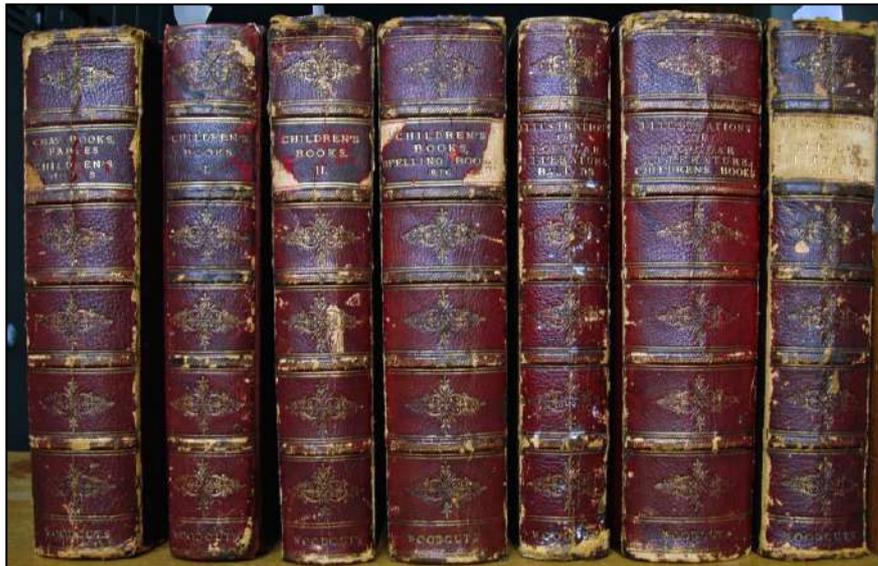


# James Gibbs's *Illustrations of popular literature*

Special Collections featured item for December 2008 by David Knott, Visiting Research Fellow, University of Reading Library.

James Gibbs. *Illustrations of popular literature* : [a set of seven scrapbooks].

Items held in Children's Collection Folio 082-FIR. University of Reading Special Collections Services.



The materials newly-designated as 'James Gibbs's *Illustrations of popular literature*' comprise seven scrapbook volumes put together in the nineteenth century [shown above]. They are uniformly half-bound in red, hard-grained morocco (now rather deteriorated), with red and black marbled cloth sides, gilt spines and gilt top edges. From internal evidence it is possible to demonstrate that they are the work of James Gibbs (1804-1891). His occasional handwritten notes and comments are often signed with his documented 'JG' initials. His full

signature dated 1866 appears once. He was a London bookbinder and print seller, active for many years in compiling collections on various subjects and making extra-illustrated books, by way of trade. It is also apparent that while three of the volumes are still titled 'Illustrations of Popular Literature', the complete seven-volume set was originally so titled, four having had lettering pieces added with more specific titles at some later stage.

All the volumes were presented to the University by the Oxford historian Sir Charles Harding Firth (1857-1936), five in September 1928, and the remaining two in March 1934. All have at least the beginnings of a contents list in his hand. One volume has the ticket of the Oxford booksellers B.H. Blackwell. Firth was a considerable benefactor to the young University Library at Reading, though his extensive collections at the Bodleian, and to a lesser degree at Sheffield, are deservedly better known. In March 1934 a minute of the University Council noted 590 volumes presented by him since 1927. A University of Reading online library catalogue search on <Firth donor> will bring up all seven scrapbook volumes listed under their individual spine titles. Currently there is little additional detail.



Recently these seven volumes have been brought together for convenience and held in the Children's Collection. They are largely, but not exclusively concerned with children's literature in a broad sense. As is the nature of scrapbooks, they contain pages, extracts and cuttings from a wide and miscellaneous range of sources - children's books, reading and spelling primers, chapbooks and song books, improving and moral tracts; also journals and magazines, prospectuses, lottery handbills [*see example above*], and printed ephemera of all kinds. However, the selection is governed by the compiler's very specific purpose - namely, to display the use of woodcut or wood-engraving as a medium for popular illustration. To emphasise this purpose, the foot of each spine is lettered: Woodcuts.

To this end, the items have been, for the most part, carefully arranged on mounting sheets, in windows if both sides need to be seen, tipped-in or laid down, within neatly ruled frames, before being gathered and bound up. In many cases the individual items which have been treated in this way are complete. In others the selection has been limited to the wood block illustrations only, pages without illustrations being discarded. In some cases this probably extends to occasional metal engraved illustrations as well. In addition there are many partial selections and fragments. It is estimated that the compiler sampled about four hundred and twenty separate works in this way, dating from the early eighteenth century to the 1870s. In all, the volumes contain around 3,220 separate pieces displaying 5,115 prints.

Once our modern sensitivities have recovered from the shock of contemplating such wholesale bibliographical mutilation, the scrapbooks can be seen as a very useful corpus of wood block illustration over a period of significance in the development of children's literature. This is particularly so in view of the teaching and research interests of the University and collection strengths of the Library. Paradoxically, some very rare items have been preserved. However, to make effective use of the material a detailed contents list is required. Much effort has been undertaken recently to identify and date the extracts, and this data greatly facilitates appreciation and use of the collection. The character of individual volumes is assessed here, in general terms.



*In times past they glued  
Paper to Paper,  
and rolled them up together,  
into one Roll, 1.  
At this day  
the Book-binder  
bindeth Books,  
whilst he wipeth, 2.  
over Papers steeped in Gum-wa-  
ter, and then foldeth them to-  
gether, 3.  
beateth with a hammer, 4.  
then sticheth them up, 5.  
presseth them in a Press, 6.  
which hath two Screws, 7.  
glueth them on the back,  
cutteth off the edges  
with a round Knife, 8.  
and at last covereth them  
with Parchment or Leather, 9  
maketh them handsome,  
and setteth on Clasps, 10.*

*Olim agglutinabant  
Chartam Charta,  
convolvebantque eas  
in unum Volumen, 1.  
Hodie  
Compacter  
compingit Libros,  
dum tergit, 2.  
chartas maceratas aquâ  
glutinosa, deinde  
complicat, 3.  
malleat, 4.  
tum confuit, 5.  
comprimit Presso, 6.  
quod habet duos Cochleas, 7.  
conglutinat dorso,  
demarginat  
rotundo Cutro, 8.  
tandem vestit  
Membranâ, vel Corio, 9.  
efformat,  
& affigit Uncinulos. 10.*

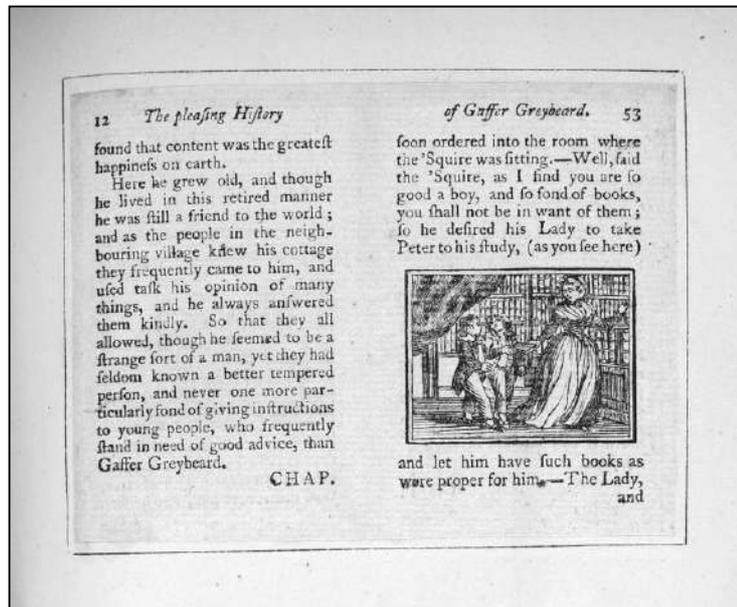
*The collector of  
these wood-cuts is  
a Book-Binder*

*D*

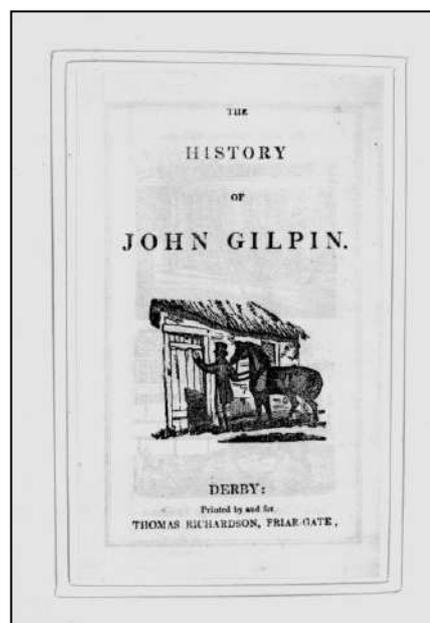
**Chap books, fables, & children's books.**

This volume contains a generally consistent selection with a predominantly eighteenth-century emphasis. There are few stray pieces or fragments, and many of the examples are complete or nearly so, at least as far as the illustrations are concerned. It opens with an early edition of *The famous and delightful history of Fortunatus, and his two sons: in two parts* and also includes an early and as yet unidentified edition of Aesop. John Bewick's illustrations for *Fables by the late Mr. Gay* are presented in two editions, 1792 and 1816, giving Gibbs the opportunity to contrast the printing of the two. Eighty-two prints are shown, mainly from the 1792 edition.

A substantial selection of the prints from the 1777 edition of *Orbis sensualium pictus* allows Gibbs a small personal intervention with the comment ‘The collector of these wood-cuts is a book-binder. JG’, on the illustration of that particular craftsman [see above]. However, the most notable source of illustration in this volume is the series of *Cheap repository tracts* of the 1790s, some thirty of them, usually in the form of their illustrated title-pages.

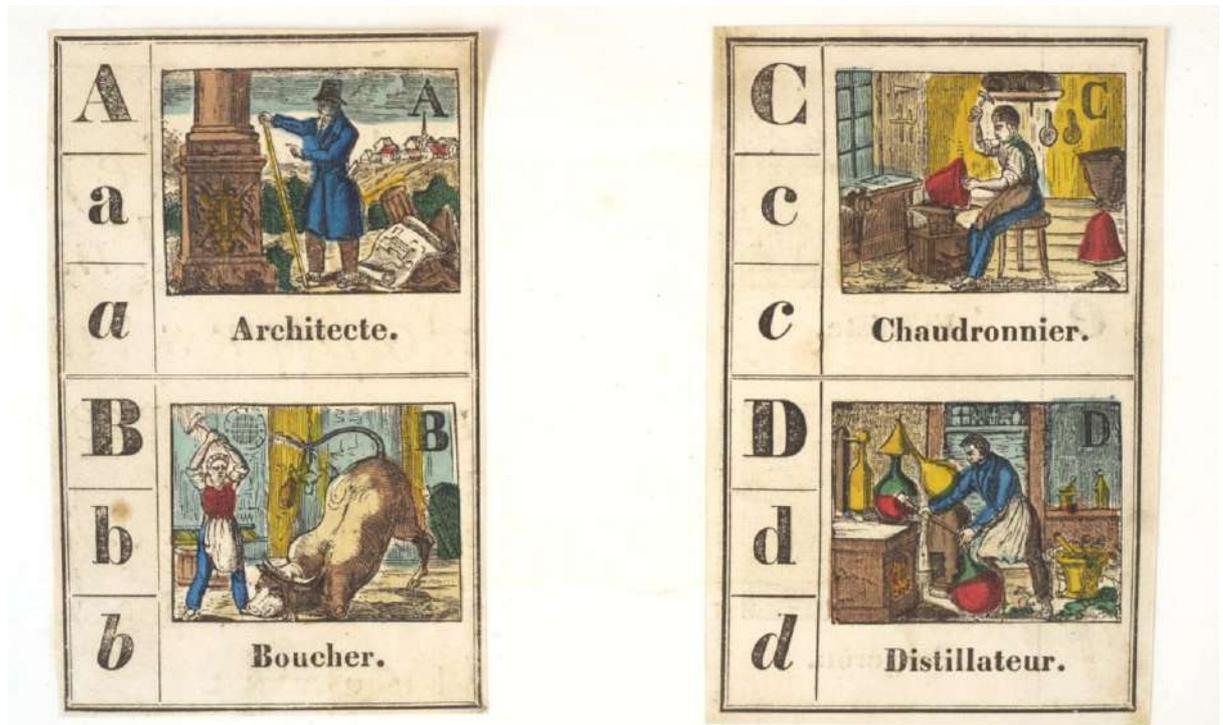


An undoubted rarity is *The pleasing history of Gaffer Greybeard* (London: Printed and sold by J. Hollis) probably from the 1790s [see above]; similarly the twenty-eight leaves of scraps, in an untitled but numbered series, printed and sold by R. Burdekin, High-Ousegate, York, circa 1830. A non-British Isles imprint, unusual throughout the entire collection, is *The infant school grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Lockwood and Corey), 1832 - thirty prints are shown.



### *Children's books I.*

This volume presents a consistent selection of material dating from the 1820s to the 1860s, with an emphasis on reading and spelling books. Many are very substantial selections, complete or nearly so. A number of English provincial imprints occur, including Derby [see example above], Plymouth and Leicester. A particularly attractive foreign item is *Syllabaire des petits enfants industriels. Édition ornée de gravures* (Épinal: Pellerin), of 1847 [see below]. Its alphabet of twenty-four hand-coloured prints is complete.

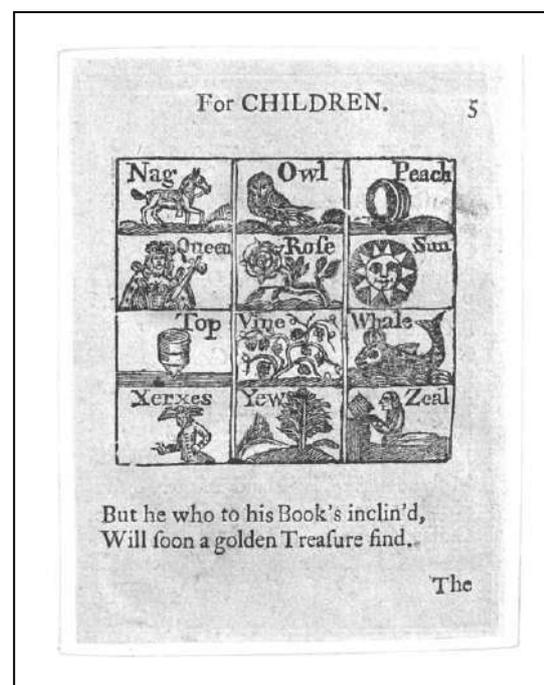
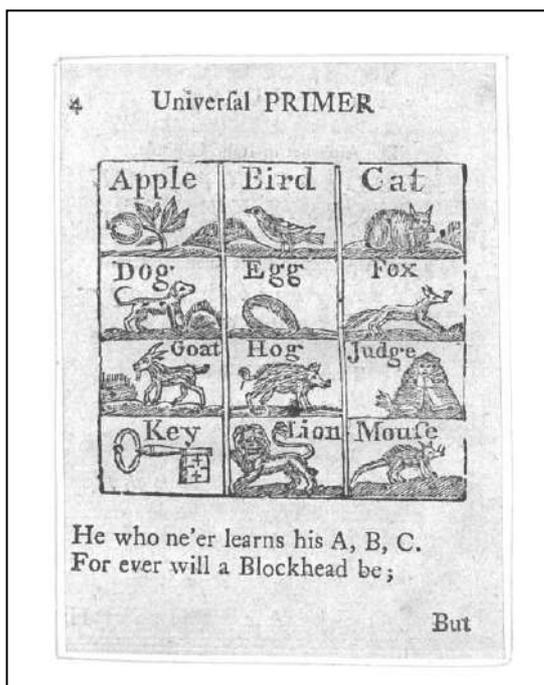


### *Children's books II.*

The most notable contribution to this volume is some eleven illustrated title-pages from songbooks published by J. Marshall of Newcastle upon Tyne in the 1810s [see example below]. Arguably more appropriate to the topic of the volume is a further group of nine, numbered, moral tracts published by Kershaw and by Mason in London in the 1820s, similarly represented by their title-pages. But even more appropriate are five children's items published by Isaac Marsden of Chelmsford, circa 1820, complete or largely so, and usually with their printed wrappers retained. (A further Marsden item appears in the volume *Illustrations of popular literature: Children's books.*)

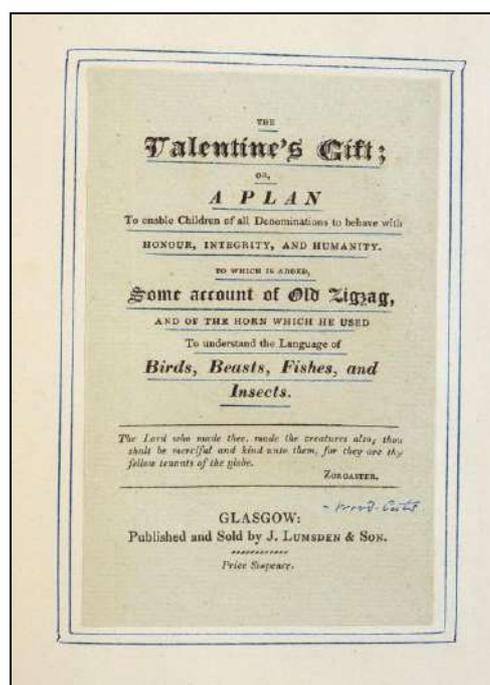
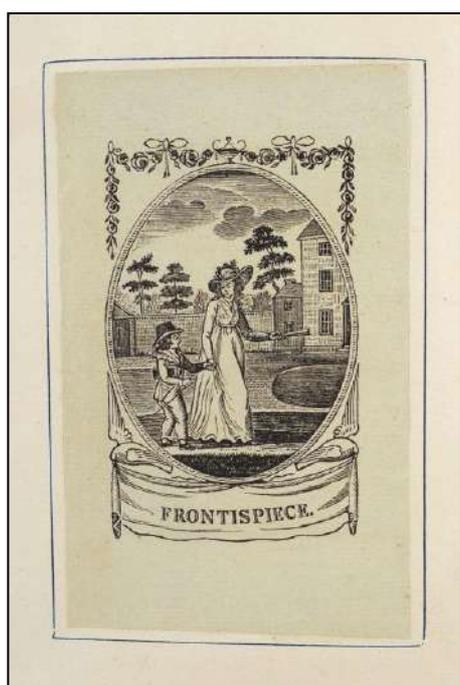


Aesop is again present in this volume in selections from two or more eighteenth-century editions including Croxall (1786) and Dodsley; and similarly, present again, *Fables by the late Mr. Gay. In one volume complete*, in substantial selections from the 1816 and 1834 editions. All sixty prints from *The new universal primer, or, an easy book, suited to the tender capacities of children* (Derby: Printed by J. Drewry), 1790? are shown, including the decorative printed wrapper and two illustrated alphabets [see below]. Towards the end of the volume the selection becomes more fragmentary, but it is worth noting *The weeping mother. In four parts* (Printed and sold by J. Evans, No. 41, Long-Lane, ... London), between 1791 and 1795. This is complete in eight pages, although it contains only one print.

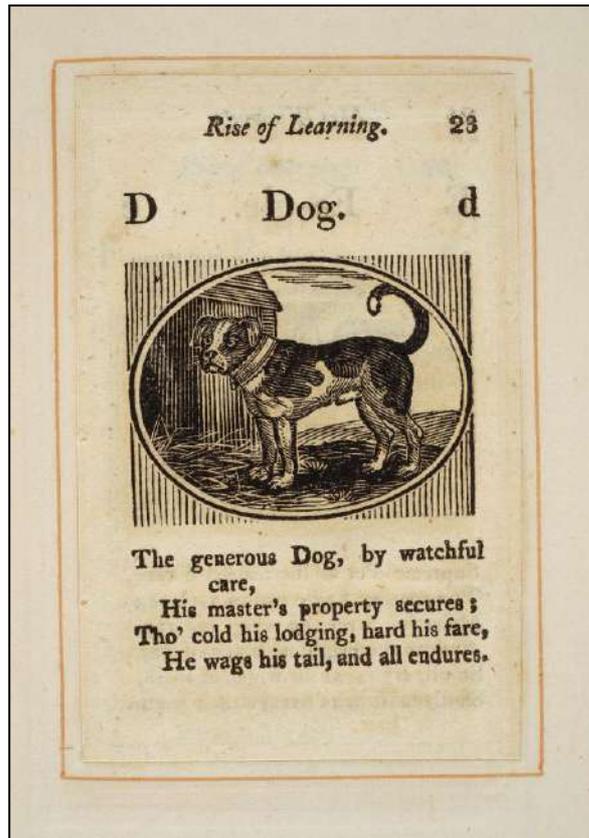


### *Children's books, spelling books, etc.*

Most notable in this volume are ten works of the Glasgow publishers J. Lumsden & Son from the period approximately 1814 to 1820. These include *The Valentine's gift; or, a plan to enable children of all denominations to behave with honour, integrity, and humanity* [see frontispiece and title-page below], *The adventures of Captain Gulliver, in a voyage to Lilliput* and *Gammer Gurton's garland of nursery songs, and Toby Tickle's collection of riddles. Compiled by Peter Puzzlecap*. Most are complete or nearly so as far as the illustrations are concerned. (Lumsden publications are also present in the volume *Illustrations of popular literature. Children's books* and volume VII of the set.) Two complete illustrated alphabets appear among the illustrations to *The rise of learning. Or groundwork of science, ... by Mrs Winlove* (Edinburgh: Printed and sold wholesale, by Caw and Elder), 1819 [see below], another in *The Christian child's education; or, spelling and reading made easy. The fifteenth edition. By the Reverend Mr. Fisher* (London: Printed for F. and C. Rivington), 1804, and another in *The Royal primer: or, the first book for children* (Dublin: Printed by William Jones), 1818. English provincial imprints include Southampton, Gainsborough and Coventry.



This consistent approach to the ostensible subject of the volume is abandoned in the final third in favour of a miscellaneous collection of fragmentary pieces culled from antiquarian and bibliographical works, and art periodicals as late as the 1860s. They display an interest in early woodcuts reproduced in facsimile and nineteenth-century publications in the same style. Some of these are from prospectuses.



### *Illustrations of popular literature. Ballads*

This volume, the most miscellaneous of the set, was probably always intended to be somewhat broader in scope than its present subtitle suggests. It has also had a more checkered career than its fellows and suffered some losses. It opens with fourteen mainly eighteenth-century pieces of single sheet verse which include some undoubted rarities. Among these are *A copy of verses, call'd Faith, Hope, and Charity* (London: Printed and sold in Stonecutter-street, Fleet-Market), circa 1760?; *Smithfield bargains: a new song. Written and sung by Mr. Dibden [sic]* (London?), 178-?; *The humours of Blackfriars* (London?), 179-? Firth's index then records a further twenty-one titles of similar material no longer present. Six of these are now in the University of Reading Library's album of *Ballads: [a collection of 184 mainly 19th century ballads printed in England and Ireland]* (held at Printing Collection Folio 821.04-BAL). How and when this came about is not clear, but as five of the six are still attached to Gibbs's mounting sheets there is no doubt as to their origin.

October 10: 1833

A FAITHFUL NARRATIVE OF THE  
**CRUEL MURDER !!**  
 OF  
**JOHN HOLDCROFT, aged 9,**  
 BY  
**CHARLES SHAW, another Boy, aged 14,**  
 For (it is supposed) the paltry Sum of ONE SHILLING and SIXPENCE !!  
 WITH  
**THE COMMITTAL of the MURDERER.**

**A**DVICE has just been received, of an extraordinary and almost unprecedented MURDER OF A BOY, in the Potteries. It appears, that on Sunday morning, the dead body of a Boy was found in a ditch near Etruria, with a cord tied round his neck, with which it appears, he had been cruelly put to death. The body was discovered by a man from Shelton, named Davis. It was soon identified to be that of John Holdcroft, a lad between 9 and 10 years of age, who had been in the employ of Mr. Hawley, of Burslem, at which place he resided with his parents.

On enquiry, it appears, he left work on Saturday evening, about 6 o'clock, and was not seen by his friends from that time till after his decease.

There is every reason to suppose that the poor fellow's life has been sacrificed for the trivial sum of 1s. 6d., the amount paid to him as wages before he left the shop, for, on the discovery of the body, no money being found about it, and it is difficult to conceive any other cause than to gain possession of that trifling booty, that could have led to the commission of the barbarous deed.

An inquest was held before Mr. Harding, at the Etruria Inn, on Monday, and by adjournment till Wednesday, when the Jury returned a verdict of "WILFUL MURDER against CHARLES SHAW."

The above atrocity is similar to that of the two Brothers John Bell, aged 16, and James Bell, aged 14, who murdered another boy,

named Taylor, aged 13, and robbed him of a few shillings. This deed was perpetrated March 1830, in a wood, near Rochester, in the county of Kent. John Bell suffered Death shortly after at Maidstone. James Bell was pardoned.



OH! listen to a tale of woe, I now to you unfold,  
 Of the Murder of John Holdcroft, a boy of nine years old;  
 His body was found all in a ditch; its true what I do say,  
 With a rope tied round his neck, his life was taken away.

This poor boy worked at a pottery, his living for to seek,  
 And all the wages that he earn'd, was eighteen pence per week,  
 When his week's work was done, upon each Saturday night,  
 His wages to his mother gave, which gave him great delight.

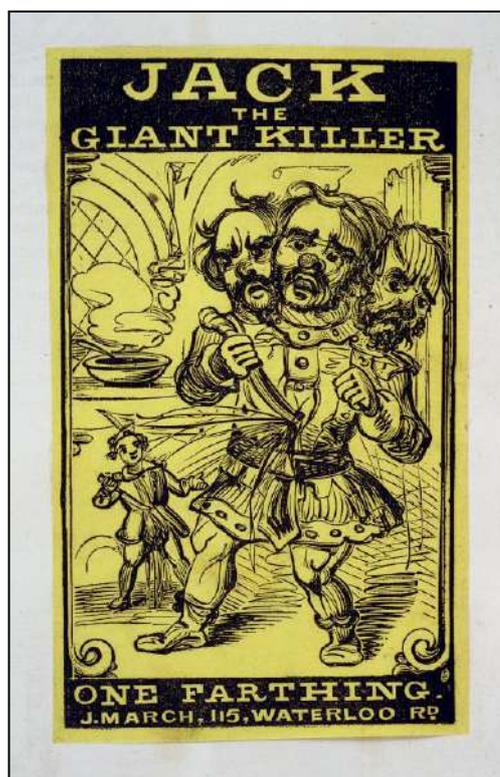
Charles Shaw he is a wicked lad, and only fourteen years old,  
 That he robb'd and murder'd this poor boy, makes the heart run cold,  
 The poor mother is tearing of her hair, the father distract'd wild,  
 Crying oh dear! oh dear! we are undone, we've lost our dearest child.



Printed by G. SMEETON, 74, Tooley Street, Southwark.—Country Dealers supplied on liberal Terms.

Hereafter the volume takes on a distinctly miscellaneous character as far as the sources sampled are concerned, and includes pieces, some complete, more appropriate for inclusion in other volumes of the series. Much though generally conforms to what Gibbs defines as 'Seven Dials art & literature'. The Seven Dials printers James Catnach, W.S. Fortey and others are represented, as is G. Smeeton of Tooley Street, Southwark, by a range of broadsides, song sheets, and sensational accounts of murders and executions. Items worth mentioning individually include *Horrid murder of Maria Martin* (Catnach), 1828; *Examination and commitment of M. Jones, for murdering her four children* (Catnach), circa 1830?; *The female sleep-walker. An affair which happened in this neighbourhood* (London: W.S. Fortey, printer), circa 1860; *A faithful narrative of the cruel murder!! of John Holdcroft, aged 9, by Charles Shaw, another boy, aged 14* (G. Smeeton), [1833] [see above]; *Awful confession of Greenacre to the murder of Hannah Brown* (Smeeton), [1837], and similar popular and topical pieces often with a specifically London interest. Of very local interest and undoubted rarity is the handbill *J. Y. To expose a cheat, ... signed Nimby Pimby*, and expanded in manuscript to read 'John Yarrell Shoe maker Butcher Row Temple Bar - 1790'. Among provincial productions from Gloucester and Preston is *Me and my wife and daughter*, a hand-coloured Alnwick caricature printed and published by W. Davison, 181?- a rare if not unique piece of copper-engraving in the entire set.

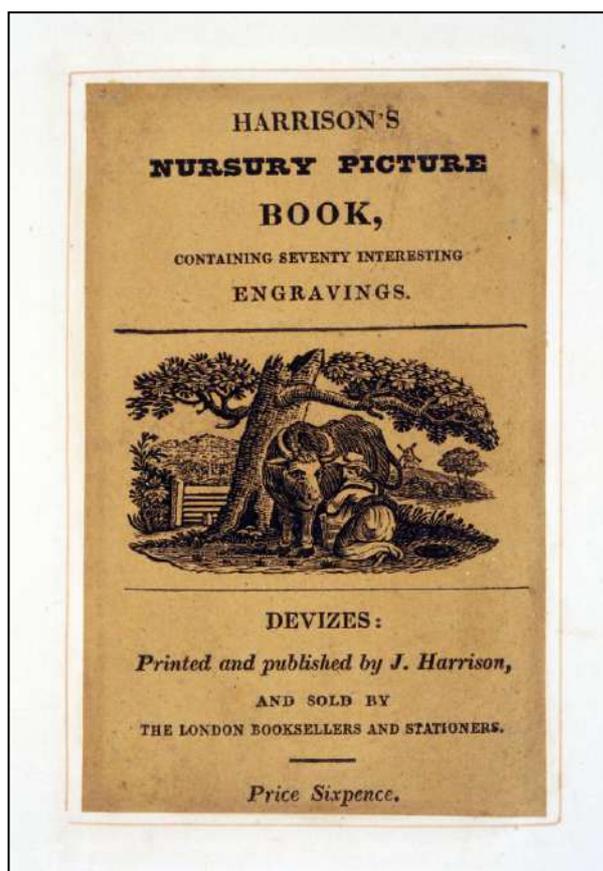
Some twenty lottery bills, two Valentines, probably of the 1840s and a trade card for *Frederick Leith and William Saunders, successors to Mary Latimore, chimney sweepers & nightmen, No. 12, Eden Street, Hampstead Road*, probably of the 1830s, emphasise the wide range of materials which contribute to this volume. It ends with a number of periodicals, some complete, of the 1860s and later, including *The wasp and social photographer* for 15 October 1864, *Punch & Judy comic almanack* 1869, *Girl of the period almanack* for 1869 and *Punch's almanack*, for 1871.



### ***Illustrations of popular literature. Children's books***

This volume, perhaps the most satisfactory of the set, contains a consistent selection of material ranging from the 1760s to 1867, most of it complete. There is a heavy concentration of publications of the Religious Tract Society of the 1820s. Provincial imprints include Derby - *A new riddle book, or a whetstone for dull wits*, 1760?; Nottingham - *The famous history of the valiant London 'prentice*, 1780?; and Devizes - *Harrison's nursery picture book, containing seventy interesting engravings* [see below]. There is a further publication of Isaac Marsden of Chelmsford - *Pretty poems, songs, &c. in easy language. For the amusement of little boys & girls. By Tommy Lovechild*, and a further three examples from Lumsden of Glasgow. Also worth noticing is a group of four items of the 1840s, published by J. March of Waterloo Road, London - *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, *The house that Jack built*, *Jack and Jill*, and *Jack the Giant Killer* [see above]. Three pieces, bearing twelve, six, and twelve sets of octagonal blocks

respectively, within typographic borders, are described by Gibbs as 'Covers for Boys Copy Books'.



### *Illustrations of popular literature. VII*

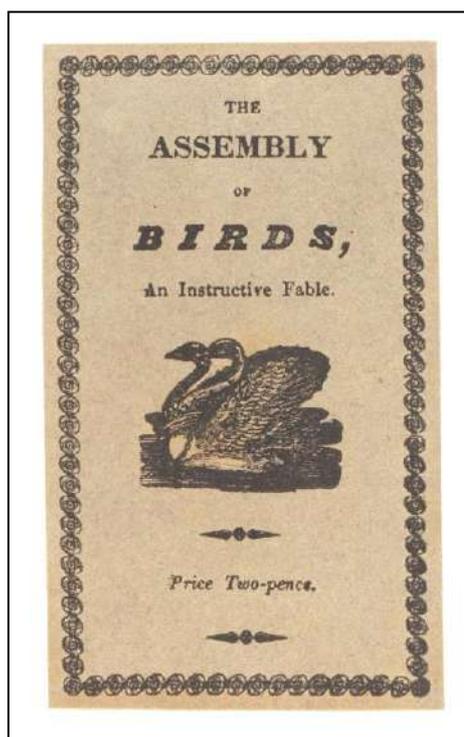
This volume is devoted to editions of Isaac Watts's *Divine songs*. Probably in excess of twenty such are sampled, although some are difficult to distinguish. Probably all are of the nineteenth century, illustrated editions, in any case, not appearing until around 1780. Complete or substantial selections of illustrations are included in many cases. Gainsborough, Coventry, Knaresborough, Wellington and Derby are among the non-metropolitan places of publication. Some fragments or strays have crept in, for example, the Lumsden edition of *Divine songs, in easy language, for the use of children*, 1814 has attracted two further titles of the Glasgow publisher. An interesting slant on the popularity and illustration of Watts's work is provided by *Illustrations to Dr. Watt's [sic] Divine songs. - 2s. each* (London: John Remfry), 1840? [see example below] - five leaves bearing prints numbered 2-31 of, presumably, stock blocks.



### *James Gibbs and the wider significance of the 'Illustrations'*

As stated above, James Gibbs was a London bookbinder and print seller. He was born in 1804 in Old Round Court on the north side of the Strand, roughly opposite Villiers Street and Buckingham Street, in an area now occupied by Agar and William IV Streets. The son of George Gibbs (ca 1776-1839), also a bookbinder, he was apprenticed to John Jackson, bookbinder of Villiers Street, where his father was a journeyman, from 1818 to 1825. By no later than 1834 he was in business as a bookbinder and printseller at 11 Great May's Buildings, St Martin's Lane. By his own account he was for a while thereafter in Lisle Street, Leicester Square, but by 1844 at the latest, similarly described, he was at 8 Great Newport Street. There he remained, except for the occasional excursion, until retiring from business some time after 1884. He died at Ifield Road, Brompton in 1891, aged 87, and was buried in

Brompton Cemetery. Nothing marks the site and nothing remains of his Great Newport Street premises today.

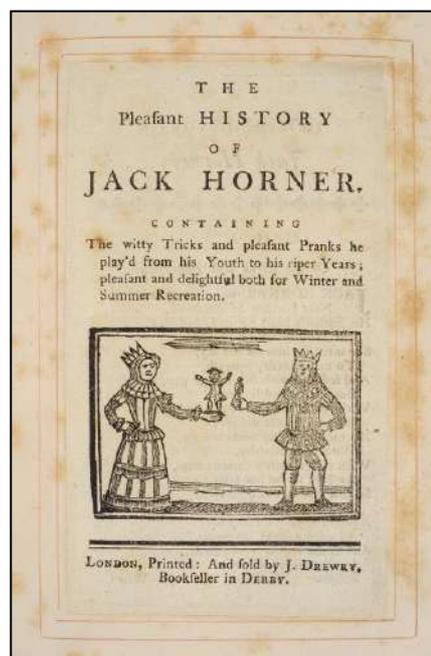


Title-page from *Children's books I*

Gibbs is best known, if known at all, as the original compiler of the 'Kitto Bible', now in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This work, in which an illustrated Bible of 1838, in three volumes, with notes by John Kitto, is expanded to sixty volumes by the insertion of up to thirty thousand extra illustrations, has been regarded as the greatest piece of extra-illustration ever undertaken.<sup>1</sup> Its compilation occupied Gibbs thirty years or more.

Much of what we know about Gibbs today results from his long friendship with the Victorian poet and bibliophile Frederick Locker, afterwards Locker-Lampson (1821-1895). Locker included a memoir of Gibbs in his autobiographical work *My confidences* (1896), and over fifty pieces of correspondence from Gibbs to Locker survive in the Locker-Lampson MSS, part of the James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection in the Beinecke Library at Yale. These give many unique if fragmentary glimpses of Gibbs's family, friends and customers, his day-to-day activities in the binding and print-selling business, his intriguing personality, his trials and tribulations - personal, commercial and financial - and even, on occasion, his love life.

According to Locker-Lampson 'Gibbs's absorbing passion was "collecting", whether it were books, or prints, or cuttings, and this lust asserted itself early'. His parents indulged this inborn inclination, which ultimately saw its 'crowning triumph' in the Kitto Bible. But while his passion was to acquire and collect, he was very reluctant to sell - a distinct disadvantage to someone whose livelihood depended on it, and the root of many of his difficulties. The Great Bible was eventually prised from his no doubt reluctant grasp in 1872 by the New York bookseller J.W. Bouton. Gibbs was then in his late sixties and must have been thinking about his retirement and old age. What Gibbs received for his life's work is not known, but Bouton offered the Bible, in the United States, for \$10,000. His printed prospectus described it as 'the largest and most elaborately illustrated Bible in the world', and gave some mouth-watering detail of the contents - the specimens of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Bibles, the near 3,000 original drawings by Raphael, Caracci and others, the missal paintings from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, the Rembrandt etchings, the Dürer woodcuts, the many choice impressions of line engravings and mezzotints. In 1875 this Bible was acquired by Theodore Irwin of Oswego, New York, who spent some years improving the collection still further by exchanging average impressions for better ones and substituting items he considered for some reason not sufficiently worthy. Gibbs was himself involved in supplying Irwin with additional material. Interestingly, when Irwin died in 1902, although the bulk of his library had been sold to J. Pierpont Morgan, he still possessed the sixty-volume Kitto Bible in its purpose-made cabinet. It was his son, Theodore junior, who negotiated the sale to Henry E. Huntington.



Title-page from *Illustrations of popular literature. Children's books*

Although the Kitto Bible is the undoubted and spectacular pinnacle of Gibbs's career, it is not the only surviving example of his activities. His was a lifetime devoted to making admittedly more modest collections on many subjects, and manufacturing extra-illustrated books, by way of trade and for his own pleasure and that of his friends. The Reading scrapbooks are just one example of these. Locker-Lampson tells of the very many scrapbooks Gibbs made as simple presents and tokens of affection when courting his first wife. Later he illustrated a 'great number of books', among them several copies of Chambers's *Book of days*, and made 'enormous collections' about barbers, Jews, and the cries of London, current whereabouts unknown. To these may be added an extra-illustrated *Table talk* of Horace Walpole and collections on tobacco and human longevity. All three of these survive in American libraries.

The practice of extra-illustration has its origins in the eighteenth century in England, and in particular, in the publication of James Granger's *A biographical history of England* in 1769 - giving rise to the alternative term Grangerism. Granger was not himself an extra-illustrator, but a print collector. His work, however, was seized upon by other collectors as a way of organizing their own collections. Grangerizing soon became a popular activity in which published books were embellished and extended by the addition of illustrations and prints of all sorts. What began as an amateur's pastime inevitably became an activity in which those professionally involved in print selling and book making also took an interest. In England in the nineteenth-century the practice of extra-illustration was in decline, assaulted by bibliographers who saw it as vandalizing and destroying many works in the cause of producing one exemplary copy. But in the United States the activity and its products remained very popular with collectors for much longer. James Gibbs played a part in these processes.

Apart from their intrinsic interest, a close examination of '*Illustrations of Popular Literature*' gives a glimpse of Gibbs's working methods, carrying out the laborious activity of inlaying and mounting hundreds of pieces of paper, gathering the resulting leaves and organizing his themes. His love of the materials, his knowledge and didactic purpose are all apparent. The scrapbooks are not extra-illustrated texts, but the processes involved in their production are identical, and it is doubtful if Gibbs made much distinction between his illustrated books and his collections. Both arose naturally from his involvement in the joint commercial activities of bookbinding and print selling, and both served his public efforts to make his living and his private passions.

<sup>1</sup> For a concise view of the Kitto Bible, see Lori Anne Ferrell, 'Biblical proportions: how the art of extra-illustration produced a unique version of the Bible', *Huntington frontiers*, Fall/Winter 2006, 16-20; available at [www.huntington.org/Information/frontiers/F06biblical.htm](http://www.huntington.org/Information/frontiers/F06biblical.htm) [accessed October 2008].

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