St Bride Library is pleased to announce the publication of a new title which will certainly take its place in the literature of printing history. This book holds interest for social historians, sociologists, and all who research the story of print; it answers the questions as to who the compositor was and why he held such a special place in this history. The compositor was once a key worker with an unusually high status and his craft helped to shape our culture; he belonged to a defined occupational community with its own customs. In the nineteen fifties compositors formed the largest group of craftsmen in the printing industry but the occupation could not survive the radical technological changes of the twentieth century. The central core of the book is Dr Cannon’s PhD thesis presented to the London School of Economics in 1961.

The author worked in the printing industry while studying and drew his data for what is essentially a sociological study of a specific occupational group. The thesis was consulted on many occasions over the years at St Bride Library and is now presented within the book with very little amendment. The footnotes have, however, been extensively revised to aid access to reference materials. In addition a bibliography has been drawn up and updated with a view to assisting the reader who wishes to consult the original sources.

To set the thesis in its context Dr Cannon has written a prologue and an epilogue. These new chapters describe the author's familiarity with print and relate the industrial changes impacting on the compositor since the thesis was written. His account brings into sharp focus the human cost of radical change in the workplace.

18 black and white illustrations, many drawn from the St Bride Library collection.

St Bride Foundation was built as a printers’ institute in 1893 and although printing classes left the building in the early nineteen twenties it has continued without a break as a library and social centre. The location just minutes from Fleet Street originally ensured a membership drawn from the hub of print and journalism but these days visitors and students arrive from across the world. Teaching has recently returned with the opening of a Printing Workshop which offers classes in letterpress, book binding and poster making with plans for wood engraving and calligraphy in the near future.

The St Bride Library opened in 1895 and offered not only technical books but also the magnificent historic collection made by William Blades, Victorian printer and Caxton expert of his day. Since that time the collection has been consistently growing to become a world-renowned resource for all who wish to research the history of the book with all its associated trades: typography, book binding, graphic design, print technology and digital type. Over fifty-five thousand titles plus artefacts, archive papers and materials reflect not just the history but continuing development both in the industry and in the academic world.

St Bride Foundation

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