Writing-Tables and Table-Books

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> '... As the memory grows torpid by the use of a table-book ...'
> (Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare*)

Among the lots which the British Library bought at Bonham's on 25 June 2003 from the private collection of Colonel W. A. Potter were seven extremely rare English almanacs printed before 1701 and a unique copy of a set of early writing-tables produced by John Hammond in 1618. The focus of this article is Hammond's writing-tables and writing-tables in general, but first it might be useful to outline the little that has come to light concerning the collector of these books and their history.

William Allen Potter was a Nottinghamshire farmer, landowner and businessman who fought in the First World War and served in the Home Guard in the Second. As well as acting as High Sheriff of the county he was also President in 1932 of its antiquarian society, the Thoroton Society. He died in 1953 at the age of sixty-five, so was born in about 1888. His main antiquarian interests revolved around genealogy and local history, but he also built up a collection of over 200 legal deeds and records relating to Derbyshire and Leicestershire from the early thirteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, which he presented to Nottingham University in 1948. His other great interest was in almanacs and prognostications: these were kept at his home, Lambley House, Woodborough in Nottinghamshire, and were sold in summer 2003 at Bonham's. In the words of his *Times* obituary (16 March 1953), he was 'a fine Englishman and typical, in many ways, of the best that can mean'.

It is not easy to discover the history of these books during the last century and when they appeared on the market: they are too late in date for Eustace F. Bosanquet's *English Printed Almanacks and Prognostications* of 1917, which only goes up to 1600, and do not appear in his subsequent articles on the subject in *The Library*. The entries for these sorts of items are of the briefest kind in the 1926 *Short-Title Catalogue (STC)*, and supply no details of private ownership. The Bonham's sale catalogue says that most of Potter's books were collected after World War II and that many have the bookplate of E. F. Bosamonier: the lots bought by the British Library appear not to have this bookplate, and it seems that the catalogue's E. F. Bosamonier is a quite imaginative misreading of the arts and crafts bookplate of another 'E. F.' – Eustace Fulcrand Bosanquet. He was a member of the Bibliographical Society from 1908 until his death in 1940, and was also, it was said, 'the author of several delightful stories for children'.[1]

At least two of the rarer volumes, an Allestree almanac of 1638 and the Hammond writing-tables, can be traced in Quaritch catalogues: the writing-tables appeared in various catalogues between 1933 and 1945 when Potter bought them for £30.[2] Some nineteen different editions of writing-tables made between 1577 and 1628 are listed in the revised *STC*. Many are fragmentary or incomplete; three editions survive in two copies and one edition in three – all the rest are unique. There seems in the earlier period to have been a

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[1] 'The Bibliographical Society: Annual Report, Balance Sheet, and Annual Meeting', *The Library*, 2nd ser., xxii (1941–2), p. 101.

[2] The Hammond was item 297 in Quaritch catalogue 479 (1933) for £31 10s. and item 155 in catalogue 563 (1939), for £20.
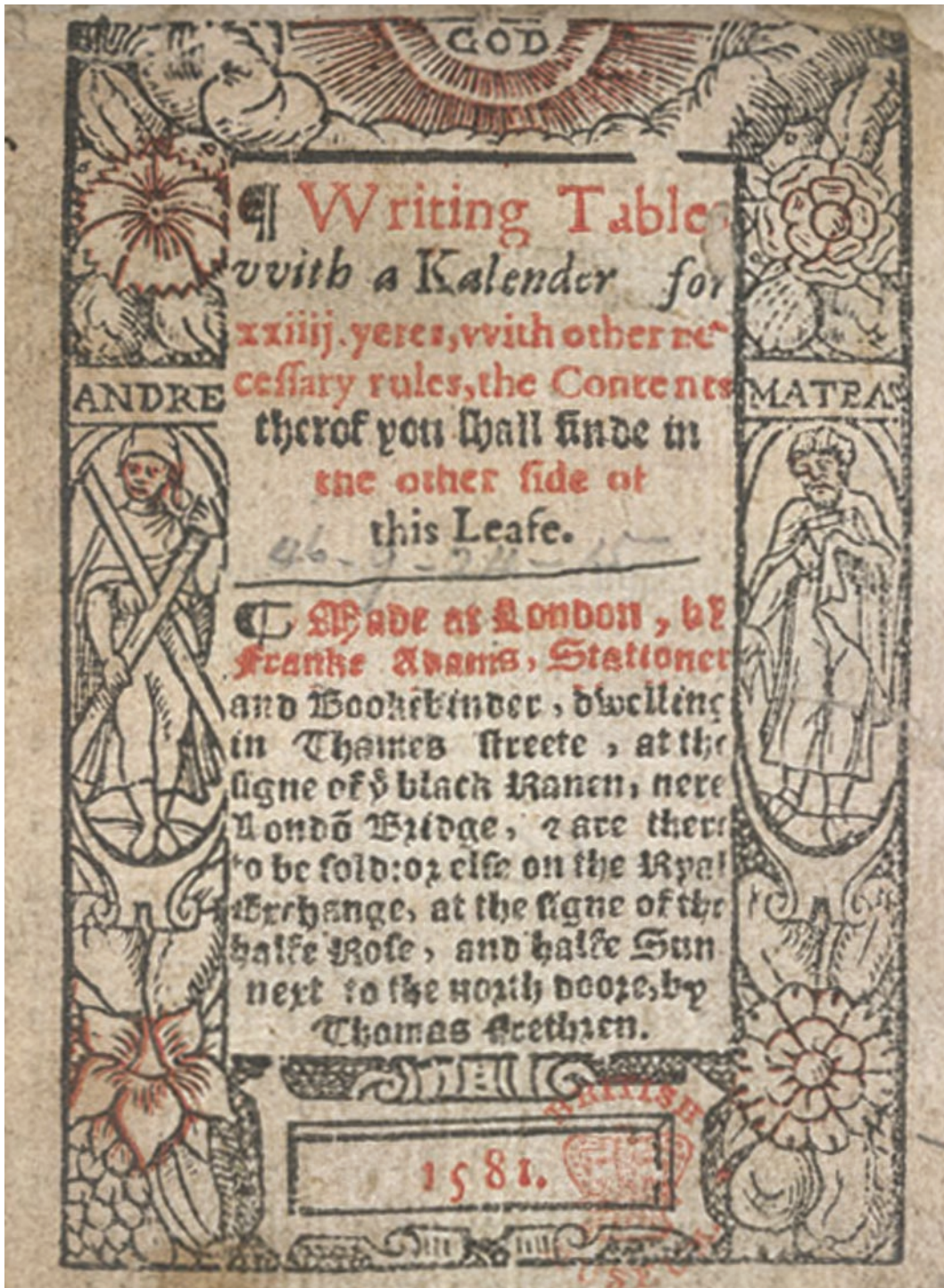
Fig. 1. C.194.a.344

clear succession of makers of these tables. The earliest writing-tables, dating from about 1577 (BL, C.194.a.342) were made and published by Francis Adams, whose only publications were these sort of items (fig.1). His association with them appears to have ended in 1594; the two next sets of tables, dated 1598 and 1601, do not mention their maker by name, but were printed by James Roberts and published by Edward White, his partner in the almanac business.[3] Roberts held the Stationers' Company almanac patent and had printed several of Adams's tables. Following these transitional years, Robert Triplet's tables succeeded Adams's in about 1602, and from 1604 onwards all the tables were printed for the Company of Stationers.[4] Triplet's last known set of tables is dated 1615 and was followed by John Hammond's 1618 volume (now British Library, C.194.a.338), which may have been printed by William Jaggard. An undated set of tables at the Folger is unassigned, but another set, a fragment of two leaves, also in the Folger but recorded by *STC* as missing, is attributed to Oliver Ridge. Like Adams, Triplet was a bookbinder, but is only associated with publishing writing-tables; apart from his tables, nothing further is known about Oliver Ridge who was not a member of the Stationers' Company.

John Hammond was a printer whose career lasted nearly forty years, at least until 1651, surviving the seizure of some four illegal presses in and around London in the 1620s and 1630s. Two verse works by John Taylor the Water Poet, *The Booke of Martyrs* (London, 1616) and a thumb-Bible *Verbum Sempiternae* (London, 1614) were published by him and took the unusual format of being 64mos in sixteens. He is also named as the seller of Thomas Wallis's *The Path-Way to Please God* of 1617 which is a 32mo in 8s, and around a decade later may have been the publisher of a ballad called *The Northerne Turtle* – he was certainly involved in the Grammar Patent in the 1620s and 1630s when he had at least five presses destroyed by the Company for illegal printing.[5] The unusual formats of the Taylor and Wallis books which Hammond published and sold suggest he was involved in what we might think of as the fancy-book market: novelty items, produced as much for display as for use and aimed at a rich or aspiring middle-class audience. In this context Francis Adams's address at the Black Raven in Thames Street near London Bridge, the centre of the fancy-goods market, may be telling.

Like most such publications, the extant writing tables contain a variety of useful and useless information. They normally include elements such as a calendar, sets of prayers, tables of weights and measures, dates of fairs and terms, accounts of roads, illustrated tables of English and foreign coins, descriptions of the country, and summaries of national and European history – Hammond's tables, for example, settle the question once and for all that printing was invented by John Cathenburg at 'Magunce' in 1459. These summaries were not always up to date – again, the latest national events in Hammond's annals are the death of Prince Henry and the marriage of the Palsgrave to Princess Elizabeth: nothing is said about what happened between these events of 1612 and 1613 and 1618 when the tables were published. *STC* notes that some printers seem to have kept parts of the type standing between one edition and the next.

What makes these volumes distinctive is not so much the information they contain but the writing-tables themselves. These survive in a few copies and consist of a number of reusable blank leaves – usually ten or so, but sometimes more than twice as many. It is not absolutely clear of what these leaves were made; Adams's 1581 tables boast that the tables themselves are made of asses' skin and give instructions about how to clean them with a wet

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[3] Adams 1577: BL, C.194.a.342; Adams 1581: BL, C.194.a.344; C.32.a.9.

[4] 1604: BL, C.194.a.343; C.40.a.44; 1611: C.194.a.341; C.32.a.1.

[5] W. A. Jackson (ed.), *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company 1602 to 1640* (London, 1957), pp. xx, 201; see also Arnold Hunt, 'Book Trade Patents, 1603-1640', in Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote and Alison Shell (eds.), *The Book Trade & Its Customers, 1450-1900: Historical Essays for Robin Myers* (Winchester and New Castle, Del., 1997), pp. 27-54, at p. 35.

sponge. It is possible that others are made of waxed or specially treated card or vellum. The leaves generally have a yellowish colour, but in the 1580 set of Adams's tables at Yale, the first two of the twenty-four tablets are black, presumably to be used with chalk or with a stylus – in which case the leaf would have to be blackened again after it had been used.

All the extant writing tables are 16mos in 8s, some being gathered at the top, rather than at the side, to form an oblong volume. Hammond's tables are now unbound, but Adams's 1580 ones at Yale are bound in purple velvet over boards and once had clasps. A set of tables from the next year at Harvard (illustrated in the Riverside Shakespeare) are elaborately bound in stamped calf with clasps.[6] The Folger set of Adams's 1584 tables were bound in stamped leather over wooden boards and once had clasps. Another set of tables, dated 1598 and now belonging to Robert S. Pirie, are bound in cream-coloured goatskin with portions of the original clasps: the upper cover has an armorial binding with an inscription (only partly decipherable) around it and a figure of Aaron, which may derive from the tables' title-page.[7] These bindings suggest that at least some copies of the tables were made, as I have already suggested, for the fancy-goods market – their bindings were designed for show as much as for use.

I have managed to get so far without quoting Hamlet: 'My tables – meet it is I set it down | That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!' (1.5.107-8).[8] What, if anything, does Hamlet get out of his breeches or from within his doublet at this point? It was not a copy of Adams's or even Triplet's tables (product placement had not yet been fully developed), but a pair (that is a single set) of writing-tables of a different kind (see below). Unfortunately, the trail of books like Hammond's that combine print and writing surfaces goes almost entirely cold. One exception to this can be found in the list of stock which the Exeter stationer Christopher Hunter drew up in 1603: the list is most famous because of its mention of Shakespeare's lost play *Love's Labour's Won*. In the list he mentions 'writing tables wth callenders & gold waytes'.[9] It is interesting in this context that he refers to the printed elements in the book (although I am not quite sure what the gold weights may have been), but not to the writing surfaces such books may have contained, but perhaps he took their presence for granted – that was what one found in a writing-table.

However, it is clear that books of a similar kind went on being produced. Christopher Edwards has kindly drawn to my attention two other lots in the Potter sale which are now in the Osborn Collection at Yale. They are copies of John Gadbury's *Ephemeris* (London, 1688) and of John Partridge's *Merlinus Liberatus* (London, 1690) which belonged to the economist and treasury official William Lowndes (1652-1724). They are bound in a similar but not identical style in black morocco, panelled in gilt, with silver clasps which are held closed by silverpoint styluses. Both volumes are interleaved with paper on which Lowndes has written copious official and personal accounts and memoranda. Each volume also has two leaves of waxed card bound into them, which presumably could be written on with the stylus, cleaned and used again. It seems as though Lowndes had these volumes specially interleaved and bound for his own use, suggesting it may have been common to include writing-tables in ephemeral publications of this kind.[10]

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[6] *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd edn (Boston, Mass., and New York, 1997), p. 180; all quotations from Shakespeare are from this edition.

[7] See Quaritch, Catalogue 369 (1922), items 1171-2.

[8] This is probably not the place to raise the question of whether in the speech in which the Hostess (or Mistress Quickly) describes Falstaff's nose at his death as being 'as sharpe as a Pen, and a Table of greene fields' in *Henry V* (2.3.16-17; Folio TLN 839), she is referring to writing-tables of some kind – the association between a pen and a table is curious.

[9] T. W. Baldwin, *Shakspere's 'Love's Labor's Won': New Evidence from the Account Books of an Elizabethan Bookseller* (Carbondale, Ill., 1957), p. 21.

[10] The almanacs were lots 221 and 234 in the Potter sale.

As I have said, evidence for the existence and use of printed writing-tables soon dries up, and I must turn instead to a related item. When annotating Hamlet's speech most editors cite a version of the definition under 'table' in the *OED*, 'A small portable tablet for writing upon, esp. for notes or memoranda; a writing-tablet'. So it was not a book with paper leaves which would require pen and ink, but some sort of notepad made out of another sort of material. *OED* says that the word 'table' was replaced by 'tablet'. 'Tablet' in turn is defined:

> A small smooth inflexible or stiff sheet or leaf for writing upon; usually one of a pair or set hinged or otherwise fastened together; anciently, of wood, or other material, covered with wax, written upon with a style, and used for correspondence, legal documents, etc.; in later times of ivory, cardboard, or the like, carried in the pocket and used for memoranda.

If we turn to 'writing-table' we have the similar definition, 'A small thin tablet, sheet, or plate of wood, ivory or other material for writing (esp. notes or memoranda) upon'. In other words all three items 'table', 'tablet' and 'writing-table' are more or less the same thing – essentially, they are sets of surfaces of different kinds (not necessarily including paper), which would take writing of one sort or another. These are the descendants of the wax tablet and stylus which had been used in Greece and Rome. According to the first English translation of J. A. Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (London, 1659), 'The ancients writ in *Tables done over with Wax* with a brasen *poitrel*, with the sha[r]p end whereof Letters were engraven, and rubbed out again with the broad end' (sig. N5v).[11] They are also the descendants of the 'peyre of tables al of yvory' which Chaucer makes the Friar's companion own in the *Summoner's Tale*.[12] The 'other material for writing' might include what could be slate or some other sort of hard, smooth surface. Nathaniel Baxter in *Sir Philip Sydneys Ouránia* (London, 1606) mentions:

> A stone there is of colour blacke as sables,
> Which Marchaunts oft, vse for wrighting-tables.
> This also deserueth some memorie,
> Because it serueth mans commoditie. (sig. L2v)

The side-note to this passage identifies the stone as *'Lapis Sectilis'*, that is cut stone.[13] Alternatively, it might have been made out of wax, which was still familiar to Shakespeare's audience as a medium for writing, as is suggested by Henry V's 'waxen epitaph' (*Henry V* 1.2.233).

In time the paper notebook or pocket-book would replace the table, tablet, writing-tablet, or writing-tables.[14] The relationship between writing-tables and what was known as a table-book is more uncertain, and I shall attempt to deal with this later. For the moment it is fairly clear that different sorts of writing-tables, as I shall call them, were fairly common objects in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and beyond. They were used for making random notes and observations, which would then be copied and perhaps written up, in a fuller and more permanent form. *In Nashe's Lenten Stuffe* (London, 1599) Nashe writes that

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[11] Cf. Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993), p. 101; 'poitrel' (translating *stilo*) is an erroneous form of 'pointel'. On the wax tablet, see also Michelle P. Brown, 'The Role of the Wax Tablet in Medieval Literacy: a Reconsideration in Light of a Recent Find from York', *BLJ*, xx (1994), pp. 1-16.

[12] *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, Mass., 1987), p. 129: III (D) 1741.

[13] Its exact identity is not clear; Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.160 sheds no light on the subject.

[14] The *OED*'s earliest citation for 'note-book' is 1579, and Shakespeare uses the word in *Julius Caesar* 4.3.98 and elsewhere. Katherine Duncan-Jones has pointed out to me that Lampatho in Marston's *What You Will* (1607: sig. D2r) describes a night's study during which he 'Stufft noting bookes'.

'My Tables are not yet one quarter emptied of my notes'.[15] Poins in *2 Henry IV* (2.4.266-7) refers to 'his master's old tables, his note-book, his counsel-keeper'. Dekker talks about filling 'a hundred paire of writing tables with notes'.[16]

Such tables were not just for writing notes: they could have had other uses such as making diagrams, drawing people, objects or scenes, or just for doodling. In his description of a hypocrite in *Characters of Vertues and Vices* (London, 1608), Joseph Hall describes how:

> At Church hee will euer sit where hee may bee seene best, and in the midst
> of the Sermon pulles out his Tables in haste, as if he feared to leese that note;
> when hee writes either his forgotten errand, or nothing. (sig. F5r)

Over eighty years later Nahum Tate adapted this portrait in his collection *Characters of Vertue and Vice* (London, 1691), which is based on Hall. His hypocrite in church:

> In hast plucks forth his Tables as to write
> Some Sermon-Note, mean while does only scrawl,
> Forgotten Errands there, or nought at all. (sig. D1v)

They might have more serious artistic purposes. When the surveyor and painter Thomas Bavin received his instructions for one of the voyages associated with Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1582, he was told to equip himself with a pair of writing-tables, as well as various scientific items, paper, ink, pens, colours and a stone with which to grind them.[17]

The relatively frequent use of such tables in plays of the period shows how common they were.[18] For example, in the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (London, 1598) Ned says of the Porter who has crossed him 'I will write him in my Tables, for so soone as I am made Lord chiefe Iustice, I will put him out of his Office' (sig. C2r). Seeking to improve his pretentious vocabulary, Balurdo in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge 'drawes out his writing table's and writes'*, noting down 'Retort' and 'obtuse' as 'good words very good words' (sig. B2r).[19] From the later period a character in Richard Brome's *A Mad Couple Well Matched* (London, 1653) remarks that 'A wooden two-leav'd booke, a paire of Tables | Would do't' (sig. C5r). In more sinister contexts, they were associated with spies and agents who used them to note down seditious and treacherous speeches. *In Every Man Out of his Humour* Jonson has Cordatus denounce 'narrow-ey'd decypherers [...] that will extort strange, and abstruse meanings out of any subiect'; 'let them know,' he adds, 'the author defies them, and their writing-tables'.[20]

Writing-tables clearly came in different styles and bindings. Towards the end of *Cymbeline* Jupiter descends and places a 'tablet' upon the imprisoned and sleeping Posthumus Leonatus's breast: when he wakes up he exclaims, 'A book? O rare one, | Be not, as is our fangled world, a garment | Nobler than that it covers!' (5.4.109, 133-5). Whatever else is going on here, there seems to be a reference to tablets in elaborate bindings. When

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[15] *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, revised F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford, 1958), vol. iii, p. 162.

[16] *The Wonderfull Yeare* (1603), in *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford, 1923), p. 21.

[17] David Beers Quinn (ed.), *The Roanoake Voyages 1584-1590*, 2 vols, Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, civ-cv (1955), vol. i, p. 52.

[18] See the entries in Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 224-5.

[19] John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. W. Reavley Gear (Manchester and Baltimore, Md., 1978), pp. 67-8; the passage is parallel to Nathaniel's use of his 'table-book' to note down 'A most singular and choice epithet' in *Love's Labour's Lost* 5.1.15.

[20] *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford, 1925-52), vol. iii, p. 495 (2.6.171-5).

Posthumus reads what is written in the 'book' the riddling prophecy takes up no more than six or seven lines. This suggests that Jupiter's tablet took the common form of a pair of hinged leaves of some material or other on which a short inscription or set of notes could be written. A similar set of tables was presented to Queen Elizabeth at Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire, the home of the third Lord Chandos, during her summer progress in 1592: the tables contained a six-line poem.[21] At one point in William Barclay's *Argenis* (London, 1625) a woman 'taketh vp her writing-Tables, in which shee writeth these lynes, scarce plaine enough to be read'. These consist of a twelve-line letter, but in the immediately following paragraph the tables seem to have changed their form and become 'the Letters' which are 'sealed vp' and given to her servant with the instruction to deliver 'these Letters' to the king (sig. Ii1v; Book 4, chapter 3).

Tables occasionally feature among the stock of contemporary stationers. For example, among several thousand items in Roger Ward's shop at Shrewsbury in 1585 were '7 writing tables';[22] John Foster at York in 1616 had some 83 sets of them.[23] Some may have been made in England, but in a port book of 1582 imported writing-tables are priced at eight shillings the dozen.[24] In Foster's York inventory the different sets of writing tables are carefully distinguished: there are 'twenty of the least sorte', presumably cheap and cheerful ones; twenty-three pairs of 'large white Tables', suggesting perhaps that the material of which the writing surface was made was bleached or painted white; seven pairs of 'little tables gilt' and three pairs of 'dull gilt beste sorte' – it is not clear whether the writing surface, or its edges, or the casing of the tables was gilt; and even more mysteriously thirty-one pairs of 'number thre'.[25] Again, one can see a suggestion that at least some of these sorts of tables belonged more to the fancy than to the practical end of the market. One of the lots awarded in the 'Lotterie' which formed part of the entertainment devised by Sir John Davies for the Queen's visit to the house of Sir Thomas Egerton at Harefield in the summer of 1602 was 'A Paire of Writing Tables'. Other prizes consisted of items such as a mask, a necklace, a fan, a looking-glass, a pair of gloves and other clothes: they were described by the mariner who brought them in a box as 'toyes' and 'trifles'.[26] When Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, paid twelve pence on 3 December 1585 'for a pare of ryting tabellse', he was probably getting something slightly special.[27]

Perhaps the essential feature of these writing-tables was that they could be wiped clean and reused. This may explain why among the items which Richard Whitaker sent Sir Thomas Barrington in March 1637 were three paper books and a 'Spunge', which on its own cost the relatively large amount of three shillings.[28] It may be that a premium was placed on unused writing-tables because, as one might expect, they soon wore out. 'I saw one of you buy a paire of tables, e'en now', Grace Wellborn says to Winwife in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and receives the reply, 'Yes, heere, they be and maiden ones too, vnwritten in'.[29] In Pasquill's *A Countercuffe Giuen to Martin Junior* (London, 1589), the

21 *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols (Oxford 1902), vol. iii, p. 480.

22 Alexander Rodger, 'Roger Ward's Shrewsbury Stock: an Inventory of 1585', *The Library*, 5th ser., xiii (1958), pp. 247-68, at p. 261.

23 John Barnard and Maureen Bell, *The Early Seventeenth-Century York Book Trade and John Foster's Inventory of 1616* (Leeds, 1994), p. 95.

24 T. S. Willan (ed.), *A Tudor Book of Rates* (Manchester, 1962), p. 65.

25 Barnard and Bell, *The Early Seventeenth-Century York Book Trade*, p. 95.

26 *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. Robert Krueger (Oxford, 1975), pp. 208-11.

27 Simon Adams (ed.), *Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1558-1561, 1584-1586*, Camden Society, 5th ser., vi (1995), p. 340.

28 Mary Elizabeth Bohannon, 'A London Bookseller's Bill: 1635-1639', *The Library*, 4th ser., xviii (1937-8), pp. 417-46, at p. 438.

29 *Ben Jonson*, vol. vi, p. 94 (4.3.45-7).

unidentified author refers to 'a newe paire of Writing-Tables'.[30] The ability to use and reuse writing-tables was what made them distinctive. Commentators point out how powerful the metaphor of tables was for what is written in the heart or mind – for example, in Shakespeare's Sonnet 122, 'Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain'. But what is written there can also be rubbed out: the tables will survive in the speaker's mind until they become victim to 'raz'd oblivion'.[31] In this sense the tables of Sonnet 122 are probably different from 'The vacant leaves [...] these waste blanks' of the manuscript book which the poet writes about in relation to the young man in Sonnet 77. The point in Sonnet 122, or in Hamlet's 'Yea, from the table of my memory | I'll wipe away all trivial fond records' (1.5.98-9), is that the table of his memory can be wiped clean and reused.

All this makes me think again that writing-tables which combined print and a set of reusable writing surfaces were relatively rare, perhaps made generally, as I have suggested, for show rather than for use. At a time when paper was expensive and writing materials relatively cumbersome, a portable, reusable writing surface that did not need pen and ink or a penner was evidently useful. I suspect that the pairs of writing tables which stationers sold filled this need more or less adequately. Even so, other forms of writing-table were developed. The *DNB* reports that Sir Theodore Turquet de Mayerne (1573-1655), a French physician who came to England in 1611:

> made an ingenious kind of tablet-book, capable of being washed by covering parchment with a resinous compound, and used such a one as a scribbling book, in which he wrote prescriptions in red ink. Only one, dated 14 Dec. 1649, is now legible, as much of the varnish has chipped off.

In fact the manuscript consists of three folio-sized oblong vellum leaves: each leaf is made up of two leaves pasted back to back. It is not so much that the varnish has chipped, but that the vellum has perished. Parts of the manuscript are just about legible, but the date mentioned by the *DNB* is above a prescription, most of which has been lost.[32]

The subject should perhaps be laid to rest at this point, but at least one further difficulty remains, which I have already mentioned. This is the relationship between writing-tables or tables and table-books: again, it is best to start with the *OED*. A table-book is 'A book composed of tablets for memoranda; a pocket note-book or memorandum-book'. This suggests that a table-book either could be made up of tables or tablets of various different sorts of materials or that it might be used as a term for a paper-book in which notes or memoranda were copied. It is not altogether clear whether the shorter form of 'tables' referred just to writing-tables or in addition to paper table-books. However, it is possible that the two sorts of 'tables' denoted quite different sorts of objects, made of different

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[30] *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. i, p. 60.

[31] Cf. the 'table' described in a poem in Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes* (Leyden, 1586), sigs N2v-3r: this is intended for the user 'to write' down the words and deeds of his friend and, when he turns out to be false, 'bee bould to rase him out' and 'let mee still within your tables bee'. The emblem, addressed to Edmund Freake and Anthony Alcock, is illustrated with a woodcut of an artist using a brush, pen or stylus to draw a figure on a panel.

[32] The manuscript is British Library, Sloane MS. 552; I owe this reference to Robert Harding of Maggs.

materials.[33] Giles Mandelbrote has generously drawn my attention to an item in the unpublished inventory of the stock of the St Paul's Churchyard stationer John Dowse, drawn up on his death in 1676. This lists '41 doz. & 8 skins of table books and writing books vellome', but does not elaborate on whether the skins go with the 'writing books' (or whether they are writing-tables) or whether the 'table books' made use of them in some way.

The *OED*'s earliest citation for 'table-book' is from *Have With You to Saffron Walden* (London, 1596), where Nashe writes of 'Proctors and Registers as busie with their Table-books as might bee, to gather phrases'.[34] This recalls the stage-direction in *Love's Labour's Lost* which instructs Nathaniel to *'Draw out his table-book'* to note down the 'most singular and choice epithet' of 'peregrinate' which Holofernes has just used (5.1.14-15). Signior Shuttlecock in Dekker's *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie* (London, 1604) reports that he can remember 'the strange and wonderfull dressing of a Coach that scudded through *London* the ninth of *August*, for I put the day in my Table-booke, because it was worthy the registring'.[35] It is clear that table-books were only an intermediary stage in the gathering of material for more leisurely transcription and writing up. In a poem 'To the pious Memory of my deare Brother in-Law Mr Thomas Randolph', Richard West describes poetasters at a play:

> Their Braines lye all in Notes: Lord! how they'd looke
> If they should chance to loose their Table-book![36]

This is made even more explicit by Henry Timberlake who on his visit to Jerusalem got into a dispute about whether Pelagia was a saint: 'but when I came home', he recalls, 'I had so much to do in writing my notes out of my table-book, that I had not leasure to vrge their Authors for Saint *Pelagia*'.[37] Some of the practices associated with tables also occur with table-books. For example, in much the same way that Hall's and Tate's characters do, the Hypocrite in Samuel Speed's poem gets out his table-book in church in order to appear to note down the contents of the sermon.[38] In the satire addressed to Sir Nicholas Smith, and erroneously attributed to Donne, the author makes a comparison familiar from tables or writing-tables:

> The mind, you know is like a Table-book,
> Which, th'old unwipt, new writing never took.[39]

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[33] Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1995), p. 16, seems to imply that a table-book was any bound volume of blank paper 'from small pocket-size books or notebooks [...] to quarto or folio volumes' into which their owners could transcribe prose or verse. However, there seems no evidence that these sorts of volumes were actually known as 'table-books'. On the other hand Peter Beal takes it that 'tables' and table-books are more or less the same sorts of things, 'some kind of unbound notebook or pocket book which could be carried around and used for jotting down on the spot things to be remembered', see 'Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book', in W. Speed Hill (ed.), *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, cvii (1993), pp. 131-47, at p. 132.

[34] *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. iii, p. 46; the association between these table-books and 'the Queenes Decypherer', who is invoked in the following sentence, recalls the link between 'narrow-ey'd decyphers' and 'their writing-tables' in Jonson's *Every Man Out of his Humour* already referred to.

[35] *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, p. 117; the use of tables for such details recalls Fungoso's request for 'a paire of tables' in order to note down the details of a suit he admires in Jonson's *Every Man Out of his Humour, Ben Jonson*, vol. iii, p. 506 (3.5.7).

[36] Thomas Randolph, *Poems* (Oxford, 1638), sig. 3★3v.

[37] *A True and Strange Discourse of the Travailes of Two English Pilgrimes: to Jerusalem* (London, 1616), sig. C1v.

[38] *Prison-pietie* (London, 1677), sig. D4rv.

[39] *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson, 2 vols (Oxford, 1912), vol. i, p. 404.

If table-books were generally associated with such fairly desultory note-taking, then the use of paper for them seems slightly unlikely. However, some instances can be found of their containing more substantial material. The Clown in Thomas Heywood's *A Maidenhead Well Lost* (London, 1638) draws up the menu for a wedding-feast in his table-book, saying 'Here are all the points | I am to treat of' (sigs F3v–4r). Philip Massinger seems to have found such items useful props in some of his plays. Caesar in *The Roman Actor* (London, 1629) *'Pulls out a Table booke'* and adds the name of Domitia to 'the list of those I haue proscrib'd'. 'That same fatall booke', Stephanos usefully adds, 'Was neuer drawne yet, but some men of rancke | Were mark'd out for destruction'. A list of enemies (one is reminded of John Major's famous notebook of 'bastards') may not take up much room, but the *'Table booke'* is clearly a book. In his slightly later play *The Guardian* (London, 1655) Massinger has Severino tell Claudio to instruct the Banditi on whom they may 'securely prey'. 'Silence', the first of the bandits commands, 'out with your Table-books', while Claudio delivers vivid descriptions of who may and may not be robbed. Again, it is unclear here whether the bandits write down just a word or two or whole passages.[40] When Samuel Pepys went to view the contents of a dead Irish soldier's pockets, he found among them 'a table-book, wherein were entered the names of several places where he was to go; and among others, his house, where he was to dine, and did dine yesterday'.[41]

A rather complicated account in Richard Brathwait's character-book *Whimzies* (London, 1631) sheds a little more light on the subject. There he describes 'A Corranto-coiner', that is an inventor of false news:

> Hee carryes his *Table-booke* still about with him, but dares not pull it out publikely: yet no sooner is the Table drawne, than he turnes *Notarie*; by which meanes hee recovers the charge of his *ordinarie*. (sigs B6v-7r)

In other words, he waits until the table has been cleared (*OED* draw v. 12), switches from his news writing by acting as a notary or minor lawyer and is thereby able to pay for his meal. The table-book is presumably the repository for his news gathering, rather than explicitly associated with his legal work.

We are on relatively firmer ground with Henry King's poem 'Upon a Table-book presented to a Lady':

> When your faire hand receves this Little Book,
> You must not there for Prose or Verses look.
> Those empty regions which within you see,
> May by your self planted and peopled bee.
> And though wee scarce allow your Sex to prove
> Writers (unlesse the argument be Love)
> Yet without crime or envy You have roome
> Here both the Scribe and Authour to become.

The gift was evidently a small blank paper book in which the recipient was encouraged to write her poems or prose compositions. The book might strictly speaking be taken to be a notebook, but could be recognizable today simply as a manuscript miscellany.[42] A friend of King's, Jasper Mayne, wrote a longer poem about another book of this kind, 'Upon Mistress Anne King's Table-book of Pictures'. This contained 'fair pictures' of 'sprightly

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[40] *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*, ed. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, 5 vols (Oxford, 1976), vol. iii, p. 83 (*The Roman Actor* 5.1.94–101) and vol. iv, pp. 144–5 (*The Guardian* 2.4.72-119).

[41] *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols (London, 1970-83), vol. viii, p. 208 (10 May 1667).

[42] *The Poems of Henry King*, ed. Margaret Crum (Oxford, 1965), p. 154.

dames', drawn with a pen and ink; Mayne advises the recipient to keep the book 'clasped' shut to stop the figures escaping.[43] Table-books are also associated with clasps in Pathericke Jenkyn's 'Liberty lost' in which Cupid throws the narrator a 'Table-book' which is then 'Unclasp'd'.[44] Such books evidently made smart and lavish gifts: in a letter published as dated from Poissy in France on 7 September 1622 James Howell reminded D. Caldwall that 'I sent you from Antwerp a silver Dutch table-book. I desire to hear of the receipt of it in your next'.[45] More elaborately bound table-books are occasionally mentioned in writings of the time, even if the author has his tongue firmly in his cheek. A character in Robert Stapylton's tragi-comedy *The Step-mother* (London, 1664) decries a gift as 'only a poor Table-Book, | The cover is but Gold and set with Rubies, Not worth your looking on'.[46] In a poem, 'Cupid and Ganymede', which is largely translated from the French, Matthew Prior mentions 'Two Table-Books in Shagreen Covers', that is, bound in rough untanned leather which may have been dyed green.[47]

The James Howell who said he had sent the silver Dutch table-book wrote a poem 'Vpon a New-fashion'd Table-Book, *Sent Him for a Token from* Amsterdam'.[48] In it he refers to 'each Leaf', which may suggest it was a paper book. However, this need not be the case, for Swift's fine and playful poem 'Verses wrote in a Lady's Ivory *Table-Book. Anno.* 1698.' invites the reader to 'Peruse my Leaves thro' ev'ry Part', but makes clear that its heterogeneous contents – poems, letters, billets doux, mottoes, recipes and accounts – can be rubbed out with 'Spittle and a Clout'. Apparently, the ivory leaves of the book were reusable.[49] Whether these elaborately bound 'tables' always contained paper or sometimes simply housed wood, wax, ivory or some other material is uncertain. At the lower end of the market table-books belonged to the sort of fancy goods which may have included writing-tables. They figure among the items (ribbons, glasses, pomanders, brooches, gloves, bracelets, and so on) which Autolycus has sold in *The Winter's Tale* (4.4.598-9).

I am not sure whether any pairs of writing-tables, sets of tables, or even table-books survive or have been correctly identified as such. A brief search through some of the more famous general writers of the seventeenth century – Ashmole, Aubrey, Evelyn, Pepys, Wood and so on – has failed to come up with much which is of interest relating to writing-tables of whatever kind. It is possible that these were such familiar and useful items that there was no need to dwell on them. All this makes the survival of John Hammond's tables and their acquisition by the British Library all the more remarkable.

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[43] The poem was a popular one and can be found in collections, such as BL, Add. MS. 33998, ff. 57r-58r, Harl. MS. 6931, ff. 59r-61v, and Add. MS. 22603, ff. 27v-28v; Beal, 'Notions in Garrison', p. 132. I have supplied a modernized text, which draws on these three manuscripts.
[44] *Amorea, the Lost Lover* (London, 1661), sigs A2v-3r.
[45] James Howell, *Familiar Letters, or Epistolae Ho-Elianae*, 3 vols (London, 1903), vol. iii, p. 146.
[46] *The Step-mother* (London, 1664), sig. B2v.
[47] *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears, 2 vols (Oxford, 1959), vol. i, p. 273.
[48] *Poems on Several Choice and Various Subjects* (London, 1663), sig. H8r.
[49] *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 3 vols (Oxford, 1937), vol. iii, pp. 60-1.