

John Stanbridge, Early Tudor Teacher and Grammarian of Oxford and Banbury

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SUMMARY

This article is a brief introduction to the life and works of John Stanbridge (1463-1510), teacher and grammarian of Oxford and Banbury, in the light of surviving evidence and of modern historical and bibliographical research. The outlines of his life and dual career as the second head of Magdalen College School, Oxford and later founding head of Banbury School and also as a priest are now quite well established. His short but authoritative texts were the first printed works on Latin grammar to be widely used in English schools in the early decades of the 16th century and helped to establish and consolidate the new humanist teaching methods and ideas.

Research on the history of Latin teaching in schools, which set the context for Stanbridge's own work, is alluded to, and he is now seen as a 'reviser' or 'editor', putting a gloss of the new humanist learning on the existing form of late medieval grammatical texts, as much as an original 'author' in the modern sense. Establishing exactly what he did in fact revise or edit or even write poses many problems, rooted in the early history of printing in England. The work of his later career is now more securely dated to the period from 1505 onwards, and the main texts are briefly described. They continued to be reprinted in numerous editions after his death in 1510 and a few copies of these early printed school texts have survived in the research libraries of the world – the Bodleian in Oxford has an extensive collection. While some knowledge of his life and works lived on in the compilations and writings of historians and bibliographers, including Anthony Wood, misconceptions were rife. The work – some very recent – of modern historians and bibliographers is helping to correct misconceptions, to clarify the context of Stanbridge's life and dual career and also to indicate where further research is needed. The article therefore concludes that while he played a critically important role both locally and nationally, it is not yet possible to reach a definitive judgement on Stanbridge's significance as an early Tudor teacher and grammarian.

John Stanbridge, one of the 'Magdalen grammarians' who were associated with Magdalen College School in the first 50 years following its foundation in the 1480s, had many connections with Oxfordshire. He came from and may have been born at Adderbury and he was the second head of Magdalen College School and, later, the founding head of Banbury School. The outlines of his life are quite well documented – principally because of his school, university and ecclesiastical connections and dual teaching and church career.¹ An intriguing undocumented gap remains in his middle years, which has been the subject of scholarly speculation but not, so far, resolved.

A near contemporary of Henry VII, Stanbridge lived through a period of major transition, encompassing as it did the late decades of Catholic medieval England and the beginning of the emergence of the early modern world, with the change from scribal culture to printing, the development of Renaissance humanism and the dramatic expansion of the known world with the great maritime explorations. As a teacher he took full advantage of the new technology of printing to provide a set of short but authoritative texts on Latin

¹ A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, iii, 1754-5.

grammar, which were widely used in England in the first decades of the 16th century. However, the extent to which he was responsible for the 59 entries covering various editions of the six texts under his name in the first edition of the *Short Title Catalogue* has been disputed. The editors of the second edition, published in 1976, queried the attribution to him of the earlier ones while appearing to accept the later ones. Subsequently, scholars have concluded that he was as much an 'editor' and 'reviser' of existing manuscripts as an original 'author' of those texts.

Consequently, his reputation has fluctuated. This article looks at the evidence that has survived of his life and work, in the context both of Oxfordshire and of early printing. It will suggest that the uncertainty about his early works may never be resolved, but that he should be seen as a link between the 'old' learning in which he grew up and the 'new', and as a man who played a critical role, both locally and nationally, as a consolidator of the emerging humanist teaching.

LIFE OF JOHN STANBRIDGE

Nothing is clearly established of Stanbridge's early life until he was enrolled at Winchester College on 29 August 1475, simply described, in Kirby's transcription, as age 12 and from Adderbury.² The original register adds that he was the 'son of a tenant'.³ The *DNB* stated that he was born at 'Heyford in Northamptonshire', but gave no reference.⁴

Winchester College had been set up by Bishop Wykeham of Winchester in the 1380s, together with New College, Oxford, the first of such linked, dual foundations. The criteria specified in the statutes of 1400 for selection of the 70 boys who were to be maintained as scholars were both academic and geographical. Academic criteria covered proficiency in reading, plainsong and Latin grammar and also aptitude for study. Among the geographical criteria were parishes in which the dual foundation or the see of Winchester had property, and then certain counties, including Oxfordshire.

Adderbury rectory was among the first of the numerous properties which made up the very rich endowment of the dual foundation, though the see of Winchester retained most of its land in the parish. The Winchester College register of admissions, which exists for 1393 on, shows a trickle of boys from the parish. Another Adderbury boy, Roger Mathew, joined John Stanbridge among the 14 who entered Winchester in the academic year 1475.⁵

Adderbury, which lies immediately south of Banbury, on the road to Oxford, was a large parish of just over 6,000 acres throughout the medieval period and included not only the settlements of East and West Adderbury but also Bodicote, Barford St. John and Milton.⁶ It consists of fertile hilly land and river valleys – the Cherwell on its eastern boundary and its tributaries – and part of it had been a royal manor before and after the Conquest. It was a mixed arable and stock-raising area, prosperous and quite densely populated before the Black Death of 1348 and subsequent plagues.

In the 15th century the land-holding system was complex. As noted above, the see of Winchester retained a large manor – the area of land given to the dual foundation with the rectory was quite small. Other ecclesiastical land-holders in the parish were Oseney Abbey, Oxford and Cirencester Abbey, while St. Amand and Hagley manors were in secular, also

² T.F. Kirby, *Winchester Scholars* (1888), 83-4.

³ Kindly checked for me by Dr. R. Custance, Archivist, Winchester College, November 2002.

⁴ *D.N.B.*, s.v. Stanbridge.

⁵ Kirby, op. cit. note 2, p. 83.

⁶ *V.C.H. Oxon.* ix, 5.

absentee, ownership. The land was let to tenants on leases for life or for terms of years. On the Winchester manor, which has been studied in detail by Patricia Hyde, all labour services had been commuted to money payments by 1405 and through much of the 15th century rents were static or declining.⁷ The Adderbury from which John Stanbridge came was, therefore, a parish of absentee landlords, tenant farmers of varying acreages and smallholders. Each of the five settlements had two open fields and very little had been enclosed.

John Stanbridge was a pupil at Winchester from August 1475 until March 1480. He was recorded as taking the statutory oath of loyalty and secrecy, which was compulsory at the age of 15, on 26 August 1478, and was described as coming from Bodicote.⁸ A year later pupils received the first tonsure, which conferred clerical status.

Bishop Wykeham had founded Winchester College in order to provide a rigorous preparation for entry to New College and, for many, subsequently to the church, thereby increasing the numbers of well-educated clergy. Leach, in his history of Winchester College, noted that the statutes, otherwise so detailed, did not specify the curriculum. Boys had to have mastered the standard elementary text, Donatus's grammar dating from the 4th century, before being admitted. At Winchester, Leach suggested, the pupils would have gone on to study a mixture of classical and Christian texts – classical authors would have included Virgil, Ovid, Cicero and the so-called *Moralia Catonis*, while among the Christian writers would have been Sedulius, Juvenius, Prudentius and Boethius.⁹ Besides grammar, the other subjects studied would have been rhetoric and logic, which together made up the 'trivium' of the grammar school.

Pupils generally remained at Winchester until their 18th year. Every summer there was a visitation by the warden and two other fellows of New College, to examine the pupils and decide which of them were judged suitable to enter the college and in which order they should proceed to Oxford as vacancies occurred. There were 70 maintained places at New College, as at Winchester. Vacancies arose not only because of students graduating or dropping out of their studies, but as a result of the continuing high death rates in the later 15th century – 11 students died of epidemic disease in 1472 and 'this figure was nearly equalled in 1479'.¹⁰

On being notified of a vacancy, for whatever reason, the next pupil on the list at Winchester was given 24 hours' notice to leave the college and was expected to reach Oxford within eight days. On arrival at New College, prospective students had to take an oath of obedience to the college statutes. The 'Registers of Protocol' which record these admissions, attested by a notary, exist from 1450.¹¹ The first volume of these registers shows that John Stanbridge entered the college on 16 March 1480 as a scholar, and, successfully completing the probationary period, became a fellow two years later on 18 March 1482. The New College bursars' accounts show that he received a B.A. degree in the academic year 1484-5 and subsequently an M.A. by 1490. The early 1480s were a time of great economic difficulty for New College – 'the penurious years 1481-5' when the price of wheat reached its highest level for over 40 years and the accounts showed only a very small surplus.¹² In the wider political world, also, it was a period of instability.

⁷ P. Hyde, 'The Winchester Manors at Witney and Adderbury, Oxfordshire, in the Later Middle Ages' (Univ. of Oxford B.Litt. thesis, 1955).

⁸ Emden, op. cit. note 1, iii, 1754. Checked by Dr. R. Custance, as above.

⁹ A.F. Leach, *A History of Winchester College* (1899), 167.

¹⁰ R.L. Storey, 'The Foundation and the Medieval College, 1379-1530', in J. Buxton and P. Williams (eds.), *New College, Oxford 1379-1979* (1979), 16-17.

¹¹ F.W. Steer, in *New College*, op. cit. note 10, p. 309.

¹² Storey, op. cit. note 10, pp. 14-15.

In Oxford the new divinity school was being completed, together with the library above it, which was to house the collection of theological, classical and humanist manuscripts given to the university between 1439 and 1444 by Humphrey, duke of Gloucester. The surrounding streets, especially Catte Street, had long been the centre of manuscript production and selling and in the late 1470s Theodoric Rood had established the first printing press in Oxford, though its exact location is unknown or, indeed, any information about it beyond the books which it is thought to have produced.

Intellectually, the influence of humanism, ever more important on the Continent, was slowly becoming apparent in the teaching and interests of some individual scholars, among them William Grocyn and Thomas Linacre who were both in Oxford during the 1480s before travelling to Italy for further studies. Grocyn was reader in theology at Magdalen College before his stay in Florence between 1488 and 1490 and his subsequent return to teach Greek literature in Oxford in the early 1490s. Linacre left All Souls College in 1487 for Italy and later returned to England but not to Oxford.

However, the curriculum for the B.A. remained on the medieval pattern codified in the university statutes of 1431. These specified 13 terms of study for the B.A. and covered the seven liberal arts, namely grammar, rhetoric and logic, the 'trivium', plus arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy, the 'quadrivium'. The core texts for each subject were also listed, heavily centred on Aristotle and Boethius but also including Euclid and Alhazen for geometry and Ptolemy for astronomy.¹³

The statutes specified a further eight terms of study, of the '3 philosophies', for the Master of Arts degree, which John Stanbridge completed by 1490. The course content was, again, centred on Aristotle – his *Physics* for natural philosophy, his *Ethics* for moral philosophy and his *Metaphysics* for metaphysical philosophy. At the same time that he was reading for his M.A., John Stanbridge also started his teaching career. In Easter term 1486 he became usher or assistant master of Magdalen College School and two years later, in Easter term 1488, he was appointed the second head, following the death of John Anwykyll.¹⁴

John Anwykyll, who had been educated at Cambridge, had been appointed first head of the school in c.1481. He is thought to have been the author of two grammatical texts, the *Compendium totius grammaticae ex Laurentio Valla, Servio et Perotto* and the *Vulgaria quedam abs Terentio in Anglicam linguam traducta* which introduced the new Italian teaching methods into English schools.¹⁵ These new methods, associated with the humanist grammarians Lorenzo Valla (1407-57) and Niccolo Perotto (1429-80), emphasised the teaching of Latin as a living language and the use or rediscovery of a much wider range of classical authors than had generally been read during the medieval period – Livy and Sallust, for example, as well as Virgil and Cicero. These texts attributed to John Anwykyll have only partially survived – they were among the first pieces to have been printed by Theodoric Rood in Oxford in c. 1483. Madan listed them jointly as eighth out of a total of fifteen works in his account of the early history of printing and publishing in Oxford.¹⁶ Theodoric Rood's printing press lasted until 1486 and then mysteriously vanished. The Bodleian Library owns a copy of part of the *Compendium*, bound together with what appears to be the complete text of the *Vulgaria*.¹⁷ The *Compendium* is written almost entirely in Latin and has numerous references to Virgil, Terence and Perotto. Only a few phrases are written in English, for example at the

¹³ J.M. Fletcher, 'Developments in the Faculty of Arts 1370-1520', in J.I. Catto and R. Evans (eds.), *History of the University of Oxford, ii: Late Medieval Oxford* (1992), 323.

¹⁴ N. Orme, *Education in Early Tudor England – Magdalen College Oxford and Its School 1480-1540* (1998), 17.

¹⁵ Emden, op. cit. note 1, i, 39.

¹⁶ F. Madan, *The Early Oxford Press* (1895), 240.

¹⁷ Bodl. shelfmark Inc.e.E2.1483.1.

beginning of a section on comparison 'I am oldist off al my bredir' – no doubt to remind pupils of what it was about. The *Vulgaria*, or model phrases and sentences, adapted from the plays of Terence, has six introductory lines in Latin but is then bilingual.

The opening years of John Stanbridge's career were thus spent as deputy to the man generally accepted as the first humanist grammar teacher in England. He was, consequently, in at the start of the transformation of teaching which was beginning to take place, and helped to consolidate it during his time as head of the school. Stanbridge also had to contend, first as deputy and then as head, with life-threatening practical problems as there were four serious outbreaks of plague in Oxford between 1486 and 1493.¹⁸ Dispersal to rural manors and disruption of studies was unavoidable.

Stanbridge may not however have intended at this point to become a career teacher, as in 1490, the year in which he completed his M.A., he began his ecclesiastical career with ordination on 5 June as acolyte, the last stage of minor orders. The following spring he progressed rapidly through the major orders, being ordained sub-deacon at Lincoln on 19 March and deacon on 2 April at Winchester. Finally, again at Lincoln, he was ordained priest on 28 May 1491, to the 'title' of St. James Abbey, Northampton.¹⁹ St. James belonged to the Black Augustinian or Austin canons, and had been established early in the 12th century on the west side of Northampton. It was a wealthy foundation and, Salter estimated, the setting for at least 20 triennial general chapters of the order between the mid 13th and mid 15th centuries.²⁰ In the later 15th century it was a fashionable abbey – in 1490 Richard Woodville, Earl Rivers, brother of Edward IV's widow and a patron of Caxton, arranged to be buried there.²¹

After his ordination in May 1491 John Stanbridge continued as head of Magdalen College School for some time, but when he left is unclear – there is a gap in the financial records of the college for the early 1490s. Surviving records show only that he was there in Christmas 1491 and had been succeeded as head by Andrew Scabot by Michaelmas 1494.²²

In October 1493 he became vicar of Bledington in Gloucestershire, a village between Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire and Stow on the Wold.²³ The living was in the gift of Winchcombe Abbey, an ancient Benedictine foundation further west in Gloucestershire. Orme suggests that Stanbridge may also have been appointed to the abbey itself, possibly as grammar master to the novices.²⁴ Winchcombe Abbey's records have only partially survived and so this cannot be confirmed. The abbot, Richard Kidderminster, a contemporary of John Stanbridge, had studied letters at the Benedictine Gloucester College at Oxford in the mid 1480s. Following his election as abbot in 1488 he made the abbey a little 'university'. Characterised by Knowles as 'the most distinguished English monk' of the age, he encouraged theological and monastic studies and he himself compiled a history of Winchcombe Abbey and also did historical research in Rome.²⁵

Stanbridge, however, remained only very briefly at Bledington and by February 1494 he had vacated the living.²⁶ His whereabouts and activities are uncertain for the next several years until April 1501, when he was appointed master of St. John's Hospital, Banbury, by Bishop Smith of Lincoln. During this mysterious period he may have been at Lichfield,

¹⁸ Orme, *op. cit.* note 14, p. 33.

¹⁹ Emden, *op. cit.* note 1, iii, 1755.

²⁰ H.E. Salter (ed.), *Chapters of the Augustinian Canons* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. 1922), p. xxxviii.

²¹ *V.C.H. Northants.* iii, 128.

²² Orme, *op. cit.* note 14, p. 18.

²³ Emden, *op. cit.* note 1, iii, 1755.

²⁴ Orme, *op. cit.* note 14, p. 18.

²⁵ D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, iii: *The Tudor Age* (1959), 91-3.

²⁶ Emden, *op. cit.* note 1, iii, 1755.

where the then bishop, the same William Smith, had refounded the grammar school. Further corroboration of the Lichfield connection, Orme suggests, is that this is where Stanbridge is most likely to have met and taught his pupil, the grammarian Robert Whittington, who was in Lichfield in the mid 1490s.²⁷

John Stanbridge may also have been in London for some of this period – the *Landboc*, or property record of Winchcombe Abbey, shows that it owned a house in Fleet Street.²⁸ He may at some point have been seeing his first prepared texts through the printing press, including the version of *Accidence* which was traditionally attributed to him. 'Attributed' because early printing followed scribal practice – colophons at the end of works rather than title pages which were only very slowly becoming established. It is for this reason that, in his opening note to a modern facsimile of this work published in 1969, Alston suggested that the 'grammatical writings of John Stanbridge... constitute one of the most difficult problems for bibliographers of early English school books, and identifying the various editions of such popular and frequently printed texts... is by no means an easy task'.²⁹ In this edition, of an original in the Bodleian Library, *Accidence* consists of 26 closely printed pages of text, plus a full-page woodcut of a teacher with his class at the end. There is no title page and the colophon only states that it was 'Printed at Westminster in Caxton's House by Wynkyn de Worde'. Alston concluded, therefore, that this dated the printing to c. 1496, as Wynkyn de Worde moved his press to Fleet Street in 1497. However, 1500 is a more widely accepted date for de Worde's move and this edition of *Accidence* is dated to c. 1499 in the second edition of the *Short Title Catalogue*.³⁰ The problems of attribution and dating of early printed grammatical texts will be discussed in more detail below.

While these uncertainties remain about this middle period of Stanbridge's life, in April 1501 William Smith, bishop of Lincoln and lord of Banbury appointed him master of St. John's Hospital, Banbury, and he stayed there as founding head of what was in effect the first Banbury grammar school until his death in 1510.³¹

Banbury, a seigneurial borough 'planted' by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln in the 12th century, was the centre of a prosperous agricultural area with a weekly market and two annual fairs. From the 13th century ale and cloth were being manufactured and by the 15th century it was becoming a wool-collecting centre for the south Midlands, and port records show that it was exporting wool through London and Southampton.³² However, it never became very large. In the 1377-81 poll tax there were 523 assessed adults and Harvey estimated a population of around 1,600 in 1441, at a time when there was evidence of vacant stalls and workshops in the town.³³

The hospital of St. John the Baptist was sited just outside the South Bar, on the east side of the hilly road south to Adderbury and Oxford and overlooking the town. It was established by 1225, 'both its site and dedication suggesting that it was intended to dispense hospitality to travellers'.³⁴ From the mid 14th century on, the bishop of Lincoln was always in charge of its appointments, and Salter tartly noted that 'the mastership was one of those

²⁷ Orme, op. cit. note 14, p. 18.

²⁸ D. Royce (ed.), *Landboc, sive Registrum Monasterii de Winchelcumba*, ii (1903), 565.

²⁹ R.C. Alston (ed.), *John Stanbridge – Accidence c. 1496* (English Linguistics 1500-1800, no. 134, 1969).

³⁰ W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson, K.F. Pantzer (eds.), *A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England 1475-1640* (2nd edn. 1976), ii, 360, no. 23153.5.

³¹ Emden, op. cit. note 1, iii, 1755.

³² M.D. Lobel (ed.), *Historic Towns*, i (1969), 5.

³³ *V.C.H. Oxon.* x, 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 23.

sinecures which prominent ecclesiastics were ever ready to accept'.³⁵ Be that as it may, from his appointment as master in April 1501, John Stanbridge began to establish a grammar school on the site and he is unlikely to have seen it as a sinecure. In addition to the hospital's existing revenues from land and rents, Bishop Smith gave £60 as an endowment for the school and was to leave it a further £100 in his will.³⁶ Whether it had a dual role or function from 1501 is unclear.

William Smith, bishop of Lincoln from 1495 until his death in 1514 and a royal servant – he was Lord President of the Council of the Marches from 1501 until 1512 – had a passion for education. He had refounded Lichfield grammar school and in 1509 he was to be co-founder of Brasenose College, Oxford, and he would have seen a pressing need for a grammar school in Banbury. Although there are documented cases of schoolmasters in Banbury in 1345, 1400 and 1430-2, there is no evidence of any already existing grammar school in the town prior to 1501.³⁷

During his time at Banbury John Stanbridge consolidated both his teaching and his ecclesiastical careers with the successful establishment of the new grammar school. Surviving undated printed texts mentioning him by name, in the opening lines or above the woodcut, have been dated to 1505 onwards, and were likely to have been the chief means by which his reputation and that of the school spread. Other than the evidence of these texts, there is little direct record of his life at this time beyond his appointment in 1501 and death in 1510 recorded in Bishop Smith's registers, together with the outlines of his ecclesiastical career. The episcopal registers show that he held the rectory of Quarrington in Lincolnshire – from when is not known – until March 1503. In February 1508 he became rector of Winwick, Northamptonshire, a position which he could possibly have overseen from Banbury.

In August 1509 Stanbridge became a canon of Lincoln Cathedral and prebendary of St. Botolph's, and one of several scholars who were appointed to the chapter in this period.³⁸ Among the others were William Grocyn and also Thomas Brinknell, who had been master of Magdalen College School, Oxford, between 1502 and 1507. Another former master of that school – though only for a few months in 1499 – was the new dean of the cathedral and rapidly rising royal servant, Thomas Wolsey. St. Botolph's, a parish church in Lincoln, was the least remunerative of the prebends. Orme calculated, therefore, that Stanbridge's total income in 1509-10 from his teaching, rectory and prebend was likely to have been around £25.³⁹

John Stanbridge died at about the age of 47, though exactly when or where is not known. His will seems to have disappeared – one possible deposition place for it, the relevant chapter act book of Lincoln Cathedral, is, unfortunately, now lacking any entries for 1510, 1511 and 1512, which have simply been cut out and have vanished. However, some of the content of his will is known as he bequeathed 40s. to New College, a clear token of his regard for his old university college.⁴⁰

Two at least of the books he owned have survived, both in Magdalen College's library. His copy of Plutarch's *Vitae parallelae* was printed in Venice in two volumes in 1478. The other is a copy of Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares*, also printed in Venice, in 1485, and one of the key texts of the early Renaissance. Rediscovered by Petrarch in 1345, these letters to and from

³⁵ Ibid. ii, 153.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. x, 120.

³⁸ M. Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln 1495-1520* (1968), 159.

³⁹ N. Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (1989), 59.

⁴⁰ Emden, op. cit. note 1, iii, 1755.

Cicero and his friends were widely admired as models of classical but informal Latin and became, from the 1490s on, 'probably the single most important addition to the basic canon of school authors'.⁴¹

SCHOOL TEXTS AND EARLY PRINTING

Of the several texts covering aspects of Latin grammar which were in use in English schools at this time, *Accidence* was the only one of ancient origin – the version now thought to have been printed in 1499 and long attributed to John Stanbridge was referred to in the previous section. Intended for elementary instruction in schools, *Accidence* is an analysis of the eight parts of speech – or 'reason' – that make up the grammatical framework of the Latin language. It is written in English, in question and answer form, with numerous illustrative examples in Latin verse for easy memorisation by the pupils. Hedwig Gwosdek's research on the early printed versions of *Accidence* has indicated that they were, in effect, a compilation. The main source was the late medieval version of Donatus's *Ars Minor* while other sources included Priscian's grammar, the *Doctrinale* of Alexander de Villa Dei (1199) and Thomas of Hanney's *Memoriale Iuniorum* of 1313.⁴²

Gwosdek's work on early printed versions of *Accidence* followed on from Thomson's research on a group of surviving 15th-century grammatical treatises in manuscript form. Thomson argued that the early printed grammars of the late 15th century were little more than revisions of these manuscripts, whose origins were to be found in the teaching of the Oxford grammar master John Leylond the elder at the beginning of the century.⁴³ Thomson suggested that Leylond, and John of Cornwall who had reintroduced the teaching of Latin in English in the mid 14th century, were therefore the innovators who set the pattern for 15th-century school practice. Whether Leylond circulated his teaching in written form or simply lectured has not been established. Succeeding grammar masters revised and rearranged material to suit their own teaching needs and surviving manuscripts show both considerable overlap and considerable differences among the groups of texts.⁴⁴ Many of these texts, not surprisingly, dealt with translation from English into Latin and became known later as *Parvula*. Others covered comparison and irregular verbs. The diffusion throughout England of these manuscripts is indicative of the spread of education and the growth of literacy during the 15th century. Schools were being established in some numbers by both lay and ecclesiastical benefactors and there were also conversions from other uses such as hospitals, as happened at both Oxford and Banbury.

Some early printers in England as well as on the Continent could, therefore, see a market for scholastic texts – Gutenberg's first printed book is thought to have been Donatus's *Ars Minor*.⁴⁵ Subsequently, in England, Caxton printed a range of literary, philosophical and religious works from 1476 until his death in 1491, but he did not venture specifically into school books. Caxton's only competitor in London, the printing firm set up and run between 1480 and 1490 first by John Lettou and then by William de Machlinia, published school texts as well as theological and legal works. The St. Albans press, which was started c. 1479 by a

⁴¹ K. Jensen, 'The Humanist Reform of Latin and Latin Teaching', in J. Kraye (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (1996), 73.

⁴² H. Gwosdek, *Early Printed Editions of the Long Accidence and Short Accidence Grammars* (Heidelberg, 1991), 21-3.

⁴³ D. Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts* (1979), p. xi.

⁴⁴ D. Thomson, *An Edition of the Middle English Grammatical Texts* (1984).

⁴⁵ A. Kapr, *Johann Gutenberg – The Man and his Invention* (1996), 89.

teacher whose name has never been established, and lasted until 1486, published six texts at university level in Latin before bringing out the works in English for which it is best known, its version of *The Chronicles of England* of 1485 and *The Book of St Albans* (1486).⁴⁶ Many books were also being imported from the Continent and their cheapness and quality may have contributed to the demise of the Oxford and the St. Albans presses. Copyright did not exist and printers could choose to print whatever text they could lay their hands on and thought might sell.⁴⁷

The Oxford and St. Albans presses having disappeared, printing became concentrated in London from the early 1490s. Caxton's two major successors, Wynkyn de Worde and Richard Pynson, both established successful long-running businesses, and both made school texts a very significant part of their output. Bennett estimated that as much as 40% of Wynkyn de Worde's 700 printed and published editions over the period 1492 to 1532 were intended for educational use.⁴⁸ Wynkyn de Worde, he suggested, recognised that there was a 'considerable demand... for works of limited size and small price. If the characteristic work of Caxton is the large folio, running to hundreds of pages, the typical volume of de Worde is the quarto of 24 or 32 pages'.⁴⁹

Richard Pynson specialized more in religious and legal material – he became the king's printer c. 1509 – but also published a considerable number of educational texts. He was, Bennett noted, an innovator, 'always eager to introduce a new device, such as pagination, catchwords, roman type etc'.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, one of the other essential features in the evolution of printed books, the title page, only came very slowly into general use by the 1530s, even though the first one to appear in an English book was around 1490, printed by William de Machlinia.⁵¹ In early printed texts, the opening lines could be used to convey information which was later on the title page, while the front page itself was often a woodcut. Colophons, at the end of texts, merely stated the name of the printer, the place where it was printed, and sometimes, but not always, the date.

JOHN STANBRIDGE'S GRAMMATICAL TEXTS

Numerous small editions were produced of the educational texts, which were very often undated. Bibliographers have, therefore, used the print type and the state of the woodcuts in their attempts to date and catalogue these texts, which have survived in some numbers – perhaps one or two of an edition, either a complete example or part or just fragments. Using these methods, undated texts mentioning John Stanbridge by name in the opening lines or above the woodcut – 'mayster Stan-bridge' or some variant – have been dated to the period after 1505, when he had become well established at Banbury. Consequently, there is no proof that anything earlier than this time was definitely by him though texts were certainly attributed to him.

The earliest surviving examples of *Accidence* mentioning John Stanbridge by name are both provisionally dated to c. 1505. The Bodleian Library owns a complete copy, printed by Richard Pynson in London, the opening line of which is, 'Here begynneth the accidens of

⁴⁶ N.Orme, op. cit. note 39, p.65.

⁴⁷ E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (1993), 84.

⁴⁸ H.S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1475 to 1557* (1969), 188.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 187.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 191.

⁵¹ Ibid. 212.

maister Stan-/bridges awne makynge'.⁵² Another version, printed by Pierre Violet of Rouen, exists only in fragments; the John Rylands Library in Manchester has the opening pages while the Bodleian's copy has parts of an early section and of the end, which were found in book-bindings. The banner above the opening woodcut of a master sitting in front of a lectern reads, 'Here begynneth the Accidence of mayster Stanbrydges owne makynge'.⁵³

The Bodleian also owns the earliest surviving edition of the *Gradus comparationum* on comparison and the *Sum es fui* on irregular verbs which refers to Stanbridge. Printed by Wynkyn de Worde and dated to c. 1509, it is described as 'ex Stabrigiana editione'.⁵⁴

Perhaps the most important of the texts, the *Parvula* on translating English into Latin, existed in several versions, from two of which, Pantzer suggested, Stanbridge derived his own version known as *Parvulorum Institutio*.⁵⁵ However, Varnhagen, an early 20th-century German scholar who edited in modern print a copy of the Bodleian's example of one version of the *Longe Parvula*, noted in his introduction to this work that older editions of the *Parvulorum Institutio* also existed. As editions of *Parvula* which he had examined were described as 'ex Stanbrigiana collectione', he concluded that 'Stanbridge himself was not the author'.⁵⁶ This was possibly the first recognition that Stanbridge was the editor or reviser of existing manuscripts, as Thomson would much later confirm.

The earliest surviving of these texts described as 'ex Stanbrigiana collectione' is listed in the second edition of the *STC* as in Cambridge University Library, printed by Wynkyn de Worde c. 1507; it was followed by another edition dated to c. 1508, with different spelling though by the same printer, now in the Bodleian.⁵⁷ The latter copy includes quotations from Sallust and Terence as well as from Virgil's *Eclogues* and can perhaps be seen as Stanbridge's updating of the existing versions in accordance with the new humanist teaching.

Of the remaining texts that were in general use, a copy of *Vocabula* mentioning Stanbridge in the title, printed by Wynkyn de Worde and dated 1510, exists in the British Library.⁵⁸ *Vocabula*, as the name suggests, were lists of words in everyday use and simple phrases, in Latin and English. The first surviving *Vulgaria* to mention him, also printed by Wynkyn de Worde and dated to c. 1509, is now in Illinois. *Vulgaria* were model phrases and sentences, also in Latin and English, and these are where the individual grammarian's imprint is most clearly to be seen. As a source for the educational history of the period, early surviving printed *Vulgaria* demonstrate perhaps the clearest examples of an important aim of the humanist teachers, namely to teach Latin as a living language. A modern print version of Stanbridge's *Vocabula* and *Vulgaria* combined, edited with a long introduction by Beatrice White, appeared in 1932.⁵⁹ The originals, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1519, are in the Huntington Library, California.⁶⁰

⁵² *STC*, op. cit. note 30, no. 23139.5.

⁵³ *Ibid.* no. 23140.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* no. 23155.9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 361.

⁵⁶ H. Varnhagen (ed.), *Libellus grammaticus latinus Longe Parvula* (1906), 3. Written in English: Bodl. shelfmark 3058 c 1.

⁵⁷ *STC*, op. cit. note 30, nos. 23164.2 and 23164.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* no. 23178.

⁵⁹ B. White (ed.), *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittington* (English Early Text Soc. 187, 1932).

⁶⁰ *STC*, op. cit. note 30, no. 23196.

AFTERLIFE

Stanbridge was succeeded at Banbury, temporarily by John Crag and then permanently by Thomas Brinknell, who was appointed master of the hospital and school in 1511 and stayed until his death in 1539. Brinknell had previously been master of Magdalen College School at Wainfleet in Lincolnshire as well as the school in Oxford.⁶¹

Stanbridge's reputation continued to grow in the years after his death and his texts were frequently reprinted and are known to have been in use in many schools, including Eton, Winchester and St. Paul's in London.⁶² Orme has estimated that 107 editions had appeared by 1530, far more than those of any of his contemporary grammarians, with the exception only of his pupil Robert Whittington.⁶³ Besides Whittington, these contemporaries or near contemporaries of Stanbridge whose grammatical works are known to have survived from the first 50 years of printing in England and the rise of the 'new' learning, included John Holt, William Horman and William Lily, all educated at Oxford.

Robert Whittington, the most mysterious of the grammarians as neither his background nor his early educational career has been established with certainty, was the only one who seems to have been a pupil of Stanbridge. He was also the most prolific. Born in about 1480, probably in Lichfield as he called himself Lichfeldensis, he may have been taught there by Stanbridge, whom he was to acknowledge as having been his teacher.⁶⁴ Though traditionally believed to have been educated at Oxford, this is now thought doubtful.⁶⁵ However, he was granted a B.A. by Oxford in 1513, after having taught for a number of years and having already, in 1512, published his first text. A proud and vitriolic man, he engaged in the so-called 'Grammarians' War' of the early 1520s with William Lily and William Horman. Whittington was a notable translator of Erasmus as well as Seneca and Cicero, and in the late 1520s he became tutor to the royal 'henchmen' or pages.⁶⁶

Despite competition from the works of these other grammarians, Stanbridge's texts remained very popular, and evidence of continuing sales in Oxford 10 years after his death can be seen in the surviving day-book or ledger of the bookseller John Dorne for 1520: of the 1,851 separate items which Dorne sold that year, 81 were named as by Stanbridge. His version of *Accidence* sold most copies, 27 at 2d. each, followed by his *Vocabula*, also at 2d., and then by his *Parvula* which cost 1d.⁶⁷ *Vulgaria* cost 2d. and *Sum es fui* were 1d. each. Combined sets of the texts, described as *Opuscula Stanbrigii*, or Stanbridge's *Little Works*, cost variously 5d., 6d. or 7d. Sales in Oxford may have been boosted by his kinsman Thomas Stanbridge – possibly a brother or nephew – who was master of Magdalen College School from Michaelmas 1517 until 1523 or 1524, after having been assistant master at Banbury between 1511 and 1517.⁶⁸

John Stanbridge's fame had, however, spread widely. In 1525 the revised statutes of Manchester Grammar School specified that the master should teach grammar as taught in Banbury and 'called Stanbryge gramyer' or any other form which might be 'ordeyned universally throughe oute all the province of Canterbury'.⁶⁹ The latter phrase is a reminder

⁶¹ Orme, *op. cit.* note 14, pp. 54, 72-4.

⁶² N. Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (1973), 109.

⁶³ Orme, *op. cit.* note 14, p. 57.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 57.

⁶⁶ Emden, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 2039.

⁶⁷ F. Madan (ed.), 'The Daily Ledger of John Dorne, 1520', in *Collectanea* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. 1885), 172.

⁶⁸ A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford A.D. 1501-1540* (1974), 533.

⁶⁹ *V.C.H. Lancs.* ii, 583.

that the variety of grammatical texts by the 1520s could be bewildering, and pressures in the direction of uniformity and standardisation were increasing. In 1530 a church commission was set up in an attempt to agree an authorised grammar and in the early 1540s Henry VIII imposed one, largely based on the works of William Lily. Written in two parts, it consisted of an elementary section in English and a more advanced one in Latin, and was in use in England for the next three centuries.

In Banbury, the hospital and school of St. John was dissolved in 1549, under the Chantries Act. Banbury itself ceased to be a seigneurial borough of the bishops of Lincoln and was taken over by the Crown in 1551, and subsequently, in 1554, became a self-governing borough. The school is likely to have been re-founded at about the same time. In 1556 Sir Thomas Pope, of nearby Deddington, who had received his early education at the school in the 1510s, gave its pupils, together with those of Eton, a preference for scholarships at his foundation in Oxford, Trinity College.⁷⁰

Stanbridge's texts, like those of Whittington, could no longer be used in schools from the 1540s, and were not reprinted. A few years later, however, they were listed in a mid 16th-century catalogue of works printed in Britain compiled by the bibliographer Bishop John Bale, together with a few lines on Stanbridge's motivation as a teacher and writer.⁷¹ Bale described Stanbridge as 'devoted to the study of good literature' from his youth, and recognising that 'knowledge of the Latin language was necessary to all the other arts... he therefore carefully researched the best method by which he could consult or serve the advantage of boys in so useful a task, and afterwards transmitted to paper'.⁷²

Over a century later, in the 1690s, Anthony Wood summarised John Stanbridge's career as a grammarian and teacher in his account of the 'Writers and Bishops' who had been educated at the University of Oxford and which he called *Athenae Oxoniensis*. Wood outlined Stanbridge's education correctly, but mistakenly believed that he had spent his entire adult life teaching at Magdalen College School; there is no mention of Banbury except in connection with his kinsman Thomas. He also appeared to be completely unaware of Stanbridge's ecclesiastical career. Nonetheless, he listed what he knew of Stanbridge's texts, and subsequently Bliss, who produced an edition of Wood's work in 1813, added further bibliographical details. Wood described Stanbridge as a dedicated and exemplary teacher who had continued in his profession 'which is esteem'd by the generality a drudgery', and 'lived poor and bare to his last, yet with a juvenile and cheerful spirit'. Wood was also the source of the statement that Stanbridge had been born at Heyford in Northamptonshire.⁷³ Wood's comment that Stanbridge had remained a teacher even though the profession was seen as drudgery by others perhaps encapsulates what he must have realised at Bledington, namely that he preferred the stimulus of young minds in a town grammar school to the life of a parish priest in a rural backwater. One phrase that occurs in the early printed versions of *Accidence* in the section on Conjunctions, but not in the older manuscripts, and which may point to Stanbridge's authorship, is 'moratus sum Oxonie et Londonis', which can be translated as 'I lingered in Oxford and London'.

John Stanbridge's life and career thus survived in the work of historians and bibliographers, and various misconceptions came to be attached to him as one of the best known of the early Tudor grammarians and, in some ways, as the 'ideal type' of teacher.

⁷⁰ *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 461-2.

⁷¹ J. Bale, *Scriptorium Illustrum Maioris Brytanniae Catalogus*, ii (1971), 73.

⁷² Latin original kindly translated for me by Jenny Shearan.

⁷³ A. Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis* (ed. P. Bliss, 1813), i, 40.

Among these misconceptions were that he was the first to teach in English, that he had taught virtually all the other known grammarians and even that he had written nearly everything produced on Latin grammar in England from 1480 on.

MODERN RESEARCH

The work of modern historians and bibliographers has helped to correct some of these misconceptions and has also suggested further lines of research. Emden's outlining of the lives of those attending both Oxford and Cambridge Universities is an indispensable start to any study of the grammarians of the period, including John Stanbridge, as it reconstructs their careers and enables cross-referencing. Work on the Oxford University curriculum and on the history of humanism and the early Renaissance in England has clarified the cultural context in which John Stanbridge and his near contemporary grammarians were working, as has that on the history of printing and of books. Of the historians of education, Nicholas Orme's researches are indispensable for an understanding of the period and of John Stanbridge's place within it. He concluded that Stanbridge was 'the first English grammarian whose works, by means of the new printing presses, achieved a really wide circulation', and that he was indeed a master of the 'new' learning not least because of the books he owned.⁷⁴ Orme's work has, as well, served to emphasise the many continuities of those years, as has Thomson's work on surviving late medieval grammatical texts in manuscript form, which has helped to clarify the status and originality – or otherwise – of the early printed grammars. Hedwig Gwosdek's recent work on early printed versions of *Accidence* is a continuation of this research.

The question of what John Stanbridge may have 'revised' or 'compiled' or 'written' in the early years of his teaching career and before his name was attached to any surviving printed text remains open and may be very difficult – or impossible – to resolve. The sheer quantity of texts under his name in the second edition of the *STC*, and the annotations by its editor, Katherine Pantzer, are an indication of the complexity of the task.

Competence in Latin was one of the key skills throughout the medieval and early modern period – and, indeed, remained so in England until quite recently – and by teaching it through the medium of the vernacular, the grammarians helped to consolidate English itself as a written language. Eloise Pafort, who catalogued some of Stanbridge's texts along with other early Tudor school books for the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, suggested that by the mid 16th century the 'foundations of modern English prose had been laid... largely due to the efforts of the quiet and scholarly headmasters and grammarians of Tudor schools'.⁷⁵ The role of the grammarians at a time of rapid change in the English language and the nature of their influence is, however, a major area of research beyond the scope of this article.

CONCLUSION

John Stanbridge can thus be seen as a grammarian who, in the course of a long career, consolidated humanist usage, the 'new' learning, yet within the existing pattern of school texts which he did not radically change. His set of texts proved very popular and, with the

⁷⁴ Orme, op. cit. note 62, p. 109.

⁷⁵ E. Pafort, 'Tudor Grammars', in E. Nugent (ed.), *The Thought and Culture of the English Renaissance* (1956), 113.

new technology of printing, spread throughout the country. Consequently, the 'new' learning became firmly established. Of his two schools, that at Banbury has had a chequered history and has long since disappeared from its original site. Magdalen College School in Oxford has flourished and Nicholas Orme's recent work on its early history is a reminder that basic research essential for an understanding of Stanbridge's life and career is continuing. While it is not, therefore, possible at the present time to come to a definitive judgement on his significance as an early Tudor teacher and grammarian, there can be no doubt that Stanbridge's influence on early Tudor schoolboys through the widespread use of his grammar was profound.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Joan Dils and to Chris Day for their meticulous reading of an earlier draft of this article, and subsequent comments. The staff of the Bodleian Library were unfailingly efficient and courteous, as was Dr. Christine Ferdinand, Fellow Librarian of Magdalen College. Many thanks to Jenny Shearan for her translation from Bishop Bale and for her excellent Latin classes. Tim Murphy, my computer 'guru', has also been an essential support. My husband Herminio Martins's continuing interest in this research has been invaluable and, lastly, I am most grateful to my cousin David Harrison and his wife Margaret, who first aroused my curiosity about John Stanbridge.