

# The AHRC-Funded King's Printer Project

## An Introduction to the King's Printer Archival Materials

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The archive reconstructed and presented here is incomplete but it is still by far the largest and most detailed tranche of documents relating to a single London printing house in the reign of James I. Moreover, the archive relates not to any printing house but to the business that stood at the very summit of the London trade—the King's Printing House—, as well as to the very successful book-trade partnership of John Bill (1576–1630) and Bonham Norton (1564–1635), men who eventually supplanted the hapless Robert Barker (1570–1645) as King's Printer.

When we began our researches we knew that one or two documents begotten by the Chancery suits fought out between the above-mentioned individuals had been examined by historians. What we did not know was that a protracted and thorough search would yield a small mountain of Chancery materials whose contents we present below. Many of these we present now. More will be added during the coming year.

Images of the original documents transcribed below are also presented on this site. These can be accessed by clicking on the square-bracketed word '[image]' associated with the document or passage for which the original image is sought.

### Principles of Transcription

**Line demarcations:** some of the original documents have very long lines. In transcribing these, the beginnings of successive lines in the original are marked by consecutive bold arabic numerals, starting at **1**. These numerals are editorial, and can be used in conjunction with the the National Archive designation of the document to enable the reader precisely to reference material in the transcriptions. The ends of these lines are marked with editorial vertical bars (|) and the original line following it begins on a new line in the transcription.

In the case of Chancery depositions, the lines are short and are not numbered: to have introduced editorial line numbers would have lead to confusion between them and paragraph or interrogatory numbers used by the scribes who produced the original documents. These numbers are retained in the transcriptions but not in bold. In the transcripts of the depositions line endings are demarcated with vertical bars.

**Editorial interventions** in the text: expansions of abbreviations and contractions excepted (see below), these are set in square brackets, e.g. [hole] (= hole in parchment or paper); [illegible word(s)] (together with an estimate of the number of illegible words)] (often caused by damage to the document (see for instance illegibility caused by damage to right margin of Bill and Norton's petition C2/JASI/N4/57, ll. 28ff.) ).

**Conjectural readings:** the word 'conjectural' with a colon, followed by the conjectured word(s) enclosed in square brackets

**Semi-conjectural readings:** words for which we have a few letters but with some letters conjectured are preceded by a question mark.

**Orthography and punctuation:** original spellings have been retained—modernization destroys evidence of scribal practice, and falsifies the original. Original punctuation (or lack of it) has also been retained.

**Superscript letters** in the original have been retained in the transcriptions, e.g. 20<sup>li</sup> (i.e. £20); Lo<sup>p</sup> (i.e. Lordship).

**Scribal interpolations:** these are often interlinear insertions and are enclosed in angle brackets (<...>).

**Scribal strikethrough deletions:** are represented by strikethrough.

**Abbreviation and contractions:** for the most part these have been retained. There is no point in expanding, for instance, ‘Lo<sup>p</sup>’ (Lordship), ‘Ma<sup>tie</sup>’ (Maiestie), ‘yo<sup>r</sup>’ (your), etc. when their expansions will be known to the reader or can easily be inferred by the reader. However some abbreviations and contractions (even in cases where the expansion is obvious) have been expanded for ease of reading. Expansions have also been introduced in cases where expansions cannot easily be inferred—p with horizontal bar through descender *per-*, *pr-o*, *par-*, *prae-*. All expansions are represented in italics, e.g. ‘Premisses’. repayment<sup>t</sup>. Exceptionally the chi-rho abbreviation of ‘Christopher’ (i.e. Xpofer) has been retained as evidence of scribal practice, evidence which it would be difficult to convey in the transcriptions.

**Scribal fillers and deliberate blanks:** where scribes have entered marks to fill out a line or a space within a line to prevent, for instance, extra words being surreptitiously entered in the text we have inserted one or more §s in our transcription. Where scribes have left a space—never in the event filled in— for a name or a detail to be entered at a later date, we have represented that space thus: [scribal space].

**NOTE:** the transcribed materials are preceded by three aids to the reader: a brief history of the the King’s Printing House in the reign (1603–25) of James I; a time-line of principal events dealt with in the Chancery documents; and biographical details of many of the *dramatis personæ* connected with the King’s Printing House in our period.