

Tudor England and the Antwerp Book Trade: From Tyndale to Plantin

Conference and Display of 16th Century Books

Antwerp, Tuesday 8 - Friday 11 July 2025



Throughout the Tudor Period, English booksellers relied on continental suppliers to keep up with the growing demand for books. Continental immigrants were active in the English printing industry and books produced overseas were imported on a large scale. One of Europe's leading printing centres was Antwerp, distributing books across Europe, and especially to and from England. In an era of religious controversies, books dealing with matters of faith were predominant among the shipments to London. In the 1520s and early 1530s, while King Henry VIII was still a 'defensor fidei' for the Church of Rome, Antwerp printers provided the English market with dissident Protestant works. A prominent example was Merten de Keyser, who printed several of the polemical works and Bible translations written by the English biblical scholar William Tyndale. Antwerp has particularly strong links to the English Bible, as both William Tyndale and Myles Coverdale worked on their translations in the city, and saw several of their works through the press there. The year 2025 is the fifth centenary of the first publication of Tyndale's New Testament translations.

By the second half of the 16th century, the English Reformation had set in motion an exodus of Catholic recusants to the Low Countries, beginning as early as Edward VI's accession in 1547. A second wave of emigration took place after Elizabeth I came to the throne, creating a considerable migrant community in the Catholic Southern Netherlands, clandestinely producing books for their coreligionists back home. Furthermore, numerous French Huguenots and Low Countries Protestants went to England fleeing religious upheaval. Some of these were booksellers who maintained their professional contacts on the Continent.

Beyond confessional conflicts and crises, there was also a continuous trade in literary and scholarly publications across denominational divides. Christophe Plantin had a successful printing and bookselling business in Antwerp as early as 1555, providing the highest quality to the widest market from very early on. He continued to sell and distribute books across the Channel throughout his career, with many leading figures in Elizabethan England proud to own them.

From 8 to 11 July 2025, we plan to mark the **quintcentenary of Tyndale's first edition of the New Testament** by organising a conference in Antwerp on the book trade between Tudor England and the Low Countries.

Outline programme

8 July: guided tours and keynote lecture

- Guided tours of Antwerp and its World Heritage printing museum (Museum Plantin-Moretus)
- Choral Evensong with the English Chamber Choir
- Keynote lecture by Andrew Pettegree

9 July: English Bibles in 16th-century Antwerp

- Plenary sessions and shorter papers relating to the theme
- Keynote lectures by Mark Rankin, Brian Cummings, and Diarmaid MacCulloch
- Concert of 16th-century music from England and the Low Countries (The English Chamber Choir)

10 July: Low Countries Books for Tudor Readers

- Plenary sessions and shorter papers relating to the theme
- Keynote lectures by Chris Warner and Cristina Dondi
- End-of-conference meal

11 July: excursion to the old university town of Leuven (Louvain)

- Visit to Erasmus' Collegium Trilingue, St Peter's Church, 15th-century Town Hall, Papal College and Beguinage

For the entire duration of the conference, all participants will have access to a small-scale curated display in the Museum Plantin-Moretus showing books from the museum's own collection, with two loans from institutions outside Antwerp: (1) the Worms copy of Tyndale's New Testament (the only complete copy, probably from 1526; loan from Stuttgart agreed in principle) and (2) the letter Tyndale wrote while imprisoned in Vilvoorde Castle in 1535 (loan from the General State Archive in Brussels to be confirmed).

Organising Committee:

Paul Arblaster (University of Louvain); Pierre Delsaerdt (University of Antwerp); Guido Latré (University of Louvain); Zanna Van Loon (Museum Plantin-Moretus).

TudorAntwerp@uantwerp.be

www.uantwerpen.be/tudorantwerp