

HORN-BOOK

by Charlotte Lawrence, museum intern at the Society during the summer (2013).

The horn-book originated in England in around 1450 and was used by young children as a primer for study. The name originally referred to a leaf or page containing the alphabet that was covered with a sheet of transparent horn and fixed in place with a handle, enabling the child to carry the book with them. [\[1\]](#)

The picture above shows an example of such an object in the Society's collection, measuring approximately 5x3 inches (LDSAL 890). It was presented to the Society by E.O Pleydell-Bouverie in 1909, Bouverie having been elected as a fellow earlier that year. The horn-book is mounted in leather with an intricate crest stamped into the back. The sheet of horn is unfortunately smashed, revealing the paper print of the alphabet followed by the *Lord's Prayer*.

Further research has identified the type face and printing block used as being founded by the print maker Robert Andrews, and this particular woodblock is documented as being used by him from 1680-1690. We can therefore speculate this as the date of creation of the horn-book. [\[2\]](#)

Over time the term 'horn-book' gradually came to mean an alphabetical tablet of any kind, and examples to fit all classes survive (ranging from wooden panels with the alphabet scrawled into it, to cast silver models). This difference perhaps being similar in both value and prestige as the comparison today between a child using a notebook and pen to using an iPad. The variety in construction of these objects leads us to another fascinating object in the Society's collection.



In 1851, Sir George Musgrave (who was elected as a fellow to the Society in 1834) exhibited two engraved pieces of stone. These had evident marks of having been used in casting metal horn-books. He additionally donated an impression of one of them measuring 2x4 inches, pictured on the right (LDSAL 566). The

iconography of the blocks can be explained by Christian symbology: the cock is an emblem of St Peter, the heart signifies the Virgin Mary and the square is a symbol of St Gregory, the patron saint

of children. The religious nature of both objects reveal the high importance of religious education at the time.

As horn-books fell out of fashion at the end of the 18th century, they were deemed valueless and examples today deemed rare as a result. As such it is evident that these two examples offer an intriguing view into English education and still offer us an opportunity to learn.

[1]Tuer, Andrew White, History of the horn-book, 1897, London, Leadenhall Press.

[2]Tuer, Andrew White, History of the horn-book, 1897, London, Leadenhall Press.