

Writing the History of a Book: *A Child's History of England*

Allison Berger

School of Information Sciences, Wayne State University

INF 7790: The History of Books

Professor Steven Galbraith

December 15, 2023

Writing the History of a Book: *A Child's History of England*

Astronomer and award-winning author Carl Sagan once said in his book *Cosmos*: “A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic” (Popova, 2016). The specific magic that Sagan is referring to in his quote is how humans create and use books to “break the shackles of time” by connecting a writer from long ago to a reader of the present (Popova, 2016). Throughout the semester, we have been learning how humans have performed their “magic.” In other words, we have learned about various processes of bookmaking that humans have used, specifically starting with the cuneiform tablets of the past to the e-readers of the present. By learning how books have been made for thousands of years, we have also learned the skill of being able to discover the history of a book. In this final paper, I will utilize all that I have learned and demonstrate my ability to write the history of a book. The specific book that I have chosen to study and write about is the first volume of *A Child's History of England* by Charles Dickens, with a frontispiece by F. W. Topham, which can be found in the Ramsey Collection, a section in the Special Collections, at Wayne State University. To uncover the history of this copy of *A Child's History of England*, I will examine this book's physical makeup, text, production history, and provenance. I will begin by describing the book as a physical artifact.

Physical Makeup of the Book

This copy of the first volume of *A Child's History of England* was, as the title suggests, likely made with children in mind. The first evidence of this idea is the book's relatively small size. In fact, it is only 16 cm (approximately 6.3 inches) tall, which would fit well in the hands of a child reader. Given its size, it can be inferred that the book's format is sextodecimo (16mo). A sextodecimo is “approx[imately] 6 to 7 inches tall, average 6.5 inches” (The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America, n.d.). The second evidence that this book was made for

children is the brightly colored binding material. This first volume of *A Child's History of England* was bound in red cloth, which is confirmed in an advertisement placed in the third volume of this set by its creators and publishers, William Bradbury and Frederick Mullett Evans (Dickens, 1854). The red cloth covers are also adorned with several examples of binding decoration: an eye-catching gilt pictorial decoration of a woman and a child can be found in the middle of the front cover, and both the front and back covers are enhanced with a blind stamped border. The decorations also carry over to the spine. The spine has gilt decoration and titles or phrases, which include "A Child's History of England by Charles Dickens" at the top of the spine and "Vol. 1" at the bottom of the spine in uppercase Roman typeface (Dickens, 1852). On the spine of this particular copy of the book, there is also a black paint-like substance in a break between the gilt decorations with a library's call number information written on top of it in white ink; this addition will be referred to again later in this paper. The third evidence that this book was made for children is the use of bright colors and exciting design patterns for the edge decoration and the endpapers. The edges and endpapers of this book have been marbled with a stone pattern, made using the colors red and blue. The pattern of the marbled endpapers is disrupted by a pastedown leaf in the front of the book and a card pocket in the back of the book, both of which may hint at previous owners of the book and will be covered later on in the paper.

Other physical descriptions to take notice of for this book, that do not relate to it being tailored to children, involve damage, lack of repairs, and binding information. A few parts of the book appear to be slightly damaged. For instance, the corners of the book are bent and worn down, and the color of the red cloth covers have faded along the edges of the spine and in several spots on the front and back covers. Also, throughout the book, many pages have become discolored, changing in places from white to a yellow color. One other piece of damage that

should be noted is that a page in the front matter with no writing or illustrations between the frontispiece and the title page has detached from the binding and is simply sitting in the book. The only other evidence of slight damage in relation to the binding can be found on pages 112 and 113; the pages have torn away from the binding strings slightly, revealing that the book has five sewing supports that are keeping the boards and text block together. Given the lack of evidence that repairs were made on this book, it can be assumed that the original binding is still in place from when the printers and publishers bound the book in 1852, as indicated on the title page (Dickens, 1852). Most of the damage noted in this book is likely due to age, so the binding and decorations of this book are in good condition for being over 170 years old.

Text of the Book

The first volume of *A Child's History of England*, published in 1852, was written by Charles Dickens. Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was a well-known “British author, journalist, editor, illustrator, and social commentator” (McEvoy, 2023, para. 2). He has even been referred to as “one of the most important and influential writers of the 19th century” (McEvoy, 2023). Dickens wrote over 15 novels, many of which have been considered classics, such as *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*, as well as dozens of short stories, articles, and other works in his lifetime (McEvoy, 2023).

Of all of his works, *A Child's History of England* has been considered to be “Dickens’s Most Neglected Book” (Tearle, 2017). It was even left off of many lists of Dickens’ books and other works that can be found throughout the web. The forgotten novel was unique among Dickens’ works since it was the only one that he wrote specifically for children, as well as due to its position of being “the only book-length work of history he wrote” (Tearle, 2017, para. 2). The book was certainly considered to be “out of character” and “weak” when compared to Dickens’

popular fiction novels that deal with contemporary social issues like urban poverty and the legal system (Tearle, 2017). Although the book did not receive the acclaim that his others did, Dickens was still able to accomplish his goal of creating a history book for children.

Dickens' main goal was unveiled after reading the dedication that appears in the preliminary matter in the first volume of the book, which reads: "This *Child's History of England* is dedicated to my own dear children, [w]hom I hope it may help, bye-and-bye, to read with interest larger and better books on the same subject" (Dickens, 1852). Therefore, his goal was to write a book about the history of England that would draw the attention and interest of children, especially his own children, with the hope of acting "as a springboard to the discovery of weightier and more detailed works of history" (Tearle, 2017). In simpler words, the book was supposed to be a fun introduction to the history of England for children. Dickens achieved this goal by writing history as if it was a narrative or story like his other works, and treating important historical figures as if they were mere characters in another one of his novels (Tearle, 2017). These tactics, creating vivid storylines and characters that captivate readers, are what Charles Dickens was best known for after all (BiblioLifestyle, 2023).

Dickens originally wrote *A Child's History of England* in his journal *Household Words* (Wales, 2022). The non-fiction work appeared in a total of 39 installments, comprised of approximately 125,000 words, from January 1851 to December 1853 (Wales, 2022). Soon after its serialization, the book was published into three volumes between 1852 and 1854 (Wales, 2022). The set of books as a whole covers the history of England from 50 B.C.E. until 1688, with a brief conclusion chapter summarizing important events that happened between 1688 and 1837 (Dickens, 1852; Dickens, 1854). However, according to the Chronological Table of Contents in the preliminary matter, the first volume, which is the focus of this paper, only covered from 50

B.C.E., referred to as Ancient Times, until 1216, the year when King John of England died thus ending his reign (Dickens, 1852). Given that the books did cover a large majority of history and were made for children, it is not surprising that they were adopted and used in British schools. In fact, the volumes were used in British schools from the 1850s until World War II (Austen et al., 2006). Therefore, after the first editions printed in 1852 through 1854, all three volumes of the book have been reprinted many times and are still being printed today. Even though, the books have been reprinted for years, they are not being reprinted by the original publishing company: Bradbury & Evans, which was passed on to the next generation of their families after the original owners retired and the name was changed to Bradbury, Agnew and Co. in 1872 (Bassett, 2023; Royal Academy of Arts, n.d.).

Production of the Book

The company responsible for printing and publishing the first edition of *A Child's History of England* was Bradbury & Evans, as stated on the title page of the first volume of the set (Dickens, 1852). The printing and publishing business of Bradbury & Evans was “founded in 1830 in London by William Bradbury (1799-1869) and Frederick Mullett Evans (1804-1870)” (Royal Academy of Arts, n.d.). Bradbury & Evans became Dickens’ publisher in 1844 and the partnership lasted until 1859 (Simkin, 2020). As mentioned, Bradbury & Evans assisted Dickens in printing and publishing *A Child's History of England*; first in the journal *Household Words* and then as a set of three books between 1852 and 1854 (Simkin, 2020; Wales, 2022).

According to the title page, this specific first volume of *A Child's History of England* was printed and published in 1852 by Bradbury & Evans at 11 Bouverie Street in London (Dickens, 1852). From only looking at and feeling the texture of the paper used in the book, it is challenging to determine what paper is used. However, it is probable that the paper used was

made of recycled linens and cotton rags, also known as rag paper, since viable processes for turning wood into pulp for papermaking were not created and fully developed until the 1850s, which is essentially at the same time that this volume was created (Burns & Potje, 2023).

Therefore, Bradbury & Evans likely printed this book using rag paper. On this rag paper, Bradbury & Evans mainly employed the use of Roman typeface throughout the book (Dickens, 1852). To emphasize important information or to differentiate between sections, Bradbury & Evans simply used Roman typeface in all uppercase letters (Dickens, 1852). Although rare within the first volume, Bradbury & Evans utilized other typefaces a few times: Italic typeface is used in the advertisement at the end of the book, Blackletter typeface is used to emphasize the importance of who the book is dedicated to on the dedication page in the front matter of the book, and Blackletter typeface is used on the title page to highlight that a frontispiece by F.W. Topham is included in this book (Dickens, 1852).

As just mentioned, this first volume has an illustration included with it. It is specifically referred to as a frontispiece, which is an illustration facing the title page of a book (Boldt & Margolis, 2020). Strangely, the frontispiece in this specific volume of this book is separated from the title page by a blank page. Anyways, this frontispiece was created by F.W. Topham, an engraver, an artist, and a personal friend of Charles Dickens (Kitton, 1899). Topham engraved five illustrations on wood, giving each of the illustrations a circular design, and surrounded them with an ornamental border (Kitton, 1899). The whole frontispiece appears to have been printed in back. The four illustrations that can be found in each corner of the page showcase well-known scenes of English History: “Alfred in the Neatherd’s Cot; Canute reproving the Courtiers; Edwy and Elgiva; [and] Eleanor and Fair Rosamond” (Kitton, 1899, p. 189). In the first volume, the main illustration in the center of the page depicts “a girl reading to two children” (Kitton, 1899,

p. 189). The main illustration in the remaining two volumes differ from the first volume: the second volume illustrates a scene of “Alfred the Great receiving instruction in reading from his mother Queen Osburgha,” whereas the third volume shows “a more modern representation of a similar incident” (Kitton, 1899, p. 189). As can be seen, the illustrations on the frontispiece in the first volume, as well as the other two volumes in the set, were commissioned and made to specifically relate to events in the book.

These first edition volumes of *A Child's History of England* were sold as a set at Bradbury & Evans' shop in London, along with all of Dickens' other works, according to the advertisement in the last few pages of the third volume of *A Child's History of England* (Dickens, 1854). Prior to the release of the second and third volume, the first volume was sold by itself. Each volume was sold around Christmas the year prior to its publication year (OverDrive, n.d.). So, the first volume of *A Child's History of England* by Charles Dickens was originally sold by Bradbury & Evans in December 1851 (OverDrive, n.d.). It is possible that one of the first owners of this book purchased it from Bradbury & Evans in the 1850s.

Provenance of the Book

Throughout the first volume of *A Child's History of England* that is being examined for this assignment, there is clear evidence of ownership. The first owners of this book can be found by looking at who printed and published the book on the title page. Therefore, the very first owners of the book were the printers and publishers: William Bradbury and Frederick Mullett Evans. The printing and publishing business, Bradbury & Evans, sold this book after they printed it in the 1850s. Once all three volumes were completed in 1854, Bradbury & Evans began selling *A Child's History of England* as a set, as was advertised in the third volume (Dickens, 1854). Given the similar design, condition, and that they seem to have been acquired at the same time

by the current owner, Wayne State University's Special Collections, it is quite possible that the owner after the printers and publishers purchased it as a set and it has remained together since.

Evidence of ownership that helps continue to fill in the history of the book after being sold by Bradbury & Evans is the inscription that appears on the half-title page in the front matter of the first volume of the book. The inscription reads: "To Emma Dower Murdock, 4th Anniversary of her birth day. from a dear & Sincere friend" (Michigan Memories, n.d.). This inscription suggests that the book was given as a present to a child. Therefore, the next owner that we can identify after the printers and publishers is the "dear & Sincere friend" of Emma Dower Murdock. After the gift was presented to Emma Dower Murdock for her fourth birthday, she became the next owner of the book. While researching for information about Emma, I was able to find some information about who she likely was. The most likely candidate for the Emma mentioned in this inscription is Emma Dower Monnery. Emma Dower Monnery was born in England in 1853 as Emma Dower Murdock (MyHeritage, n.d.). She later married Edward John Monnery, from the outfitting firm Monnery & Son, taking his last name as her own (Hamey, 2014). Emma Dower Monnery (born Murdock) passed away on February 23, 1929, at the age of 76 in England (MyHeritage, n.d.).

It is unclear whether there was another owner after Emma Dower Monnery since there is no evidence of ownership again until 1957. The next owner of the book was the Wayne State University Libraries, whose name has been stamped several times throughout the book: on the reverse side of the title page, at the bottom of page 65, on the last page of the text block, and on the card pocket that was attached to the endpaper at the back of the book. Above the stamp on the reverse side of the title page, there is also a stamp that reads: "OC- '57," which leads to my assumption that this book was not acquired by the Wayne State Libraries until 1957. Upon

acquisition, *A Child's History of England* was added to The Eloise Ramsey Collection within the Wayne State University Libraries, according to the bookplate, which is located on the endpaper attached to the cover at the front of the book.

The Eloise Ramsey Collection of Literature for Young People was created by Eloise Ramsey (Wayne State University Library System Digital Collections, n.d.). Eloise Ramsey was a professor of English Education at Wayne State University for 36 years (Wayne State University Library System Digital Collections, n.d.). She strongly believed that it was essential that future teachers had to take classes about children's literature, and this collection became an important resource to help achieve that goal (Wayne State University Library System Digital Collections, n.d.). To start the collection, Eloise Ramsey provided "over 400 rare or notable books" (Wayne State University Library System Digital Collections, n.d., para. 1). The library has continued to acquire books to add to this collection; it is selective and "contains those titles which made literature for young people a true part of world literature and made it an area of English studies" (Cusenza, 1967). It is said to include complete works of great authors and illustrators, single works that are considered to be landmarks in children's literature, and "fine, unusual, or special editions of certain works" (Cusenza, 1967). Therefore, it is logical that *A Child's History of England* by Charles Dickens, as well as 14 of his other works, were acquired and added to this collection (Cusenza, 1967); Dickens is still well-known today and was considered to be a great and influential author during his time (McEvoy, 2023).

When the first volume of *A Child's History of England* was acquired, it was given the call number "j 942 D55c lc-v.1" and was placed in the corresponding location within the collection. This call number is visible on the spine of the book in white ink on top of a black paint-like substance and on the card pocket on the endpaper in the back of the book. The book was

removed from its original place in the library in 1989, according to the bibliographic notes written in pencil above the “Wayne State University Libraries” and “OC- ‘57” stamps on the reverse side of the title page. There is also evidence that the previous bibliographic notes, stating the previous call number, were erased. The remaining bibliographic notes read: “Vault,” “Ramsey,” “9209,” and “O ‘89,” with each quotation being on its own line. The “O ‘89” note leads me to believe that this change was made in 1989. These notes match the current location of the book as it is listed in the online catalog: it is in the Purdy-Kresge Library Vault under the call number “9209 [Ramsey Collection] v.1” (Wayne State University Libraries, n.d.). This first volume of *A Child’s History of England* by Charles Dickens, along with the second and third volumes, still remains in this location within the Eloise Ramsey Collection today for students, faculty, and other interested parties to view and use in the Gardner Special Collections and Rare Book Room, located within the Purdy/Kresge Library at Wayne State University (Wayne State University Special Collections, 2023).

Conclusion

By thoroughly analyzing this copy of *A Child’s History of England* by Charles Dickens, I was able to learn a lot about the history of the book. Examining the book’s physical makeup allowed me to understand that it was likely made for children due to its size, format, and design. Studying the text of the book enabled me to learn Dickens’ intentions and the purpose of the book. Researching the production of the book helped me better understand how much detail and work went into printing this book by the printers and illustrators. Investigating the provenance of the book allowed me to see the journey, or at least part of it, the book has been on, from owner to owner, since its creation. All in all, being able to draw all this information from such a small book is amazing; it certainly makes me agree that books are proof that humans can do magic.

References

- The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America. (n.d.). *Glossary of book terms: Book formats*. Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America (ABAA).
<https://www.abaa.org/glossary/entry/book-formats>
- Austen, J., Dickens, C., & Starkey, D. (2006). *Two histories of England*. New York: Ecco Press.
 Retrieved December 11, 2023, from
<https://archive.org/details/twohistoriesofen00aust/mode/2up>
- Bassett, T. J. (2023, November 19). *Publisher: Bradbury, Agnew and co*. At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837–1901.
https://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl/show_publisher.php?pid=104
- BiblioLifestyle. (2023, December 1). *6 must-read Charles Dickens books: Where to start*.
<https://bibliolifestyle.com/6-must-read-books-by-charles-dickens/>
- Boldt, J. Y., & Margolis, E. A. (2020, April 16). *What's happening in that frontispiece? and what exactly is a frontispiece?* American Philosophical Society.
<https://www.amphilsoc.org/blog/whats-happening-frontispiece-and-what-exactly-frontispiece>
- Burns, T., & Potje, K. (2023, September 11). *BPG paper supports*. MediaWiki.
https://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/BPG_Paper_Supports
- Cusenza, J. (1967). *The Eloise Ramsey collection of literature for young people: A catalogue*. Detroit: Wayne State University Libraries.
- Dickens, C. (1852). *A child's history of England* (1st ed., Vol. 1). London: Bradbury & Evans.

Dickens, C. (1854). *A child's history of England* (1st ed., Vol. 3). London: Bradbury & Evans.

Hamey, B. (2014, March 24). *Monnery, Glover and outfitter*. London Street Views.

<https://londonstreetviews.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/monnery-glover-and-outfitter/>

Kitton, F. G. (1899). *Dickens and his illustrators*. London: Redway. Retrieved December 11,

2023, from <https://archive.org/details/dickenshisillust00kittuoft/page/188/mode/2up>

McEvoy, C. (2023, September 19). *Charles Dickens*. Biography.

<https://www.biography.com/authors-writers/charles-dickens>

Michigan Memories. (n.d.). *Child's history of England*.

https://michmemories.org/exhibits/default/catalog?f%5Bcreator_ssim%5D%5B%5D=18

12-

1870&f%5Bdata_provider_ssim%5D%5B%5D=Wayne+State+University.+Libraries&f

%5Blanguage_ssim%5D%5B%5D=eng&f%5Bplace_ssim%5D%5B%5D=London&f%5

Bsubject_topic_ssim%5D%5B%5D=History&per_page=10&search_field=all_fields&vie

w=list

MyHeritage. (n.d.). *Emma Dower Monnery (born Murdock)*.

<https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-10147-1398979201/emma-dower-monner->

[born-murdock-in-billiongraves?tr_id=m_kmmrlc7s2p_7dz0bmtqnqh](https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-10147-1398979201/emma-dower-monner-born-murdock-in-billiongraves?tr_id=m_kmmrlc7s2p_7dz0bmtqnqh)

OverDrive. (n.d.). *A child's history of England*. <https://www.overdrive.com/media/9182822/a->

[childs-history-of-england](https://www.overdrive.com/media/9182822/a-childs-history-of-england)

Popova, M. (2016, June 29). *Carl Sagan on books*. The Marginalian.

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2012/05/08/carl-sagan-on-books/>

Royal Academy of Arts. (n.d.). *Bradbury and Evans (London)*. Organisations | RA Collection |

Royal Academy of Arts. <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/organisation/bradbury-and-evans-london>

Simkin, J. (2020, January). *Bradbury and Evans*. Spartacus Educational. <https://spartacus-educational.com/DICbradleyEvans.htm>

Tearle, O. (2017, August). *Dickens's most neglected book: A child's history of England*.

Interesting Literature. <https://interestingliterature.com/2017/08/dickenss-most-neglected-book-a-childs-history-of-england/#>

Wales, K. (2022). Charles Dickens, children's author: Narrative as rhetoric in a child's history of England. *Language and Literature*, 31(1), 85-98. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/10.1177/09639470211072170>

Wayne State University Libraries. (n.d.). *A child's history of England. By Charles Dickens. With a frontispiece by F. W. Topham*. Wayne State University Libraries Catalog.

[https://elibrary.wayne.edu/search~S47?/h9209+\[Ramsey+Collection\]/h9209+ramsey+collection/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CB/frameset&FF=h9209+ramsey+collection&1%2C1%2C](https://elibrary.wayne.edu/search~S47?/h9209+[Ramsey+Collection]/h9209+ramsey+collection/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CB/frameset&FF=h9209+ramsey+collection&1%2C1%2C)

Wayne State University Library System Digital Collections. (n.d.). *Eloise Ramsey Collection of Literature for Young People*. <https://wayne.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/eloise-ramsey>

Wayne State University Special Collections. (2023, December 6). *About the collection*. Research Guides at Wayne State University - Special Collections.

<https://guides.lib.wayne.edu/c.php?g=640021&p=4482249>