexter's entries, which were mainly religious works, for White who mainly entered ballads, the figure is less than a quarter. Comparing the work of these two printers from the prospect of the Stationers' Register thus presents a wholly different picture from a comparison based on the data in the ESTC. Even within better surviving categories such as religious works, certain types of book survive better than others. In particular the constant use to which catechisms and prayer books were subjected greatly reduced survival rates.³⁶

36 Mary Morrissey, 'Sermons, Primers and Prayerbooks', in Raymond, *Popular Print Culture*, p. 496.

Ballads

Literacy and price were two of the largest considerations in the dissemination of print. Literacy is often difficult to evaluate, but the beauty of printed ballads was that they could be enjoyed by those even with only basic literacy levels and, selling for a penny or less, were affordable to a wide range of readers. Recent studies of ballads have shown how the interactive nature of the genre was adapted by contemporaries to disseminate ideas. Tessa Watt's book on ballads and piety revealed that in the first decade of Elizabeth's reign, reformers were keen to spread religious and moral ideals through godly ballads.³⁷

A ballad is a work set in verse, on a single-sheet of paper, often accompanied by an illustrative woodcut, and sometimes with the name of the tune to which it was to be sung. One surviving ballad entry from the 1590s was Richard Tarlton's, "A prettie newe ballad, intytuled: The crowe sits upon the wall, please one and please all. To the tune of, Please one and please all", entered in the Register by Henry Kirkham on 18 January 1592.³⁸ "Please one and please all" is a jaunty tale on the subject of women, containing verses such as,

Be they sluttish be they gay,
Love they worke or love they play,
Whatsoever be theyr cheere,
Drinke they Ale or drinke they beere,
whether it be strong or small:
please one and please all,
please one and please all.³⁹

The tunes, though sometimes overlooked when studying ballads, were a vital part of the genre. These tunes were sufficiently well known that the musical notation was only rarely printed on the ballad. As a result, knowledge of many of the tunes has been lost. Ballad tunes were also referenced in other contemporary literature; 'please one and please all' is referred to in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.⁴⁰ After

37 Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 125.

38 *Arber* 2, p. 602.

39 Richard Tarlton, 'A prettie newe ballad, intytuled: the crowe sits vpon the wall. To the tune of, Please one and please all' (1592), available through *Early English Books Online* (EEBO), <eebo.chadwyck.com/home>.

40 E.P. Kuhl, 'Malvolio's "Please One, and Please All": (Tw. Night, III, iv, 25)', *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association*, 47 (1932), pp. 903–904, at p. 903.

Puritan Malvolio is tricked into believing the young mistress Olivia is in love with him through a fake letter, he is keen to show his amenability by following her instructions for him to wear yellow stockings cross-gartered;

Sad, lady! I could be sad: this does make some
obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering; but
what of that? if it please the eye of one, it is
with me as the very true sonnet is, 'Please one, and
please all.'⁴¹

Ballads were quick and cheap to print, making them a popular genre for printers, some of whom entered multiple ballads at a time. John Danter, for example, entered five ballads on 25 July 1592:

Englands felicitie with an admonicon to repent By examples of others
harmes
The Coy maidens care sent to her kind companions
Conscience[s] Crye to all estates in selling of broom
The conflict between Sathan and ye penitent sinner
A medecin for Jealous men with ye trial of a wife.⁴²

Their fragility, however, and the fact that many were passed around and pasted on walls means that despite the fact that almost 200 ballads are entered in the Stationers' Register, only 2 editions survive in extant copies. The ballads recovered through the Stationers' Records show that ballads covered a whole range of topics. Lost ballad titles, for instance, reflect the hardships of the period, covering the famine and plague, such as the mournful ballad of "The poores lamnetacon for the price of corne with Godes Justice shewed uppon a cruell horder of corne". Others provide light-hearted entertainment on the subjects of love, marriage and everyday life, in "A pleasant ballad of a combat betwene a man and his wyfe for the breches", and "A ballad shewing the strange qualities of a yonge nagge called Morocco" concerning a horse that performed circus tricks in London.⁴³ Many lost ballads also had an important moral role, providing warnings against drunkenness and "unbridled youthe".⁴⁴

41 William Shakespeare, "Twelfth Night, or What You Will" (1602), available through *Open Source Shakespeare* online: <www.opensourceshakespeare.org/>.

42 *Arber* 2, p. 617.

43 *Arber* 2, p. 662. *Arber* 3, pp. 593, 53.

44 *Arber* 3, p. 45.

Ballads also provided a way of reporting contemporary events. Indeed, since they could be used to tell the stories as they unfolded, they permitted an enterprising publisher to produce a variety of ballads on the same event. In the 1590s, ballads were often used to provide commentaries on crimes, including murders, enabling printers to narrate the crime from different angles. Five ballads, for instance, were entered on the murder of Robert Beech by Thomas Merry between 29 August and 9 September 1594. The first two narrated the murder, the other three focused on the execution of the murderer.⁴⁵ Annual events were also a draw for printers of ballads. Every November, there was a tilt celebrating Elizabeth's accession involving jousts and other festivities. Three entries in 1593, 1594 and 1595 announce ballads marking the annual celebrations, but none have survived.⁴⁶ It is only by looking at lost entries in the Register that we discover these items existed at all.

News

Even in the period before corantos and newspapers, there was a lively market for news. Although much of the news during this period was transmitted orally or through manuscript, by the 1530s, according to Andrew Pettegree, news was already seen as a commercial product.⁴⁷ Printed news came in a variety of different forms with letters, speeches and edicts from a range of countries, covering war and peace as well as more curious phenomena. News pamphlets in early modern England tended to be composed of six to eight pages, in quarto format, plain, printed in black letter and very seldom contained images. This made them cheaper and quicker to print.

A typical surviving news item was "A letter sent from a gentleman of accompte concerninge the true estate of the Englishe forces nowe in Ffraunce under the conduct of the righte honorable the E[a]rle of Essex, &c". This was entered on 6 September 1591 by John Wolfe.⁴⁸ Authenticity and truth were important aspects of printed news, with trustworthy witnesses an excellent selling point, hence the title is keen to point out that it is from a 'gentleman of account'.⁴⁹ The date of

45 *Arber* 2, pp. 658, 659.

46 *Arber* 2, pp. 640, 664. *Arber* 3, p. 53.

47 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 2.

48 *Arber* 2, p. 594.

49 Fabian Johnson, "True intelligence sent from a gentleman of account. Concerning, the estate of the English forces now in France, vnder the conduct of the Right Honorable

entries in the Register can also be used to determine how quickly news was reaching printers; with news items speed was of the essence, and a news pamphlet could sometimes be rushed out within a matter of days of the event it described. The latest news in the above entry was from 2 September, although it is important to be aware that the use of different calendars, with France ten days ahead of England at this time, complicates these calculations.⁵⁰

Perhaps surprisingly, printed news items had a high survival rate: 67% of those books registered with the Stationers can be linked to a surviving copy. This suggests that despite their relatively small size and the transiency of their subject matter they were eagerly collected by their purchasers and sometimes bound together for the library. An overwhelming majority of these news pamphlets focused on foreign events: over a third of news items covered the religious wars in France, focusing on Protestant victories and the deeds of the English troops involved. Printers normally tried not to risk venturing into the field of domestic politics, for fear of the possible consequences.

The relatively high survival rate of foreign political news items though contrasts with a much lower survival of works on domestic events. Readers, for instance, could read detailed reports on the latest proclamation affecting shipping in and out of the Low Countries, an earthquake in Vienna or a sensational case of “A most wretched worke of a wretched witch the like whereof none can recorde theis many yeres in Englande” from Huntingdonshire.⁵¹ This implies that the range of events considered to be worthy of publication at that time was somewhat wider than we would believe by studying surviving copies alone. The lost news entries are therefore an important addition to our knowledge on how and what news was reported in print during the early modern period. For all that, despite the popularity of news items in the 1590s, it is clear that printers were unable to rely on news printing as they would in the seventeenth century. Once the fighting in France died down after Henry IV’s conversion to Catholicism, the level of news entries dropped significantly.

the Earle of Essex. Particularly expressing vwhat hath beene done since his departure from England, vntill the second of September last, 1591’ (1591). EEBO: <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:13667>. David Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), p. 58.

50 H.S. Bennet, *English Books and Readers 1558 to 1603 Being a Study in the History of the Book Trade in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 245.

51 *Arber* 2, pp. 595, 570, 607.

Conclusion

Issues of survival have always presented a barrier to the study of the past. Even contemporary collectors and bibliographers were aware of the impact that the loss of print would have on cultural and historical knowledge, and it is only thanks to bibliographers such as Antoine du Verdier in France and collectors such as John Selden or Samuel Pepys in England that certain ephemeral works survive at all.⁵² Only now, with the digitisation of catalogues, can researchers gain an idea of exactly how much has been lost, and whilst research has mainly focused on the reasons behind loss, or on calculating mathematically the number of lost works, the Register goes one step further in allowing for the re-discovery of specific lost items.⁵³

Entries in the Register illustrate a greater variety and diversity of printed works available than could be assumed simply by looking at those works that have survived. This is true not just for ballads and news, but also for more everyday items such as indentures, cookery books and manuals. The fact that the Register stretches from 1557 to 1640 provides substantial data on how genre and survival rates changed over the decades. Tessa Watt has already suggested that changing religious attitudes shaped the fortunes of ballads over the decades. A comprehensive study of the broader record of enrolled titles in the Stationers' Register should present a more accurate picture of just what effect those changing attitudes had on the printing of ballads and other publications.⁵⁴

The comparison between existing books and titles enrolled in the Stationers' Registers that cannot be traced highlights a number of factors which can affect survival ratings. Historians have long cited the roles that use and size played in the survival of books, but the Register entries allow for a more detailed analysis, placing survival rates in context and looking at the effect that other factors such as subject and author had on the different genres.

Preliminary research has already shown the effect that foreign events in the 1590s had upon the printing of news items is not always evident simply by looking at those works that have survived; the Register offers not just information on the types of lost print available but also on the full and varied output of

52 Wilkinson, 'Lost Books Printed in French Before 1601', p. 197. R.C. Simmons, 'ABCS, Almanacs, Ballads, Chapbooks, Popular Piety and Textbooks', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, pp. 504–513, at p. 504.

53 Neil Harris, 'The Italian Renaissance Book: Catalogues, Censuses and Survival', in Malcolm Walsby and Graeme Kemp (eds.), *The Book Triumphant. Print in Transition in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 26–56, at p. 51.

54 Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, p. 40.

printers and authors otherwise obscured by low survival ratings. Printing was a risky business, and being able to examine the full scale of output can help explain more about how the business worked, especially for those who specialised in ephemeral print.

By ignoring lost works, we can never hope to gain a full picture of early modern printing in England. This is especially true for a large number of single-sheet items for which the Register is often the only indication that they ever existed. Estimations of the number of lost works indicate that there is a significant gap in our knowledge, and with the help of the Register entries we can go some way towards closing that gap.