

## QUEEN ELIZABETH'S IRISH TYPE

VERY LITTLE IS KNOWN of the founding of type in England prior to the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign in 1558. It would seem that many of the mechanical aspects of English type-founding at this period were the work of resident aliens and that *design* considerations were largely supplied from abroad. John Day, the Elizabethan printer, had facilities for casting type on his premises: Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, mentions having "spoken to Daie the printer to cast a new Italian letter which he is doing, and it will cost him xl marke".<sup>1</sup> Talbot B. Reed states that Day "occupies an important place in the history of early English letter-founding. What is mainly conjecture with regard to most of his predecessors we are able to state on the authority of historical records with regard to him, namely, that he was his own letter-founder".<sup>2</sup>

After being arrested on 16 October 1554 for printing "noythe bokes" of a heretical nature, Day escaped in the following year and it is thought that he took refuge on the continent.<sup>3</sup> He returned to England in 1556, where on the accession of Queen Elizabeth, with whom he found favour, he became an important printer. Early in Elizabeth's reign he found a generous patron in Archbishop Parker for whom he cut some types, notably his fount of Anglo-Saxon, used for the first time in Ælfric's homily, *A Testimonie of Antiquitie*, edited by Parker and printed in 1567. This type was used in a number of works and subsequently in the archbishop's edition of Asser Menevensis' *Ælfredi Res Gestae* in 1574 (see ill. 1.1), in the preface to which, attributed to Parker, it is stated, "And in as much as Day, the printer, is the first (and, indeed, as far as I know, the only one) who has cut these letters in metal; what things have been written in Saxon characters will be easily published in the same type."<sup>4</sup> John Strype states of Parker that "He made Day the Printer to cut the Saxon Types in Brass; who was the first Person that did it."<sup>5</sup>

In the pursuit of his study of the Scriptures, Archbishop Parker had collected both Anglo-Saxon and Irish manuscripts. His study of the Anglo-Saxon character led him to Irish. He considered that a knowledge of the Saxon character would be useful to the understanding of the Irish. "For though the language was different, yet the letters, in which the books of the Irish were writ, were the same."<sup>6</sup>



DOMINO MEVO VENERABILI  
PIISSIMOQVE OMNIVM BRI  
TANNIÆ IN SVLÆ CHRISTIA  
NORVM RECTORI ÆLFRED  
ANGLORVM SAXONVM RE  
GI: ASSER OMNIVM SERVO  
RVM DEI VLTIMVS MILLE  
MODAM AD VOTA DESIDE  
RIORVM VTRIVSQVE VITÆ PROSPERI  
TATEM.

ANNO DOM. INCARNATIONIS, 849. NATVS EST ÆLFRED ANGLY SAXONV  
NEX IN VILLA REGIA QVÆ DICITVR YUANATING IN ILLA PAGA; QVÆ NOMI  
NATVR BERNOCITNE, QVÆ PAGA TALITEN VOCATVR A BERNOC FILIA V  
BI BUXV HABVNDANTISSIME NATVTV; CVTVS GENEALOGIA TALIV TALIT REPIE CÔ  
TEXTVTV. ÆLFRED NEX FILIVS ÆHELWULFI REGIV QUI FVIT ECGBERTI; QUI FV

Whenever possible, Queen Elizabeth enjoyed speaking to the various foreign visitors to her court in their own language. To facilitate her in this regard, in the period c. 1560–5, Christopher Nugent, 9th baron of Delvin prepared a manuscript at her request, an “Iryshe-Latten-Englishe Primer”, which set down the Irish alphabet, together with some words and phrases in Irish with Latin and English translations (see ill. 1.2). In this, Nugent pays tribute to the queen for her interest in the Irish language: “Among the manifold actions . . . that beare testimonie to the worlde of your maiestyes great affection, tending to the refformation of Ireland, there is noe one (in my opinion) that more euydent showithe the same, then the desyer your Highnes hath to vnderstande the language of your people theare.”<sup>7</sup>

There is a reference in the Fitzwilliam MSS. to a payment for the making of Irish type: “to the archbishop of Armaighe and the bishop of Methe for the making of Carecter to print the New Testament in Irish lxvj] xiijs iiijd [£66. 13s. 4d.]”.<sup>8</sup> This payment must have been made some time before the end of 1567, since a note in another document, dated 1567, demands the repayment of this sum unless the bishops publish the (delayed) Irish

1.1 Example of John Day's Anglo-Saxon type, from *Ælfredi Res Gestæ*, 1574.

1.2 The Irish alphabet as prepared for Queen Elizabeth by Christopher Nugent in his Primer of the Irish Language c.1560-65, from a facsimile reproduction printed by J.M. Kronheim and Co. in 1888.

## THE IRISH ALPHABET: f

A . a . b . c . d . e . f . g . h . i . R . l . m . n . o . p . q .  
 r . s . t . u . r . x . y . z . 7 . 8 . Amen.

A . ailm .	a	L . luif .	l
b . beé .	b	M . mujn .	m
C . coll .	c	N . mon .	n
D . duif .	d	O . oñ .	o
E . eaça .	e	P . peé .	p
F . fñin .	f	Q . cñit .	q
G . gope .	g	R . rñr .	r
H . huac .	h	S . foil .	s
I . ioça .	i	T . tñe .	t
K . collailm .	k	U . uif .	u

1.3 Day's Anglo-Saxon type (above) and the Queen Elizabeth Irish type (below) enlarged to 200% approx.

A B C D E F G H I L M N O P R S T V

a b c d e f g h i l m n o p r r t u

a b c d e f g h j l m n o p r s t u

a b c d e f g h j l m n o p r r t u

Testament.<sup>9</sup> The project appears to have been abandoned and there is no record as to whether or not the money was ever repaid.

In 1570 attention was again turned to the production of an Irish type. By an agreement of 23 October 1570, John Kearney, clerk and treasurer of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, undertook to provide the 'stamps, forms and matrices' necessary for printing 200 or 300 catechisms at the cost of £22. 13s. 4d.<sup>10</sup>

Kearney kept to his word, for the Queen Elizabeth Irish type was available in 1571. Sir James Ware states in his *Annals of Ireland* under the year 1571: "This year the Irish characters were first brought into this kingdom by Nicholas Walsh, chancellor of Saint Patrick's in Dublin, and John Kerne, then treasurer of the same; and it was ordered that the prayers of the Church should be printed in that language and a church set apart in the chief town of every diocese, where they were to be read, and a sermon preached to the common people, which was instrumental to convert many of the ignorant sort in those days."<sup>11</sup>

The link between Parker and Day, together with the archbishop's interest in Irish, and the resemblance of some of the Irish letters of the Queen Elizabeth fount to those of the Anglo-Saxon, have led some bibliographical historians to argue that the Irish characters were taken directly from Day's fount. Influenced, perhaps too literally, by the handwritten statement at the top of the broadside (*Tuar ferge foighide Dhe*, the poem for which the type was initially used):<sup>12</sup> 'This Irishe balade printed in Irelande who belike use the olde Saxon carecte', E. R. McC. Dix wrongly maintained that the Queen Elizabeth type was the same as Day's Saxon. He states that: "I venture to submit that this type was simply Anglo-Saxon type cast by John Day in 1567 for Archbishop Parker, and used as if Irish type."<sup>13</sup> This view was shared by the Irish scholar Osborn Bergin, by Joseph Hammond, and later by the typographer and publisher Liam Miller, who states: "This Anglo-Saxon font provides Day's first important link with Ireland, because these characters were adapted to form the first type devised for printing in Irish and were introduced into Ireland in 1571 by William Kearney, Queen Elizabeth's printer in Dublin."<sup>14</sup>

A comparison between the two types, however, clearly establishes the inaccuracy of these opinions. While both types combine traditional script-like forms with existing roman letters, the roman and the newly cut special characters differ in the Anglo-Saxon from the Irish fount significantly, as may be seen from the enlarged samples of both faces in ill. 1.3. The Saxon fount had special sorts, many based on an uncial model, for lower-case d, f, g, i, r, s, t, y and z; and upper-case E, H, M, S and X. This influence is particularly noticeable in the upper-case special characters of the Anglo-Saxon E, H, M, characters which would have been suitable for use in the Irish but were not so used. Of the lower-case, the d, f, g, r, s and t could