

### **Blog Post 1:** The Shakespeare Head Press: Background

As a recipient of the 2019 Sir Stanley Wells Shakespeare Studentship, I've had the pleasure of spending my summer doing research in the archives of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. My project focuses on the history of the Shakespeare Head Press, a small publishing operation in Stratford-upon-Avon in the first decades of the twentieth century. More broadly, I'm interested in small, fine press printers and publishers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially the revival of hand-press printing techniques following the style of William Morris as part of the Arts and Crafts Movement; the Shakespeare Head Press is a wonderful and under-researched example of this type of printing. The Trust holds the records of the Shakespeare Head Press, as well as the personal papers of its founders and many of its employees. This includes the correspondence of co-founders Arthur Henry Bullen and Frank Sidgwick, secretary Edith Lister, and several others. What follows is a brief history of the Press derived from my research.

A. H. Bullen, the brain behind the Shakespeare Head Press project, had worked as a publisher previously in partnership with H. W. Lawrence. Lawrence & Bullen dissolved their partnership after ten years, and Bullen continued publishing independently for a period before joining with Frank Sidgwick (whose father was able to assist in funding their venture). Sidgwick and Bullen entered into partnership in 1904 to found the Shakespeare Head Press at 21 Chapel Street, Stratford-upon-Avon. Bullen often credited his desire to found the Press to a dream he had, in which he was visiting Stratford-upon-Avon and someone remarked that he ought to see a certain book before he left. The book was a beautiful edition of Shakespeare printed there in Stratford—the first complete edition printed in Shakespeare's hometown. Bullen then made it his life's mission to move to Stratford-upon-Avon and found the Shakespeare Head Press in order to print what became known as the Stratford Town Shakespeare, begun in 1904 and completed in 1907.

The Shakespeare Head Press printed editions of classic works on a hand-press in the style of William Morris's Kelmscott Press, often using Batchelor's Kelmscott handmade paper or other, similar types. Bullen's goal was to publish texts that he deemed of artistic and scholarly merit, and to produce them in physically beautiful editions. His lofty, aesthetic goals did not, however, take into account the cost of doing so, the limited number of sales they would make, and the retail price of the books versus their production cost. All of this is to say, Bullen was not particularly business-minded and instead ran the Press according to his artistic desires and principals. Frank Sidgwick decided to move on to new ventures in 1907, and Bullen bought him out of his share of the Press (supposedly—according to some financial records, Sidgwick was owed much more money, but never pressed for it). Predictably, the Press had all but gone under by the time Bullen died in 1920.

A major, overlooked factor in the success of the Shakespeare Head Press through all of this is the secretary, Edith Lister. All of the ledgers held by the SBT belonging to the Press are written in Lister's hand, as are many of the letterbooks and administrative papers. Upon Bullen's death, she became his literary executor and secretary, a trustee of the Press, and went on to orchestrate the Press's sale. Lister handled the money and continued to

correspond with Bullen's creditors to have them repaid, and solicited offers in order to sell the Press, eventually forging an agreement with Basil Blackwell in 1921. She insisted that it remain in Stratford-upon-Avon, ensuring its survival into its next stage and allowing for its records to be preserved by the SBT. Blackwell did eventually move the endeavor to Oxford along with the rest of his publishing business years later, and the Shakespeare Head Press remains active as an imprint of the modern publishing house, Wiley-Blackwell.

## Blog Post 2: The People Behind the Press

Although much of the Press's history is preserved in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust archives, it has never been written about for the public. Outside of the diary of Frank Sidgwick—published in 1975 and printed by Basil Blackwell in Oxford (by the company that the Shakespeare Head Press eventually became part of)—there is no published history of the Press. Paul Morgan, a librarian, Warwickshire native, and SBT trustee, worked extensively with the Bullen collection and papers of the Press. In his notes (also held by the SBT), he indicated that he would like to eventually write a book about its history and accomplishments, although he never managed to do so before his death in 2006. Dorothy Withey, too, hoped that she could contribute to such a book; though not an academic herself, she was a friend of Paul Morgan's and knew much about Bullen and the Press's history. (Interestingly, in July, the SBT acquired some of Dorothy Withey's papers and other materials that ended up in her hands following the sale of 21 Chapel Street; I had the opportunity to look through this before it was even catalogued thanks to Amy Hurst and Mareike Doleschal.) But a book about the Press never came to be, which brings us back to my work in the present day.

I had the chance to look through some of Paul Morgan's papers, which revealed that he had in fact made huge strides toward documenting the Press's history. Morgan had transcribed the notes of Harold Holliday, one of the printers, in which he wrote down details such as what types of handmade paper he was using for what book, and how different papers and inks held up. Morgan had also worked for many years on creating a bibliography of everything printed by the Shakespeare Head Press, which he updated several times and exchanged with Dorothy Withey. Though incomplete, Morgan had accomplished a lot of cataloguing and transcribing legwork required to recreate the history of the Press, which gave me a fantastic basis from which to continue.

Attempting to review and revise Morgan's bibliography proved too large a project for my time in Stratford, so I instead moved away from the books and looked toward the people behind the operations of the Press. I became especially interested in Edith Lister, the Press's secretary and record keeper. I found her interesting in part because Paul Morgan, it seems, did not, and also because of the wealth of her writing that was available in the archive. Edith and her sister, Alys, moved from London to Stratford-upon-Avon around 1908 to assist in running the Shakespeare Head Press. They lived with A. H. Bullen from then until his death in 1920 at 26 Evesham Place, claiming to be his cousins, although little is known about their family history. Paul Morgan suspected that in fact Alys and Bullen were carrying on an affair, as Bullen had left behind his wife and five children when he moved to Stratford to found the Press. However, in a 1960 letter, Bullen's nephew wrote that the Lister sisters and Bullen were "cousins on the mother's side." Additionally, Bullen's mother, Eliza Mary Bullen, née Martin, shares her name with the pseudonym under which Edith published, E.M. Martin. While I was unable to establish a complete family tree to confirm their relation, I believe that it is exceedingly likely that Edith and Alys were indeed Bullen's cousins.

Edith Lister's correspondence proved to be a treasure trove of interesting finds. She corresponded with authors and editors, edited manuscripts herself, managed sales, and kept track of all the Press's administrative business. There were numerous letters from after Bullen's death in which she kept track of loans they had taken out and managed terms of

repayment, and began soliciting offers from interested buyers. It became obvious almost immediately how instrumental she was to the Press's success. In addition to this, Lister was a prolific and relatively successful writer in her own right; she wrote at least eight novels and numerous poems and short stories, many of which were published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

Lister wrote predominantly under male pseudonyms, which complicated my task of determining what letters were addressed to whom, specifically in one case where her and Bullen's correspondence had become mixed together. I managed to determine that one letter from the famed sexologist, Havelock Ellis, was actually addressed to her, although it began, "Dear Sir," and was described in the catalog as being to Bullen. Lister and Bullen had many famous friends, connections, and correspondents, including the poet Algernon Swinburne, the popular novelist and fellow Stratfordian Marie Corelli, and the photographer Emery Walker. In fact, I noted that one of the only known likenesses of A. H. Bullen is a photograph, previously uncredited, which appears to have been taken by Emery Walker. Its copyright is owned by the British Library, but even they did not know who had taken it.

Another frequent correspondent of Bullen and Lister was R. B. McKerrow, the noted bibliographer and Shakespeare scholar. Bullen published McKerrow's edition of the works of Thomas Nashe in 1904 (with his previous company before he founded the Shakespeare Head Press). McKerrow also wrote *An Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students* in 1927, which is still used by students of bibliography today. He is an important figure in the field, which made these letters a highly amusing discovery for me as someone who studies early twentieth-century bibliography. The correspondence with McKerrow connects Bullen and Lister to a broader historical and literary movement—one which studied early books and printing, and attempted to reproduce it. Bullen, Lister, and the Shakespeare Head Press are part of a movement which became interested in printing and publishing as art, rather than only technology or information distribution. Following William Morris's example, Bullen and many other contemporary printers became interested in the aesthetics of hand-press printing, creating an artistic revival of the method at a time when craftsmanship had begun to lose value in the face of mass-production. The Shakespeare Head Press is one of several fine presses to embrace the outdated but beautiful work of the hand-press in the early twentieth century, which remains an underexamined topic. I hope I can continue Paul Morgan's work on the Press and situate it within that broader context in my future research.