
A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland

Association of Antiquarian Booksellers, item No. 895 is an edition of Jones, S., *The Most Important Question, What is Truth*, printed by William Parks at Ludlow in Shropshire, England, in 1719-20. The editor of the catalogue has appended this note: "The first book printed at Ludlow. The printer afterwards emigrated to America and started printing at Annapolis." Immediately after perusing this entry, the author began a search in available histories of Ludlow and Shropshire for verification of the statement as to the identity of William Parks of Ludlow and Annapolis, but in the short time at his disposal secured no definite information. He discovered, however, that at a short distance from the town of Oswestry in Shropshire there is a celebrated "half-timbered" mansion known as "Park Hall," and that there is another "Park Hall" in Bitterley near Ludlow. Recalling, as is stated in this narrative, that on April 19, 1731, a tract known as "Park Hall" was surveyed in Maryland for William Parks, and knowing the tendency of the colonial American to name his tract after some English estate dear or familiar to him, he felt that he was in the way of throwing light of an interesting nature on the early life of this emigrant printer. Through the kindness of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, examination was made of the parish registers of Oswestry in the *Shropshire Parish Register Society* (Diocese of St. Asaph series), but with negative results, except to show that Parks was a common name in that neighborhood, as it seems to have been also in the neighborhood of Bitterley.

This evidence is so slender in amount and character that the author hesitates to add to it more of the same nature, but the fact that among the slaves left by William Parks was a negro man named "Ludlow" seems to have sufficient significance to justify its inclusion among the other indications of the identity of William Parks, printer of Annapolis, Maryland, and William Parks, printer of Ludlow, England.

Through Messrs. B. F. Stevens & Brown of London the following additional information has been received concerning William Parks, the first printer of Ludlow, England: The Rev. W. G. D. Fletcher, Honorary Secretary of the Shropshire Parish Register Society, writes that the Ludlow Parish Register records the baptism on March 20, 1719/20 of "William, son of William Parks and Elianor." This was doubtless the son of William Parks the Ludlow printer. The connection which this entry provides between William Parks of Ludlow and William Parks of Annapolis lies in the name of the wife, which is given as Eleanor in the will of the Maryland and Virginia printer (*Wills and Inventories*, 20: 183, 1746-1759 in Court House, Yorktown, Va., dated March 30, 1750.) No son was mentioned in this will. Mr. Fletcher communicated the matter of the inquiry to Henry T. Weyman, Esq. F. S. A. of Fishmore Hall, Ludlow, who transmitted to him in reply some interesting facts as to the activities of William Parks of Ludlow. Mr. Weyman writes in reference to this Parks that he was the publisher of the first newspaper of Ludlow, probably the first in Shropshire, entitled "The Ludlow Post-Man. Or the Weekly Journal." Some copies of this newspaper are in the British Museum and a reproduction of the first page of its first issue was printed in *Cassell's Family Magazine* in October 1896, p. 885. In this reproduction of No. 1, the date of publication is given as Friday, October 9, 1719, and the introductory address of its publisher is signed "Typographer." One familiar with Park's *Maryland Gazette*, seeing this reproduction, will notice immediately the similarity in the arrangement of the two headings; that is, the title centered between two decorative and symbolical woodcuts, representing Neptune and Mercury in the *Maryland Gazette*, a mounted postman and the arms of Ludlow in the *Ludlow Post-Man*. The imprint of this journal is "Ludlow published by William Parkes." Mr. Weyman refers to an announcement by W. Parkes in 1720 of the forthcoming publication by him of a "Prospect of the Demi Collegiate Church of Ludlow," price one shilling.

In an article on "English Provincial Presses" (part 3) in *Bibliographica*, vol. 2, pp. 301-303, W. H. Allnutt discussing Parks's Ludlow press adds the following note: "William Parks afterwards printed at Hereford and Reading, emigrated to America, died on his return voyage to England, and was buried at Gosport, April 1, 1750." Under the heading "Hereford" and the date 1721, Mr. Allnutt gives the following title: *Pascha, or Dr. Prideaux's vindication of the Rule and Table for finding Easter . . . briefly examined*. By a Well-Wisher to the Starry Science . . . Hereford: Printed by Will. Parks. (1721). 8vo. [Bodl.]; and under the heading "Reading," date 1723, he records the title of Parks's second newspaper venture; namely, "Vol. 1. Numb. 1. *The Reading Mercury, or Weekly Entertainer*. Monday July 8, 1723. Reading: Printed by W. Parks, and D. Kinnier, next Door to the Saracen's-head, in High-street. 4to. [Nos. 1-8 in the Bodleian Library.]"

The author regrets the fragmentary form in which the information in the above paragraphs has been conveyed to his readers, but the exigencies of the situation permitted no other method. He is conscious that in this note there is to be found no legal proof of the identity of William Parks of Ludlow, Hereford and Reading with William Parks of Annapolis and Williamsburg, but he believes that taken together the several facts set forth above justify one in thinking of the Annapolis printer as "William Parks, printer and journalist of Ludlow, Hereford, Reading, Annapolis and Williamsburg."