

THOMAS OLLYFFE
(fl. 1685--circa 1725)

The first mention of this writing-master is by John Ayres who dedicated a plate, in his Tutor to Penmanship, to " W. Thos. Oliffe Penman in London ". The plate is dated 1695. Ten years previously, however, Ollyffe had set up his writing-school in Fetter Lane, for an advertisement in the Post Boy, 5 May 1701, announced that "Tho. Olyffe, writing master who lived about 16 years at the Hand and Pen in Fetter Lane is Removed over the way to the Hand and Pen in Church Alley in Fetter Lane, as you go into Cursitor Street". In Samuel Pepys' "List of Surviving Maister-Pen-Men... 1699 " he appears as " Ollyffe [of] Fetter Lane ". Massey says that " his principal excellency lay in writing the Engrossing hands and the Court and the Chancery". That he was recognised as an expert in these law hands is acknowledged by the famous writing-master of that time, Charles Snell. In this author's "Rules to inform the Learner's judgment " prefacing his Art of Writing (17 12), there is a special note to the effect that " * * * What is here said about the Law Hands is to introduce a Beginner; but if he desires to make himself Compleat in them, I would recommend him to W. Tho. Ollyffe, at the Hand and Pen in Fetter Lane, who by a long practice, has attain'd to a thorough knowledge of them". In this same preface is included a letter from Thomas Ollyffe to Snell dated 1711: "Sir, I understand that some People believe Me to have recommended W. Shelly's Book to be the Best yet publish'd; and because such a Misunderstanding does suppose me very Unjust to my Self, and the Publick, I think fit to acquaint the World, that I am very far from approving the Essays which that Author has made at the Law Hands, nor have I recommended anything in that Book, but some few Pieces of the Round Hand, and Round Text; and if you think fit to cure this Mistake, by inserting these few lines in what you are about to publish you will very much oblige your humble Servant Thomas Ollyffe ".

His first published work appeared in 17 13 under the title of The Practical Penman. This dealt more particularly with the Engrossing, Secretary, Court and Chancery Hands and was issued from the Hand and Pen in Fetter Lane. The book is dedicated to Ralph Snow (q.v.) and a fine portrait of the author is prefixed. Massey says this was engraved by Nutting, but Bromley's Catalogue and the BM Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits attribute it to Bickham.

Ollyffe's second book was "Miscellaneous Sentences in Prose and Verse ... for the Use of Schools", published from Church Yard Alley, Fetter Lane, in 171g. This however contains no calligraphic plates and consists entirely of letterpress, and was evidently intended to provide suitable extracts from which "copies" might be set. In 1721 he published a Small Copy Book of Law Hands. This was arranged in single lines and was issued from Fetter Lane. He also published another calligraphic work entitled Abbreviations as used in the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas. This was engraved partly by J. Cole and partly by Nutting. It was issued from Church Yard Alley in Fetter Lane without date (circa 17 15?) and comprised 600 abbreviations in Court Hand, with their significations written out in full in Engrossing and Secretary Hands.

In 1724 and 1725 he appears to have taken his son Edward into partnership with him, according to advertisements in the daily papers of these dates (see under Edward Ollyffe). In 1728 the advertisements appeared with only Edward's name to them, so possibly Thomas Ollyffe died shortly before this year.

Advertisements have been seen of two other publications bearing Thomas Ollyffe's name, but I am inclined to think that they were posthumous, and possibly pirated editions. One of these was " The Young Clerk's Tutor Enlarged. Seventeenth Edition- 1728". And the other, The Young Clerk's Tutor ... purg'd from errors by Thos. Ollyffe, Writing Master at the Hand and Pen, Fetter Lane. Eighteenth Edition. 1735 "- Possibly they were amended editions of Cocker's (or Hawkins') book with the same title that ran through many editions.

Two of Ollyffe's plates dated 1714 are reproduced in Bickham's Penmanship in its Utmost Beauty and Extent and also in the same editor's Penman's Companion.