

# Almanacs and Prognostications

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**A**lmanacs were everywhere in early modern England. By the 1660s, it is estimated, one could be found in every third household.<sup>1</sup> These small books typically contained calendars (Figs. 37–8), marking the events in the religious calendar alongside the lunar cycles, prognostications of the fortunes for the year to come (Fig. 39), and other useful information specific to a particular location or occupation. They were also ephemeral, discarded in December, used to light a fire or tossed down the privy. A small fraction of the numbers printed survive, many of these damaged or in fragments in the bindings of other books.<sup>2</sup>

Histories of almanacs have accordingly set out to recover the numbers of titles and their print runs each year, and to garner contemporary anecdotes about the ubiquity of these works.<sup>3</sup> Histories of belief have seized on the prevalence of almanacs as evidence for the standing of astrology.<sup>4</sup> The medical content of these works has also been noted, or at least the propensity for almanacs to serve as advertisements for the astrological and medical services of their authors.<sup>5</sup> Almanacs, everyone agrees, were common

<sup>1</sup> Capp 1979, 23; Blagden 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Capp 1979, 66.

<sup>3</sup> Comprehensive lists of almanacs and almanac makers are included in Capp 1979. The standard bibliographical works remain Eustace F. Bosanquet, *English Printed Almanacks and Prognostications: A Bibliographical History to the Year 1600* (London, 1917); id., 'English Seventeenth Century Almanacks', *The Library*, 10 (1930), 361–97; id., *English Printed Almanacks and Prognostications: A Bibliographical History of the Year 1600. Corrigenda and Addenda* (London, 1928). This followed a series of earlier pieces on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century almanacs by H. R. Plomer and others in *Notes & Queries* in the 1880s. A search for 'almanacke' in the ESTC produces 614 titles up to 1660.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Chapman, 'Astrological Medicine', in Charles Webster (ed.), *Health, Medicine, and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979), 275–300; Louise Hill Curth, 'The Medical Content of English Almanacs 1640–1700', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 60 (2005), 255–82; H. G. Dick,

**May hath xxxi. dayes.**

First quarter the 7 day, 45 min. past 11 at night.  
 Full moon the 14 day, 48 min. past 7 at night.  
 Last quarter the 21 day, about high noon.  
 New moon the 29 day, 44 min. past noon.

1	b Philip & Iam. gem.	8	△	U	☾ Pleasant weather
2	a Low-sunday.	20			☾ Fair and good
3	d Invent. cruc. cano.	1	♂	♂	☾ warm weather.
4	e Florianus	23	*	♂	☾ Little differing.
5	f Gorhard	25	□	U	☾ Great winds the
6	g John Port. Lat. leo	8	♂	U	☾ 5, and 6 dayes.
7	a Joh. Wiebel.	20	*	♀	☾ Some moisture.
8	b Stanislaus virg.	3	*	♀	☾ The 8, 9, and 10
9	c 2 Sun. aft. East.	16	*	♀	☾ dayes fair and
10	d Quind. Pasch.	19	□	♂	☾ warm.
11	e Sun in Gem. lib.	13	□	♀	☾ Rain the 11.
12	f Term begins.	26			☾ Fair and good.
13	g Serbatius	scor. 13	♂	♀	☾ VVindy and fair.
14	a Fortunatus	18	b	Perig.	☾ Mild weather.
15	b Sophia	leg. 13	*	U	☾ Mo. ft aite.
16	c 3 Sun. aft. East.	20			☾ Very good weath.
17	d Tres Pasch.	cap. 13	△	♀	☾ on these dayes.
18	e Eleanthus	28	b	12 29 *	☾ 7 14 U
19	f Sara	aqua. 17	♂	U	☾ ☐ ☐ ☐ Fair winds
20	g Bernbardine	26			☾ Good weather.
21	a Dindentius pife.	9	△	b	☾ Tempestuous.
22	b Helen burg.	22	△	♀	☾ Milder weather.
23	c 4 Sun. aft. East. Aries	5	△	☉	☾ Thunder about
24	d Mens. Pasch.	17			☾ Dark with 23 and 24, with
25	e Alban	29			☾ thund. or hail sudden rain or
26	f Edwardus taur.	18	*	♂	☾ (hail.)
27	g Bede	2	♂	♀	☾ VVindy weather.
28	a German bish. gem.	5		U	☾ Fair and clear.
29	b Harin bish.	16	□	b	☾ The three last
30	c Rogation Sun.	28			☾ cool weather. dayes cloudy dark
31	d Quind. Pasch. cano.	10	△	b	☾ weather. &c.

37. Dove 1641, sig. A8v, showing calendar for May.

objects and useful commodities. This chapter will consider their numbers and functions together. It will sketch the conventions of the genre and account for some of its changes during the period in question. It will reflect on what it meant for a work to be produced in bulk, and to be put to use by a particular person. I will begin with three surviving almanacs, each bearing traces of its original use and serving to introduce the conventions of the genre.

In the autumn of 1586 Thomas Byng, Master of Clare College, Cambridge, bought an almanac. Its title-page read:

An almanacke and prognostication, for the yeere of our Lord. M.D.LXXXVII. Which is accompted from the fyrst beginnyng of the worldes fundation. 5549. Composed according to artificiall observations, & indifferently serving for most partes of England, but specially referre

“Students of Physic and Astrology”, *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 1 (1946), 300–15, 419–33; Michael Macdonald, ‘The Career of Astrological Medicine in England’, in Ole Grell and Andrew Cunningham (eds.), *Religio Medici: Religion and Medicine in Seventeenth Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), 62–90.

The Moon hath xxx. days.

Let quarter 20 day at 6 and 32 min. in the morning:  
New moon 27 day at 6 and 1 min. in the noon.

D.	h.	m.	Sunsetting.
1	7	43	2 h. fro 10 to 9
2	7	44	5 a. fro 10 to 9
3	7	46	3 h. fro 10 to 8
4	7	47	10 a. fro 10 to 8
5	7	49	2 h. fro 10 to 9
6	7	50	3 h. fro 11 to 7
7	7	52	10 a. fro 11 to 7
8	7	53	10 a. fro 11 to 7
9	7	55	10 a. fro 11 to 7
10	7	56	3 h. fro 11 to 7
11	7	58	4 h. fro 11 to 8
12	7	59	1 h. fro 11 to 7
13	8	1	3 h. fro 11 to 7
14	8	2	1 h. fro 10 to 9
15	8	3	2 h. fro 10 to 9
16	8	5	5 a. fro 10 to 9
17	8	6	3 h. fro 11 to 8
18	8	7	4 h. fro 11 to 7
19	8	8	3 h. fro 10 to 7
20	8	10	4 h. fro 10 to 7
21	8	11	2 h. fro 11 to 8
22	8	12	4 h. fro 11 to 8
23	8	13	5 a. fro 10 to 9
24	8	14	6 h. fro 11 to 7
25	8	15	5 h. fro 10 to 9
26	8	16	6 h. fro 10 to 8
27	8	18	4 h. fro 10 to 7
28	8	17	5 h. fro 10 to 8
29	8	18	2 h. fro 11 to 8
30	8	19	5 a. fro 10 to 9
31	8	19	2 h. fro 11 to 7

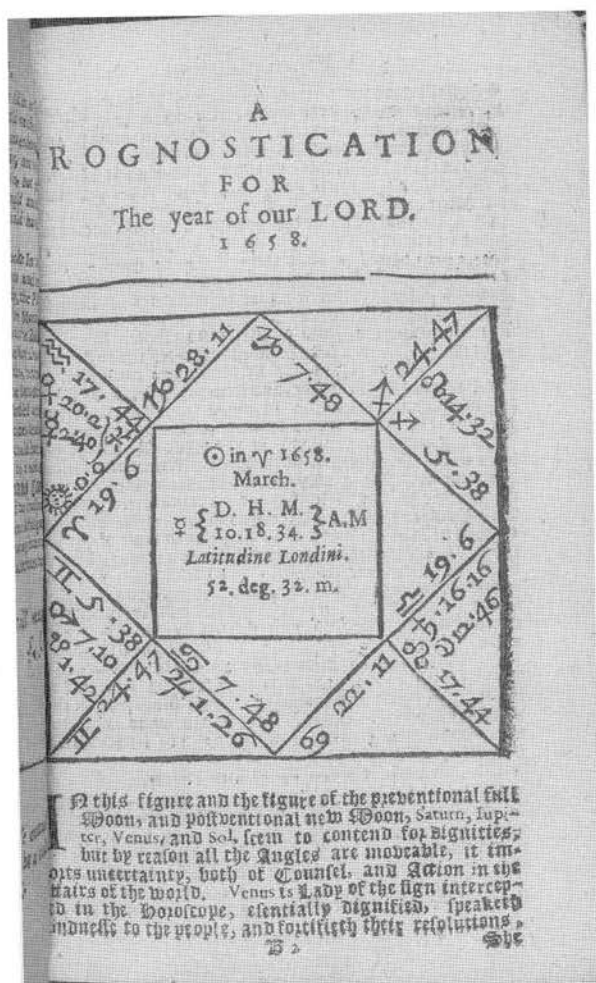
B. 5.

38. *Gallen* 1652, sig. B5, showing blank calendar for June, with annotations.

to the meridim and ... of the pole articke of the ancient citie of *Canterburie*. By Gabriel Frende, practitioner in phisicke and astrologie.<sup>6</sup>

This is a small book, an octavo filling three sheets or forty-eight pages. It has two main parts. The calendar is set out as a table, with each opening devoted to a month and headed with basic medical advice and the time of sunrise and sunset. Reading from left to right, the table includes the date of the month and the day on which it falls, saints' days (with feast days printed in red), the time the sun enters each zodiac house, the

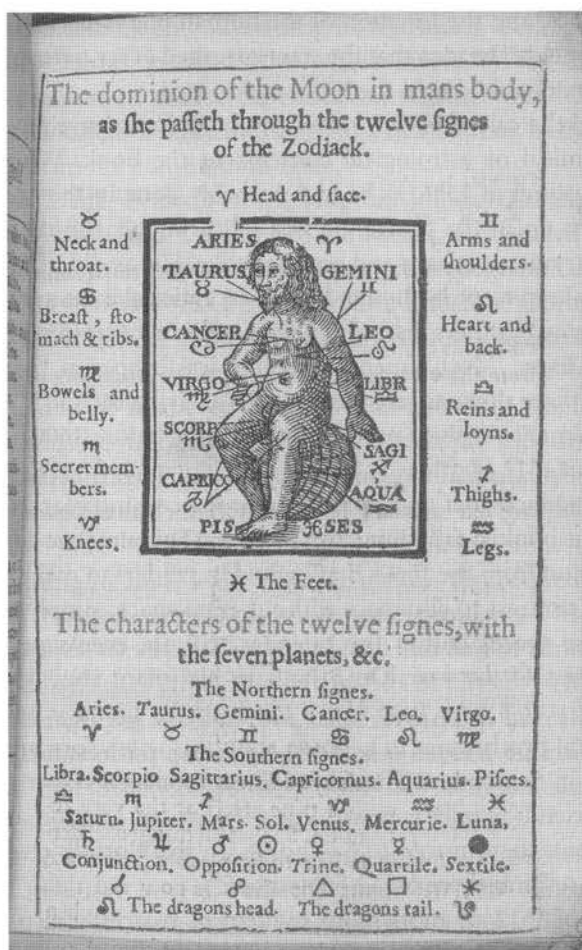
<sup>6</sup> F. H. Stubbings, 'A Cambridge Pocket Diary, 1587-92', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 5 (1971), 191-202. Frende's almanac is STC 444. Byng's copy is Canterbury Cathedral Library V2.17-21.



39. Jinner 1658, sig. B2, showing prognostication, with horoscope for the year.

location of the moon in the zodiac signs at noon, and the phases of the moon, plus a 'D' marking days when it was dangerous to fall ill or have blood let. The right-hand page repeats the days of the month, and is blank for the use of its owner. The second major part is a prognostication that forecasts, beginning with winter, the weather and health-risks for each season and describes the effects of the lunar eclipse on 6 September. The almanac is preceded by an address to the reader, several pages of astronomical rules useful for surgeons and farmers, and an anatomical or zodiac man (Fig. 40), designating the correspondences between the parts of the human body and the celestial signs.

This was a typical almanac. While each almanac was tailored to a year, a place, and an intended audience, its contents followed general conventions. Frende's 1587 almanac combined astronomical calculations of planetary motions, information about the



40. Dove 1641, sig. A1, showing a zodiac man.

meaning of astrological signs, and liturgical and local dates. It specified that it was calculated for Canterbury, but was useful to people residing elsewhere too. It was a national and cosmic handbook, providing its reader with information to locate him- or herself temporally, and in some cases geographically. It was useful for thinking about one's bodily, domestic, social, and occupational economy. Other almanacs included advice for times to bathe, tables dating the reigns of the English kings and queens (a standard form for dating documents), chronologies of world history, records of high tide, farming and gardening advice, a schedule of fairs, road directions, sample legal documents, and monetary calculations.

We do not know whether readers distinguished between the descriptive and prescriptive material in the almanacs. We do know that debates were raging in the 1580s about the moral and political dangers of astrological determinism that prognostications entailed. In general, the idea that the celestial bodies affected the weather, wars,

plagues and famines, and the function of the human body, just as the moon affected the tides, was accepted. The idea that the stars governed every person's or city's fortune and that the future could be read therein was disputed.

Byng duly filled the calendar with notes, but he did not leave any traces of how he read the astronomical or astrological contents of the book. When he bought the almanac in the autumn of 1586, as he had probably done in the preceding years and would continue to do in the future, he was following an annual routine typical of many of his countrymen, artisans and esquires alike. He, as did others, used the pages of his almanacs to keep records, though he was exceptional in keeping his in Greek. He preserved these records; others discarded theirs, after first transferring their notes into histories of their lives.<sup>7</sup> Most almanacs became wastepaper at the end of the year. Including Byng's, three almanacs are recorded as surviving for 1587.<sup>8</sup> Yet it is estimated that at least 160 almanac makers produced 600 works before 1600.<sup>9</sup>

In the autumn of 1612 Matthew Page, a young clergyman from Kent, bought Arthur Hopton's *New almanacke and prognostication* for the coming year. He wrote his name and the price of the book, two shillings, on its cover. This almanac advertised its 'blank leaves', an innovation from the 1560s that invited its readers to make notes. These were called 'blanks', in contrast to almanacs without extra space, simply called 'sorts'. Page made use of these spaces within the calendar to note events personal, local, and national for the rest of the year. On 5 January his infant son, Anthony, fell ill; he died on 17 January at 8 a.m. Page lost a tooth on 12 January; seven days later he consulted a medical practitioner in Lenham about his wife's sore breasts, and she was sick for five days in September. The Globe Theatre burned down on 29 June. Page, sometimes with friends, sometimes with his wife, visited London and various towns and villages in Kent, then moved to Saxthorpe on the Norfolk coast on 31 July. He preached his first sermon there on 12 September.<sup>10</sup>

In the autumn of 1612 an anonymous resident of Worcester also bought a copy of Hopton's almanac. This copy was complete with blank leaves, which its owner filled with records of financial transactions and the odd personal note.<sup>11</sup> The volume is preserved in its original vellum binding, on which is written 'Almanack & Mem. 1613'—this was a calendar and memorandum. When Page and this nameless man from Worcester bought their almanacs, they might have chosen from more than a dozen versions, each bearing the generic title 'A New Almanacke and Prognostication'

<sup>7</sup> On annotated almanacs, see Capp 1979, 60–1; 2004; Alison Chapman, 'Marking Time: Astrology, Almanacs and English Protestantism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 60 (2007), 1257–90; Smyth 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Buckminster (1 copy), Farmer (6 copies), plus another copy of Frende. This is based on a search of ESTC. Most copies are incomplete.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll Camden Jr., 'Elizabethan Almanacs and Prognostications', *The Library* (1931), 83–108, at 84.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Hopton, *A new almanacke and prognostication . . . for the year of our Lord God 1613* ([1612]). Page's copy is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 66.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge University Library, Syn.8.61.181. Sir John Pakington is mentioned frequently throughout the volume, and it is possible that its owner was a member of his household. This copy of the almanac does not include the prognostication.



printed in red-and-black ink and advertising its legitimacy. Perhaps Byng bought his almanac from the Cambridge bookseller whose inventory for 1588 included 234 almanacs.<sup>12</sup> The amount of choice depended on whether one bought an almanac from a London or a local bookseller, another shop, or a hawker; in the 1630s a Durham parson sold them from the communion table.<sup>13</sup>

Bretnor, Burton, Dade, Evans, Farmer, Hopton, Johnson, Keene, Matthew, Neve, Rudstone, White, Woodhouse.<sup>14</sup> These are the names that headed the almanacs for 1613. Bland, formulaic titles followed, each noting the geographical specificity of the work. Le Neve's was calculated for Great Yarmouth, Rudstone's for Cambridge, Farmer's for Dublin.<sup>15</sup> Titles became more varied in the 1640s: *The celestial observator*, *Vox stellarum*, *A celestial glasse*. In general, the almanac maker's name 'branded' the work, and often continued to be used even after the man had died. The names of Dade, Le Neve, and Woodhouse continued to adorn almanacs at least through the 1670s, sometimes perpetuated through a family tradition, sometimes by a publisher capitalizing on name-recognition.<sup>16</sup> Dade was well known, having produced an annual almanac every year since 1589. Bretnor too had achieved some name-recognition, with a series beginning in 1607. Most almanac makers tagged their names with their credentials. Dade, Hopton, and Woodhouse were gentlemen. Many of the others advertised their medical expertise; between a third and half of almanac writers before 1640 identified themselves as physicians or students of physic.<sup>17</sup> Hopton was not one of these. As a mathematician and surveyor, he advertised his instruments and mocked the medical aspirations of his colleagues.<sup>18</sup> He also enticed the choosy reader with a prefatory address that distanced himself from the common almanac maker and specified lawyers, scholars, and clerks as his intended audience.<sup>19</sup>

Almanacs were commodities; almanac makers and booksellers collaborated in marketing them to select buyers, tailoring them to each year and geographical, occupational, confessional, or political constituency. Format and price were geared to the desired market. Did the buyer want, like Byng, a small, unbound book that fitted easily in a pocket, or, like the unnamed man from Worcestershire, a sturdier book, bound and interleaved? From 1565 almanacs were sold, like Hopton's, bound with blank sheets or pre-printed pages for tabulating accounts and marketed as 'books of memory'.<sup>20</sup> These thicker, often bound, works might cost as much as 6*d*.<sup>21</sup> Did he want to pay more than 2*d*? Almanacs were cheap, hastily produced, and printed on

<sup>12</sup> McKitterick 1992, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Capp 1979, 59–60; Watt 1991, 263 (parson); 266–7 (hawker).

<sup>14</sup> All but Farmer were collected into a single volume, Ashmole 66.

<sup>15</sup> On geographical and occupational specificity, see Simmons 2002, 506–7; Capp 1979, 33–4.

<sup>16</sup> Capp 1979, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Chapman, 'Astrological Medicine', 285.

<sup>18</sup> On astrology and medicine, see n. 5 above. On advertisements, see Capp 1979, 52, 145.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson 1613 and White 1613 also targeted learned readers.

<sup>20</sup> Capp 1979, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 41, 114–16; Simmons 2002, 508–9; Watt 1991, 263–4.

thin paper.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the period, most people bought them as unbound octavos and paid between 2*d.* and 4*d.* Smaller versions, in duodecimo or sexto-decimo, were also available. Occasionally works, such as Digges's *Prognostication everlasting* (1556), were produced as quartos. Broadside almanacs, for posting on the shop or kitchen wall, were common. Few survive and records are scarce, but in 1664 28,000 were printed.<sup>23</sup>

Almanacs had begun to be produced in England in significant numbers from the 1550s, and had soon become a staple of the book trade (see Figs. 37–40). They were amongst the earliest European publications, first printed by Gutenberg in 1448. From the 1470s large numbers of prognostications were also printed, though the practice of pairing almanacs—which contained calendars and other useful information—with prognostications was not commonplace until around 1540.<sup>24</sup> The earliest printed English almanacs were imports, produced by the Laet family of Antwerp and Borchloen from 1493. The Laets' almanacs dominated the English market for fifty years.<sup>25</sup> William Parron probably produced the first English almanacs, beginning in 1498.<sup>26</sup> The first English prognostication was issued in 1539. Eight of the thirty-five almanac makers producing English almanacs between 1498 and 1560 were English.<sup>27</sup> Even with the establishment of the English trade in the 1540s, manuscript almanacs continued to circulate.<sup>28</sup>

Perpetual calendars and everlasting prognostications were produced alongside annual almanacs, serving as more enduring handbooks of dates and useful timekeeping, medical, moral, and domestic advice. The *Kalender of shepherdes*, for instance, was first translated from French in 1503, and went through multiple editions through the seventeenth century.<sup>29</sup> *Erra Pater* was similarly long-lived, probably first printed in 1536 and reprinted more than a dozen times through the Restoration and beyond. It contained much of the standard information of an almanac, charting the changes in health and the weather through the seasons, phases of the moon, and planetary motions.<sup>30</sup> Leonard Digges's *Prognostication everlasting* (1556), as already noted, was a more substantial work, heavily illustrated with astronomical diagrams. Within the usual trappings of an almanac—a zodiac man adorns the cover—Digges instructed his readers in how to calculate astronomical positions and introduced them to Copernican cosmology.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Capp 1979, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 27, 34; Simmons 2002, 508.

<sup>24</sup> Camden, 'Elizabethan Almanacs', 85.

<sup>25</sup> Bosanquet, *English Printed Almanacks* (1917), 17–19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 20; Capp 1979, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Chapman, *Astrological Medicine*, 277.

<sup>28</sup> Capp 1979, 26. On continental almanacs and related publications see Sachiko Kusukawa, 'Incunables and Sixteenth Century Books', in J. L. Thornton and R. I. J. Tully (eds.) *Scientific Books, Libraries and Collectors: A Study of Bibliography and the Book Trade in Relation to Science* (Aldershot, 2000), 137–9.

<sup>29</sup> Bosanquet, *English Printed Almanacks* (1917), 58–70; Capp 1979, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Capp 1979, 31; Fissell 1992, 72–96; Thomas 1971, 350.

<sup>31</sup> See also p. 406, above.



Almanacs were widely sold, and highly regulated, in part because of the economic worth of the trade, in part because of concerns to control the potentially seditious content of their accompanying prognostications. When the mundane enterprise of marking the days became the sensational foretelling of future events—religious, political, economic—almanacs and prognostications became the business of the state. Prophecies had always been politically dangerous and subject to ecclesiastical regulation.<sup>32</sup> The 1559 royal injunctions for controlling the press were applied to the printing of prognostications.<sup>33</sup> These controls were often flouted, and in 1571 two stationers, James Roberts and Richard Watkins, were granted a monopoly for printing almanacs, on the understanding that they would actively suppress the printing of dangerous prophecies. Their patent was renewed twice, ostensibly lasting until 1608.<sup>34</sup>

In 1603 James VI and I created the 'English Stock' of small books—primers, psalters, almanacs, and so on—under the control of stakeholders of the Stationers' Company.<sup>35</sup> Almanac makers submitted their works to the Company, or stationers solicited texts.<sup>36</sup> Counterfeits were rife.<sup>37</sup> The presses of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge posed the greatest challenge to the company. In 1623 Cambridge secured the right to print privileged books offered first to it, including almanacs. The privilege was reduced in 1631, and in 1639 Cambridge agreed to obtain written permission for printing almanacs in exchange for £200 per annum and a guarantee of sufficient work.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century the Company profited £39 per £100 of sales.<sup>39</sup>

From the 1550s almanacs were a staple of the book trade. Official numbers do not survive until the Restoration, but there is some evidence for the boom in almanac production from the 1640s, when print and prophecy joined forces in the heated politics of the age.<sup>40</sup> Printers received orders for 12,000 copies of John Booker's 1640 almanac. Seth Partridge's sold 18,500 copies in 1648. William Lilly's 1659 almanac allegedly sold 30,000 copies.<sup>41</sup> Lilly's celebrity, established through his printed works, was legendary. Humphrey Blunden, who published Lilly's *Merlini Anglici ephemeris*, recorded a schedule of production: 13,500 copies in 1646, 17,000 copies in 1647, 18,500 copies in 1648.<sup>42</sup> Lilly also insists that his *The prophecy of the white king* (1644)

<sup>32</sup> Harry Rusche, 'Merlini Anglici: Astrology and Propaganda from 1644 to 1651', *English Historical Review*, 80 (1965), 322–33, and 'Prophecies and Propaganda, 1641 to 1651', *English Historical Review*, 84 (1969), 752–70, at 753 n. 2, details the laws against prophecies. See also Camden 'Elizabethan Almanacs', 89–90; Thomas 1971, 461–514.

<sup>33</sup> Capp 1979, 29.

<sup>34</sup> David Kathman, 'James Roberts', *ODNB*; cf. Capp 1979, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Curth, 'Medical Content', 260; Capp 1979, 37; see p. 70 above.

<sup>36</sup> Capp 1979, 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>39</sup> Blagden 1958, 109.

<sup>40</sup> Capp 1979, 24–5; Rusche, 'Merlini Anglici'; Capp 1979, 35; Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars* (Manchester, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Capp 1979, 44.

<sup>42</sup> Ariel Hessayon, 'Humphrey Blunden', *ODNB*.

sold 1,800 copies in three days and was reprinted many times.<sup>43</sup> Lilly, along with Booker, Wharton, John Gadbury, and others, had created a forum for astrology alongside the general cacophony of printed books and pamphlets in the 1640s and 1650s. Lilly was especially adept at veiling his political prophecies in astrological terms and coaching his readers in this language of the stars.<sup>44</sup> Some almanacs had become more explicitly political, others more evidently products of a consumer economy, advertising the addresses from which astrological expertise, healing nostrums, or mathematical instruments could be purchased. Rudimentary, utilitarian versions continued to be sold.

Print contributed to an increase in astrological literacy throughout Europe from the early fifteenth century. Almanacs were the most prevalent form of astrological publication, while other sorts of astrological books—stand-alone prognostications, didactic manuals, polemical debates, and philosophical expositions—were also readily available. Challenges to the predictive aspects of almanacs and prognostications are clear in mock, spurious, and burlesque almanacs and prognostications, works that show the conventions of the genre in relief. Anti-astrological works parodied the astrologer and his predictive arts.<sup>45</sup> For John Melton and his contemporaries, an astrologer was a ‘figure flinger’ and an almanac maker was a ‘weather-wise wizard’.<sup>46</sup> John Cotta described ephemerides makers as ‘jugling merchandizing’ and warned of the perils of reading signs of the heavens instead of signs of disease.<sup>47</sup> Scorn was placed on astrologers for daring to meddle with the divine plan, and for their pursuit of lucre in the name of truth. Critics of astrology blamed astrologers for taking advantage of the superstitious beliefs and exploiting the psychological needs of the uneducated masses. Historians have echoed this complaint.

We should be cautious, however, about attributing a direct correlation between the sorts and numbers of astrological books printed and the status of belief in the art. The increase in the numbers of almanacs and other astrological titles produced in the 1640s is not disproportionate to the general rise in printed titles.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, while the astrologers who produced almanacs and prognostications knew how to calculate astronomical motions and to explicate the correspondences between these motions and terrestrial events and human bodies (with varying degrees of computational and interpretative expertise), their consumers did not necessarily correlate their activities to the celestial motions or endorse astrological determinism. As we saw in the cases of Byng, Page, and the anonymous man from Worcestershire, almanacs were tools for marking time. They used theirs to record mundane events; they may also have used

<sup>43</sup> Lilly, *History of his life and times* (1715), 45, cited in Rusche, ‘Merlini Anglici’, 760.

<sup>44</sup> Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind*.

<sup>45</sup> Camden, ‘Elizabethan Almanacs’, 100–8; Capp 1979, 32–9.

<sup>46</sup> John Melton, *Astrologaster, or, the figure-caster* (1620), 24. For further examples see Camden ‘Elizabethan Almanacs’, 87–8.

<sup>47</sup> John Cotta, *A short discoverie of the unobserved dangers of severall sorts of ignorant and unconsiderate practisers of physicke* (1612), 94, 101–3.

<sup>48</sup> See Ch. 6 and Table 6.1 above.

them to plan future activities in relation to feast days or weather forecasts. While the authors of almanacs and prognostications deployed an idiom that linked the microcosm to the macrocosm in terms ranging from health and weather to political and economic fortunes, the pages of these documents do not tell us how, if at all, the individuals who used these almanacs located themselves within this array of cosmic correspondences.

When Byng bought Frende's almanac in 1586, he probably knew that vituperative printed battles had been waged since 1583, following prophecies about the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter.<sup>49</sup> Cambridge was at the centre of these disputes. He might also have known that calls had been made to reform astrology. In buying, and in using, his almanac, Byng leaves no traces of engaging with the substance of the science of the stars. His almanac is evidence of current idiom and practices of time-management and record-keeping, not philosophical engagement or popular belief. When Page bought a copy of Hopton's 1613 almanac he too was probably aware that many printed pages had disputed the extent of astrologers's powers in the previous years, and he may have been aware that Hopton adopted a conservative line. Hopton, Pond, Bretnor, and others positioned themselves as mathematical practitioners endorsing the trend to make utilitarian expertise available to merchants, sailors, and artisans that became fashionable in Elizabethan London.<sup>50</sup>

Annotated almanacs provide some evidence for how these small books were used. A survey of the thousands of surviving titles shows the conventions of the genre and the divergences within it, in terms of target audiences and astrological traditions. Estimates about the numbers of titles and copies issued across the centuries attest to the tenacity of the genre, and raise questions about the fortunes of astrological publishing alongside broader economic, religious, and political changes in early modern Europe. Economically, the growing numbers of astrological books reflect the rise of the consumer economy and the establishment of a medical marketplace. Proponents of reformed religion complained that displays of faith should not be dictated by a prescribed calendar; they placed a premium on individual contemplation above collective rituals. Astrology, some Protestant divines argued, was contrary to the doctrine of free will and provided an excuse for not taking account of one's own actions. Whether or not a true Christian should consult his almanac before making decisions was a subject of theological debate.<sup>51</sup> Politically, especially in England, the figure of the court astrologer was replaced by the professional astrologer. He often established his reputation through, and bolstered his income with, printed books. Some of them, like Hopton, wrote utilitarian almanacs, while others, like Lilly, encrypted comments about the state of the nation in elaborate prophecies.

<sup>49</sup> D. C. Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance: The Quarrel About Astrology and its Influence in England* (1951; New York, 1973); Margaret Aston, 'The Fiery Trigon Conjunction', *Isis*, 61 (1970), 159–87; Carroll Camden Jr., 'Astrology in Shakespeare's Day', *Isis*, 55 (1933), 26–73.

<sup>50</sup> Pond 1612; Neve 1611.

<sup>51</sup> Melton, *Astrologaster*, 56.

Increasingly from the 1640s, astrologers used print to encourage astrological literacy. They also promoted the reform of the art.<sup>52</sup>

From the 1640s the growing concern for the utility of natural knowledge that prompted calls for the reform of astrology also spawned efforts to recover past prophecies as documentation for the timing and location of actual events. This is the spirit in which John Booker, the famous astrologer, acquired Page's annotated almanac. Then Elias Ashmole collected this and eleven others into a single volume, reading them in the hope of discerning a system of astral influences. Ultimately he lodged them for posterity in the Ashmolean Museum (whose collections are now held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford). What had begun as ephemeral tools for marking time had become repositories of memories and artefacts of the history of English astrology.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Bowden, 'The Astrological Revolution of the Seventeenth Century (1558–1686)', Ph.D. thesis, Yale University (1974); Capp 1979, 180–90.