

# James VI and the establishment of Scottish printing

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After **Chepman and Myllar** printed the first books in Scotland around 1508 to 1510, it took the best part of the century for printing to become firmly established as a permanent industry in Scotland. Thomas Davidson was appointed King's Printer under James V, and produced the splendid *The New Actis and Constitutionis of Parliament* in 1542, but the turbulent mid-century saw printers hustled around the centres of power, printing for Catholic and Protestant factions in Stirling and St Andrews when they were thrown out of Edinburgh.

It was not until the reign of **James VI** that Edinburgh became a stable centre for printing and bookselling, with leading figures such as **Henry Charteris** and **Andro Hart** publishing books printed to a high standard. The place of print was helped considerably by the fact that the young king was himself an author who obviously liked to see his works in print. Our exhibition features several of James' publications, all produced to the highest possible standard by the Scottish presses of the day.

## Poet King

James VI in his youth was a keen poet, with a high opinion of his own talents. *Essays of a Prentise*, a collection of his poems published anonymously in 1584, his eighteenth year, includes some poems in praise of him by Scottish court poets. The printer, **Thomas Vautrollier**, pulled out all the stops to produce a book which was attractive to look at: on these pages, a poem in memory of James' friend Esme Stuart is presented in the form of a column.



'These detestable slaves of the Devill, the witches or enchaunters'

*Daemonologie*, James' 1597 book on witchcraft, was probably inspired by James's role in supervising the trials of the North Berwick witches in 1590. It was also written to contradict contemporary writers such as Reginald Scot, who had tried to disprove the widespread existence of witchcraft. The book would later be regarded as having encouraged the hysteria which led to the witch hunts of the 17th century.

## The King on politics

James was a prolific author whose output ran from poetry to theology and political theory. The *Basilikon Doron* or 'Kingly Gift' was a practical manual of kingship, written for his oldest son Henry. James dispensed common-sense tips on areas such as religion, dealing with the nobility, and exercising moderation in one's private life. Only seven copies of this first edition were privately printed in Edinburgh in 1599 for James to hand out to specific individuals.

You can read a type-facsimile of the *Essays of a Prentise* online at [Google Books](#), and find out more about James at the NLS webfeature [James VI and the Union of the Crowns](#).