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# Andrew Pettegree, a Historian of the Reformation and the Book

*Malcolm Walsby*

As a historian, Andrew Pettegree is distinctive. His arguments are forceful and his style precise. Whether it be in the field of Reformation history or in his analysis of the print world, his short sentences and memorable phrases lend rhythm to his prose and render quotable what can be quite complex ideas. A Pettegree book or article is never an exercise in paper filling.

Those who have seen him write can testify to the incredible speed with which he can turn his ideas into well-structured paragraphs. Generally preferring paper and pen for the first draft of his work, he revisits the prose as he types it into his computer, adding references that he can later check and improve. Though this may seem a laborious process for those of us who write directly with a keyboard, this in no way slows down his output. As a young historian still learning how to craft a monograph, I remember being astonished by the ease and swiftness with which he formulated and pursued arguments. On one particular occasion, I recall arriving in St Andrews for a few weeks of work with other members of what was then the French Book Project as he put the first touches to one of his most influential monographs. By the time I left, he was writing the conclusion and starting to enrich the text he had already finished. All the while, he continued to supervise the work group, taught, and dealt efficiently with the inevitable load of administration that comes with holding a chair.

Perhaps this ease with words led some of the doctoral students and early career researchers to underestimate the amount of time and effort that went into the genesis of his writing. The phase of evidence gathering and his careful reading of the existing historiography conducted over many months and years was often hidden by the many simultaneous tasks he had to undertake. During this period, he generally tries out ideas on willing colleagues, master students and, in fact, anyone. Often, he looks to push his logic to the extreme, seeing how far he can carry an idea before his audience starts to push back and seem less convinced by his interpretation.

This is part and parcel of his creative process, and one that underlines a marked independence of mind. The variety of people he talks to often helps

him find the sentences and phrases that will have the greatest impact. He tells his students that they should always have a way of explaining what they are working on in a one-page, one-paragraph, and one-sentence form: be ready to present your work to your colleagues, first-year students and your mother. I remember feeling perplexed as he confronted me as I got bogged down in a particularly difficult article. What are the three take-away ideas? What is your one sentence version? I was caught off guard and learnt a valuable lesson.

The ease with which he writes has resulted in a considerable corpus of books and essays, all published at a rate that shows no sign of abating. But, incredibly for such a prolific author, his impact cannot be limited to his writing. As is amply demonstrated by the numerous scholars who have contributed to this volume, his influence touches many people. He is a conscientious thesis supervisor, ready to spend hours with students as he helps them to revise and to reorganise their work. These are sometimes ego-bruising encounters as he strives to teach how to formulate ideas better. He is a social and kind supervisor too – if anything characterises Andrew beyond his scholarship, it is his love of people and his numerous interactions with all types of scholars and students. When he first arrived in St Andrews, he became warden of Deans Court, a postgraduate hall of residence where he made many friends. Throughout his career, regular pub evenings have been important to his research groups and he values the way it enables people to talk freely and exchange ideas.

The now well-known annual St Andrews conferences on the history of the book have enabled many scholars to discover an approachable and informal research environment which in part explains the success of the enterprises he has directed. When we organised the first of these in 2008, we had three fundamental criteria that we applied when sifting through possible speakers: would their paper be new? Would it be good? And are they nice? Criticising or attacking early career researchers in the questions is definitely not the St Andrews way.

Andrew has also been a builder of research communities. After being appointed in St Andrews, he founded the Reformation Studies Institute to promote research into religious change and its impact in early modern Europe. It was rapidly a success as researchers of different faiths and nationalities came to work with him or under his guidance. When he turned towards the history of the book, he sought to replicate this with a research project group that is now known under the title of one of its more important outputs: *The Universal Short Title Catalogue*. I remember giving one of my first papers on book history in France and being surprised when I was introduced as a representative of the 'St Andrews school'. The label demonstrated the cohesive nature of the work

undertaken and its success in making a mark, even in a *Sprachraum* traditionally averse to anything coming from north of the Channel.

### Reformation Historian

Andrew Pettegree began his career as a historian of England. His thesis on foreign Protestant communities in London, defended at Oxford and published in 1986, filled a considerable historiographical void and began a trend for analysing such displaced refugees.<sup>1</sup> Over the decades that followed, other historians began analysing the phenomenon, organising entire conferences on the issue to which he was often invited even decades later when he no longer worked in this field. Though the initial focus of the study was firmly English, it inevitably opened up onto the other European worlds from which the refugees came and with which they often still maintained close ties.

Convinced of the European nature of Reformation when some historians were still clinging to a rhetoric of English exceptionalism, Andrew moved naturally across to the Continent to analyse similar communities outside England. Having obtained a research scholarship in Hamburg that followed the Schmidt scholarship he had held in Freiburg during his thesis, he became particularly interested in the role of exiles in Emden during the time of the Dutch Revolt. Though nominally in Germany, the city was firmly turned toward the west, to what became the United Provinces. This marked the beginning of a long love affair with Dutch history that remains an important part of his research activity.

His work on this Protestant community also brought him into contact with the intricacies of book history. Emden publishing in the sixteenth century was in great part geared towards providing the Dutch with polemical and anti-Catholic material. It was here that Andrew constituted his first alphabets of typographical material as he sought to determine the importance of the phenomenon. Many of the pamphlets they printed were, indeed, unsigned and the monograph that Andrew published changed our understanding of the place of Emden in the Revolt.<sup>2</sup> It was here too that Andrew had his first

1 Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

2 Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt. Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

exchanges with one of the most important historians of printing of his time, Paul Valkema Blouw.

Valkema Blouw had already worked on the material used by Emden printers. By the time Andrew began his analysis, Valkema Blouw was already close to seventy years old and, though he was in the end generous with his files, one imagines that he would have been a little sceptical of this young English scholar, who suggested that there was still a lot to be done. Andrew kept a fondness for the great book historian and it was somehow very fitting that a selection of Valkema Blouw's articles was later republished as a single volume by Brill in the series directed by Andrew, the *Library of the Written Word*.<sup>3</sup> If one can date his interest in book history and his astute understanding of the interaction of printing and ideas to this research on the Emden imprints, he nevertheless remained first and foremost a Reformation historian.

When he was appointed in St Andrews, it was this aspect of his research that he pushed to the forefront. The creation of the Reformation Studies Institute went hand in hand with a series of publications that he organised and edited. The first of these was a collection of documents translated into English that became a vital tool for introducing the less linguistically gifted history students to primary sources on the European Reformation. The international approach was firmly embedded in his articles and books, though he refused to be seen as simply a historian of continental Europe, as his collection of six studies on Marian Protestantism emphasises.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1990s, he strengthened his position as one of the foremost historians of the Reformation and his numerous and accessible volumes undoubtedly contributed to his success in attracting an increasing number of research students. He also set up a new book series with Ashgate entitled the *St Andrews Studies in Reformation History*. The monographs and edited volumes of the series were soon highly regarded and is still active over twenty years later, though their publication is now handled by Brill since Routledge's takeover of Ashgate in 2016. Andrew also made his mark as someone who was unafraid to iterate his views, even if this was to the displeasure of his audience. A perfect example of this was when he was invited to give a paper to a conference celebrating the ideal of tolerance. An idea often promoted by the Dutch as a positive outcome of the Revolt, Andrew stunned the audience by calling it little more than 'a loser's creed'. It was an assertion that he was not shy of repeating

3 Paul Dijstelberge and Ton Croiset van Uchelen (eds.), *Dutch Typography in the Sixteenth Century. The Collected Works of Paul Valkema Blouw* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

4 Andrew Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism. Six Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996).

in the subsequent article.<sup>5</sup> Apart from anything else, it also demonstrated his ability to coin pithy phrases that could be used as debating points.

The focus on the Calvinist reformation in the Netherlands naturally led him to begin to consider what was happening in the other great Calvinist conflict of the second half of the sixteenth century. The Wars of Religion in France were analysed in a number of books he edited on the Reformation. These culminated in the publication of his first sole authored textbook: *Europe in the Sixteenth Century*.<sup>6</sup> By then, he had already decided to turn his attention to the French case. As with the Netherlands, his entry point was the history of the book, though this time the study of the medium eventually took on greater importance than the analysis of French Protestantism.

### A Historian of the Book

Andrew's interest in the French Wars of Religion was first triggered by the lack of research into vernacular publications during the wars. In 1996, Francis Higman, one of the great specialists of the early French Reformation, compiled a short title bibliography of religious works printed in French during the first half of the sixteenth century. Published under the aegis of the *St Andrews Studies in Reformation History*, Andrew hit upon the idea to finish the job and put together a similar volume for the second half of the century.<sup>7</sup> This was to be the start of a long endeavour which took on unforeseen proportions and shaped this phase of his career. Initially without proper funding, he strove to set up a working methodology that would be the basis of the future bibliographical work of the research group.

Andrew appreciated that for this project to work, it was necessary to obtain regular funding and for the following years much energy was expended in writing grant proposals and reports. This enabled him to build new groups with successive generations of doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. The presence of so many early career scholars allowed him to supervise and influence over thirty PhD students. One of the striking aspects of this group was the time and effort he expended to help them find positions either within academia or

5 Andrew Pettegree, 'The Politics of Toleration in the Free Netherlands', in Ole Peter Grell and Robert Scribner (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 182–98.

6 Andrew Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

7 Francis M. Higman, *Piety and the People. Religious Printing in French, 1511–1551* (Aldershot: Scolar press, 1996).

in other branches of work. The proportion that have been successful in obtaining post-doctoral fellowships or lectureships is truly remarkable.

Initially called the *French Religious Book Project*, the bibliographical enterprise sought to identify and describe book-in-hand all the religious books produced in the French vernacular in the sixteenth century. As part of this endeavour, Andrew prepared to publish a book provisionally entitled *The Huguenot Voice* that was to analyse how French Protestants used the presses not just to produce the well-known editions of Bibles and Psalms that rolled off the Genevan presses, but also the numerous pamphlets that were often printed within the kingdom. To this end, he used the same approach as that he had employed with the Emden printers in order to understand the often-anonymous output of the Huguenot presses active in cities such as Lyon and Rouen. Sadly, the book was never written: the propitious moment passed, though some of the articles were later brought together as part of a volume of collected essays on the French book.<sup>8</sup> This research also informed an important article, co-authored with Matt Hall, that revisited the traditional paradigm of the Reformation and the printing press and showed that in France the connection between faith and medium was not as straightforward as in Germany.<sup>9</sup>

The bibliographical work necessitated considerable fieldwork, particularly in the less well-known French provincial libraries. Each year, he led a research team to a series of strategically important collections for weeks at a time which enabled the full description of tens of thousands of volumes. As the work progressed, it became increasingly clear that the barrier between what constituted a religious edition and what was to be excluded was difficult to determine. In the first of a series of expansions, it was decided to include all vernacular texts in the database. He then resolved that earlier printed books should be examined and the chronological bracket pushed back to the beginning of printing. The breadth of this new overview was highly ambitious, but it allowed Andrew to have a perfect overview of the place and importance of polemical books within the broader print scape.

If the conjunction of the new research into the history of the French book and his knowledge of the world of the European Reformation did not result in a separate monograph, it did contribute to one of his most influential works: *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*.<sup>10</sup> Here, Andrew revisited some of

8 Andrew Pettegree, *The French Book and the European Book World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

9 Andrew Pettegree and Matthew Hall, 'The Reformation and the Book: A Reconsideration', *The Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), pp. 785–808.

10 Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

the fundamental questions that surrounded the new faith. In particular, this book sought to understand why and in what conditions people converted, as well as determine the role of the different media of the Reformation era. Book history was thus inserted into a wider framework that included visual and oral culture. As a result, he suggested that the influence of images or of texts in actually persuading someone was less important than had been previously suggested, though he did recognise the importance of short polemical pieces, particularly in what he memorably termed 'pamphlet moments'.

The bibliographical work itself was published in two large volumes as short title catalogues, to which further endeavours on French books in scholarly and other languages, as well as Netherlandish books were added.<sup>11</sup> Brought together in an expanded version, they were launched as part of a wider European database containing datasets from other great national projects from around Europe for the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. The result became available open access online as the *Universal Short Title Catalogue* in 2011.<sup>12</sup> Andrew likes to quote one of Mark Greengrass's mantras that in the career of an academic there should be one or two publications that are done as a service to the research community, such as a translation, or an edition of sources. For him, the USTC was precisely this type of work. The fact that he has since continued to add to the database by pursuing grants from diverse sources in order to widen the chronological scope (currently including all imprints up until 1650), and has sought to have existing data enriched, demonstrates his commitment to this type of work. The many millions of searches carried out on the website emphasise the worldwide success this has been.

The end of the first stage of the project and the publication of the database coincided with a further shift in Andrew's historical writing. The breadth and depth of the bibliographical work encouraged him to present a new book that sought to rethink how the first century and a half of print should be considered.<sup>13</sup> In typically bold manner, he consciously minimised the role of the scholarly book which he felt had taken up too much attention in conventional narratives, preferring to emphasise the central role of economics and

11 Andrew Pettegree, Malcolm Walsby and Alexander Wilkinson, *FB. French vernacular books. A Bibliography of Books published in the French Language before 1601* (2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2007). Andrew Pettegree and Malcolm Walsby, *NB. Books published in the Low Countries and in Dutch Abroad before 1601* (2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2010). Andrew Pettegree and Malcolm Walsby, *French Books III & IV. Books published in France before 1601 in Latin and languages other than French* (2 vols, Leiden: Brill, 2012).

12 The database can be consulted on the project website: [www.ustc.ac.uk](http://www.ustc.ac.uk).

13 Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (London: Yale University Press, 2010).



of conflict in all its forms, to the frustration of some traditional scholars. The book was also aimed at a wider public than his previous more academic publications. A reduced number of notes, relegated to the end of the volume, a selection of illustrations and a more engaging style set the tone for many of his future books.

The long-standing interest in the fundamental role played by ephemeral print that informed his wider analysis in *The Book in the Renaissance* and the difficulty to charter its development also heavily influenced his next books. The market for news was not invented by the printing press, but it did take on new forms. The slow emergence of a printed news culture and its relationship to pre-existing manners of communication, be they handwritten or oral, allowed him to charter the place of printing as a public way of sharing and spreading news up until the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The success of the volume and the interest it sparked in Andrew led him to consider a follow up but instead, writing now at the astonishing rate of a book a year, he continued his overview of ephemeral print.

This was first of all done by returning to the question of the Reformation and how part of Luther's success could be explained by the creation of a distinctive brand that was disseminated through the numerous *Flugschriften* and other similarly cheap print.<sup>15</sup> Now regularly translated into different languages, Andrew's impact reached beyond the academic world. This did not, however, lead to him move away from traditional scholarly writing: alongside the steady flow of articles, he continued to direct the USTC, develop its data, and supervise the organisation of the annual USTC conference and volunteering programme. His interest in ephemeral print led him to organise and edit the papers of a workshop addressing the issue of single-sheet items, the imprints most prone to poor survival rates, and one of the annual conferences to lost books.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of what has been lost over the centuries was already part of the bibliographical work undertaken as part of the USTC. Indeed, the database published in 2011 also included items for which not a single surviving copy was known. The question of survival was also addressed thanks to a specific grant obtained to identify the rarest items in the collections of a series of

14 Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know About Itself* (London: Yale University Press, 2014).

15 Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther. 1517, Printing and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

16 Andrew Pettegree (ed.), *Broadsheets. Single-sheet Publishing in the First Age of Print* (Leiden: Brill, 2017) and, with Flavia Bruni (eds.), *Lost Books. Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

partner libraries. By highlighting these cases, Andrew sought not just to help with their preservation, but also to emphasise their past prominence within the print industry. This underlines one of the recurrent themes that he regularly returned to and is one of his long-term contributions to the field of book history: the importance of everyday books for all readers, rather than the scholarly and social elites.

The last few years have seen a switch back to the Dutch print industry, though this time in the famed Golden Age. Alongside Arthur der Weduwen, he published two volumes dedicated to the place of advertising and the book and, more broadly, on how the Netherlands increasingly played the role of 'bookshop of the world'.<sup>17</sup> Their work together has emphasised Andrew's ability to turn to new subjects. Having worked so much, with so many different people and in so many libraries in Europe and North America, it is perhaps fitting that his latest monograph, also written with Arthur der Weduwen, looks at the library not as the repository of everlasting knowledge but as an often transient and continually mutating institution.<sup>18</sup> The insistence on the fragility and instability of libraries comes as an echo to the warning about the inherent fragility of much of what was printed and in part explains, perhaps, why so much has been lost.

The essays that celebrate Andrew Pettegree's contribution to the fields of Reformation and book history demonstrate the breadth and depth of his impact. The interdisciplinary nature of the scholarship and the diverse geographical origins show how his writing and thinking has informed many different fields. But that so many scholars have wished to offer Andrew an article as part of this Festschrift also stands testament to the fact that they wanted to thank him for his many kindnesses.

17 Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Dutch Republic and the Birth of Modern Advertising* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); *News, Business and Public Information. Advertisements and Announcements in Dutch and Flemish Newspapers, 1620–1675* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); and *The Bookshop of the World. Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (London: Yale University Press, 2019).

18 Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Library: A Fragile History* (London: Profile, 2021).