



Richard Tottel (1530-1594)

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Editor.

Active 1550-1594 in England

Richard Tottel (c. 1528-1593) is chiefly remembered for printing the extremely influential English poetry anthology *Songes and Sonnets*, first published in 1557 and best known today as *Tottel's Miscellany*. The collection had gone into seven editions by 1585; after that, the imprint went to John Windet (in 1585) and to Robert Robinson for the ninth and final edition in 1587 ("Tottel's Miscellany").

Born in 1528, Richard Tottel grew up in a family of altogether eleven children. His father, William Tothill (for variations of the name, see Greening, 2004), was a fishmonger in Exeter and a conscientious citizen who first acted as sheriff and bailiff and eventually became mayor of the city in 1552. Richard Tottel went to London to become an apprentice to the printers William Middleton and then William Powell, who took over the shop after the death of Middleton in 1547 ("Printing in England"). In 1552, Tottel became a member of the Stationers' Company and, the next year, was granted a seven-year monopoly on printing Common Law texts (Greening, 2004). He equally profited from Mary's accession to the throne in 1553 and the subsequent return of lawyers from their exile on the continent: his "patent for common-law books was renewed on 1 May 1556" (Greening, 2004) and again by Elizabeth I in 1559, a monopoly that brought him enormous financial gain and established him first and foremost in the printing of legal texts.

With the formal incorporation of the Stationers' Company on May 4, 1557, Tottel was named in the charter (Greening, 2004), one of 97 members altogether. He later acted as master of the company (in 1578-79 and 1584-55; see Greening, 2004). It was also in 1557, a month after the incorporation of the Company, that his *Songs and Sonnets* was published; he moreover printed the first edition of the *Works* of Thomas More in Folio format and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey's translation of the *Aeneid* in the same year. Among other publications are Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Iuliet* (1562), the first English translation of Bandello's tale, which served as the major source for Shakespeare's tragedy. Other publications from his printing house include, apart from law texts, classical works as well as books on "animal husbandry", among them *A Hundreth Good Points of Husbandry* (1557), which included "a collection of poems on rural life by Thomas Tusser", and was constantly revised and expanded in editions as late as 1573 and beyond (Knott, 1996). He also reprinted quasi-canonical literary works such as William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure* (in 1566-67), as well as William Baldwin's *A Treatise on Morall Phylosophye Contaynyng the Sayinges of the Wise* (from 1547) and works of rhetoric, including, for instance, Richard Sherry's *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammer [sic] and Rhetoric* (1555), and Nicolas Grimald's translations of Cicero (1558, 1568 and 1574; see "Tottell R[ichard]", 1900: 223, 224, 226). As Holton and MacFaul note in the most recent edition of the *Miscellany*, Tottel became

“a major player in the Company, contributing to royal loans on its behalf, and donating the profits from some of his most popular texts – including the *Miscellany* – to the relief of poorer Company members” (ix). His shop was located on the north side of Fleet Street, near the Inns of Court and Temple Bar; he worked at the sign of the Hand and Star (see Greening, 2004; Knott, 1996). At times, he had at least four apprentices working for him, and altogether twenty-four were employed by him over a period of almost thirty years (Knott, 1996). The success of his business enabled him to buy several houses and shops near the premises as well as land in Buckinghamshire and Middlesex.

At around the same time of the publication of the *Miscellany*, Tottel’s private life equally took off: he was married to Jane (or “Johan”, i.e. Joan), the daughter of Richard Grafton, who was the King’s Printer during the reign of Edward VI, which gave him the sole right to print all Acts and Statutes; he was also involved in printing the *Great Bible* in 1539 (“Richard Grafton”). Richard and Jane had six children; their son William, born in 1560, entered the Middle Temple in 1576 and later became a clerk in Chancery. In 1588, Tottel retired from London and moved to Wiston in Pembrokeshire, where he died in 1593.

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