

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Early Advertising Types*

FAT FACES AND EGYPTIANS<sup>1</sup>

ADVERTISING TYPES, AS distinct from book types, are little more than a century old. The decorated and outline letters of the eighteenth century, popularised by the Paris founder, P. S. Fournier, were intended in the first place for display on title-pages, but in the early years of the nineteenth century English founders designed several types which, however they might be used, were intended for poster work. The earliest of these were the fat faces and Egyptians, both probably due to Robert Thorne, the man who led the way in introducing the modern face into this country.

There are three sources in which one can trace the history of these early display letters; there is first of all the evidence of contemporary writers on typography, secondly, the specimen books of the founders, and thirdly, documents in which the types were actually used. The contemporary writers were naturally at that period not greatly interested in advertising or its typography. They have little to say on the subject, and that little generally contemptuous. Hansard, in his *Typographia*, 1825, shows them as "typographical monstrosities", and in another passage writes of the "folly of fat-faced preposterous disproportions".

He does, however, give us some definite information where he says that "the extremely bold and fat letter, now prevalent in job

<sup>1</sup> See also Nicolette Gray, *XIXth Century Ornamented Types*, 1938.

## EARLY ADVERTISING TYPES

printing, owes its introduction principally to Mr. Thorne". Savage also, in his *Practical Hints on Decorative Printing*, 1822, says that the fat faces which had entirely changed the appearance of posters were first designed by Robert Thorne. Our second source, the founders' specimens, fails us in the matter of the fat faces, as Thorne himself issued no book of specimens after 1803, and the first display of his jobbing types is in the specimen of his successor,

**INDUSTRIAL CITIES OF ENGLAND**  
*and convincing manner, has a direct and*

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S**  
**T U V W X Y Z**

*abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz fiff fiff fiff*  
**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0**

**Quousque**

Fig. 42. Thorowgood's Fat Face

William Thorowgood, published in 1820. Vincent Figgins's specimen of 1815 and Fry's of 1816 both show the design, but from our third source we know that it had already been in use for several years before 1815. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the State lotteries were highly popular, and the bills issued by the various contractors who organised the sale of tickets are interesting documents for the history of jobbing types. From the year 1806 onwards, especially on the bills of one of the chief contractors, T. Bish, fat faces are generally used. Again the posters of Drury Lane Theatre adopted the new letter from the year 1807. Whatever the intentions of the original founder, the smaller sizes of the fat faces soon came into use for display in books; examples may be found on the title-page of the *Scot's Magazine* for 1809, and in the *Annual Register* for 1808, issued in 1810. The publishers

of the more sensational books, such as reports of murder trials or political trials, as might be expected, found these exaggerated letters suited to their purpose. The political satires and controversial tracts of the bookseller, William Hone, offer many examples of their use.

The fat face was simply Thorne's modern face with the thick strokes swollen out, the thin strokes remaining hair-lines. The thin, flat serifs, the monotonously uniform width of capitals, the vertical stress, and other characteristics of the modern face are repeated. Under this process of fattening, some of the letters became remarkably overweighted; for instance, both the capital and the lower-case G (see fig. 42). In spite of this and notwithstanding the strictures of connoisseurs like Hansard, the type had its uses in display, even in books. The Lee Priory Press, founded in 1813, with the support of Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, with John Johnson as typographer, was in the forefront of fashion. Its types were all modern, and the use of small sizes of fat faces in headings convinces one that the design was not so preposterous as Hansard asserted. It was taken up by continental founders, and the Imprimerie Royale in Paris even took the—for them—unprecedented step of commissioning Thorne, a foreigner, in 1818, to cut some fat faces for their use as a new form of display type.

The reason for the adoption of the name Egyptian for a particular style of letter is hard to discover. It may be that the heavy squareness of the design in some way reminded the inventor of the style of Egyptian architecture. At any rate, it is clear that he chose a name which was at the time of frequent occurrence in the public press. We may compare the origin of the names Locarno and Zeppelin as applied to two types designed by Professor Koch. There was a considerable revival of the study of Egyptian antiquities in the early years of the nineteenth century, arising out of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. Archaeologists accompanied the First Consul to the East, and, as a result of their work, the early history of Egypt began to be better known in Western Europe. The Rosetta Stone, which provided the clue to the reading of Egyptian hieroglyphics, was brought to London in 1802, and for

some years afterwards, not only the learned periodicals, but also the more popular journals, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, included much comment on Egyptian archaeology.

No contemporary writer explicitly states that the type known as Egyptian was originally designed by Robert Thorne, but the name first occurs in connection with his foundry. From the catalogue of the sale of the Thorne foundry, which took place in June 1820, it

#### ENGLISH ANTIQUE.

**Quousque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra? quamdiu nos etiam furor iste tuus eludet? quem ad finem sese effrenata jactabit audacia? nihilne te nocturnum præsidium palatii, nihil urbis vigiliæ, nihil timor populi, nihil consensus bonorum omnium, nihil hic munitis-**

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTU**

**£1234567890.**

Fig. 43. Figgins's Antique

appears that among the matrices were six sets of Egyptians, 2-line great primer to brevier. In the specimen issued by Thorowgood in 1820, already mentioned, these Egyptians are displayed. But already, as early as 1815, in a specimen of Vincent Figgins there had appeared three sizes of Antique, upper case only, and in 1820 other founders had shown the letter, so that Thorne's priority is not beyond dispute. In the latter year, Edmund Fry's firm and Blake, Garnett & Co., of Sheffield, who had recently bought the foundry of William Caslon IV, both copied the design under the name of Antique. At least the probability is that Egyptian was the original name, and Antique the copy. In the following year, the original Caslon firm produced their version, also under the name Antique. In 1823, we find an Antique in the specimen of Wilson of Glasgow, while in 1825, Bower, Bacon & Co. ventured to use the

original name, Egyptian. In an article in the *Archiv für Buchgewerbe* (Hft. 4, 1931), by Dr. H. Bockwitz, on Egyptians and grotesques, there will be found a list of some continental specimens which display the design, the earliest being that by Andreae of Frankfurt, of 1830.

Udike quotes a remark from a book of 1806 referring to the lettering of "fashionable Egyptian signboards". Whether this lettering had the characteristics of the founder's design does not appear. At least we can be confident that there was no Egyptian type in existence in 1806. Is it possible that the fat faces were originally so described? The bills of the lottery contractors are again a useful guide to the earliest appearance of the type; it was in regular use in the year 1817. There is one sheet referring to a draw to take place on January 21, 1817, which bears the imprint of one Thorowgood of Wood Street, Cheapside. This was a brother of William Thorowgood, and oddly enough, William is said to have purchased Thorne's foundry with the prize-money of a lottery ticket. From the Thorowgood sheet it follows that the type must have been on the market by 1816. William Hone was using the type in 1819, and in 1820 it is found frequently on sheets relating to the trial of Queen Caroline. From March 1821, it occurs on the play-bills of Drury Lane Theatre, and from that year onwards is not uncommonly used as a heading type in ordinary books.

The chief characteristics of Egyptian are the monotone, or almost monotone colour, and the horizontal square or slab serifs, which are almost equal in thickness to the main strokes. These characteristics, of course, result in a heavy black letter. The descenders, as one would expect in a type of the kind intended for display work, are very short. As the traditional Egyptians were designed by the men who had recently abandoned their old-face types in favour of the modern face, the new display type had naturally a number of features in common with the modern face. The upper case in particular had that monotonous uniformity of width which is found in all modern faces. Of individual letters, the G, the short-ranging J, and the R with a curved tail conform to the same standard. In the lower case, the e is the best example of

the prevailing fashion. We have noted that the colour is not entirely monotone, and in this letter the stress is definitely vertical; the large eye of the e and the height of the t are further points. There have been other versions of the Egyptian under different names and various types derived from the same source. That freak type called *Italian*, and later *French Antique*, first displayed by the Caslons in 1821, seems to be inspired by the Egyptian. In this "monstrosity", to use Hansard's word, the serifs have become thicker than the main strokes; the design, so to speak, stands on its head. *Ionic* in some cases appears to be only another name for Egyptian.

## SANS SERIFS

The third group of display types which was produced by the same generation of printers is that of the Sans Serifs. Although this group apparently did not come into use until the 1830's, it made, at any rate, one appearance in a specimen book of about 1816, that of William Caslon IV. In that book there is one line set in sans serif capitals, 2-line English in size. It seems then that the sans serifs also competed for the name Egyptian. The name was finally allocated to another style, and the type itself seems to have been an unsuccessful experiment on the part of Caslon, and we hear nothing more of it until 1832. In that year Vincent Figgins displayed it under the name sans serif and William Thorowgood, successor to Thorne, under the name grotesque. Thorowgood's specimen book of 1832 was a supplement and, as Figgins displayed more sizes of the type, it seems probable that he was the originator of this revival. In 1833 Blake and Stephenson of Sheffield showed the design as sans-surryphs, and in 1834 the Caslon firm followed with their version. Thorowgood's name, grotesque, seems hardly suitable, though not so absurd as the name gothic, given to it by the American and by some English founders. The name is presumably due to the fact that the early types in this style were heavy, black letters, which by their colour recalled the early gothic or black-letter types. Figgins's name at least describes one of the two main characteristics of the design, the absence of serifs. The other characteristic is the monotone colour, and equal weight of all

strokes. The sans serif is in fact an Egyptian with the serifs knocked off, and it is probable that that was the manner of its creation.

The early sans-serif founts consisted of an upper case only, and all these capitals were of uniform width. Given the period in which it was first designed it was inevitable that, like the fat faces and Egyptians, the sans serifs should share that characteristic feature of the modern-face roman. This peculiarity in conjunction with the monotone face resulted in some of the letters being heavily overweighted, for instance the G's and M's. The earliest founts were all of heavy weight, and it was some years before lighter faces were cut. The Caslon design, called Doric, was shown in a number of weights in their specimen book of 1857, but with no modification of the original forms. The addition of a lower case was of even later date, apparently not before the seventies in this country, although a German firm, Schelter & Giesecke, had displayed a lower case in 1850.

These three display types, the fat faces, the Egyptians, or Antiques, and the sans serifs, remained unchanged throughout the nineteenth century. The present-day revival of the three groups is an indication that there was something good in them. The manner in which they have been modified is in accordance with the change in our general typography; the letters have been made to conform to earlier and better designs, and the bad features derived from the modern-face roman have been eliminated.

As to the other display types of the nineteenth century, they certainly deserve Hansard's description of monstrosities. The ornamented three-dimensional letters such as appear in the Caslon specimen books of the mid-nineteenth century were doubtless cut in all seriousness, but are surely quite the worst letters ever shown in any founder's specimen.

THE IMPORTANCE of type graphical history is self-evident. I have described several cases in which the study of specimens has thrown a flood of light on the designs. This source, of course, is not an early days of printing. Even the most established as a separate trade in the sheets or books displaying the designs has not survived down to our day. It is used as a historical document and not as a historical document. In recent years that attempts have been made to put the elements together. In England the work of T. B. Reed. Charles Enschedé, the Dutch founder, whilst Gustave Goussier and Audin have collected much material on French founders.<sup>1</sup>

For the fifteenth century work, if we exclude the advertisements, the "littera Psalteri" which he gives a specimen of being set in like most of the earlier specimens.

<sup>1</sup> For a general list of Type in *The Library*, March 1942, pp.