PUNCH CUTS

THE MODERN PAGE, 1843

NICK SHINN

© 2006 Nick Shinn. All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, without written permission from the author.
Originally published in *Eye* 48, Summer, 2003.
Fonts: *Scotch Modern* and *Figgins Sans,* presently under development.
www.shinntype.com

FIG 1. *Punch,* page 7, July 1, 1843. The satirical magazine *Punch* was founded in 1841 by a group of young radicals. Co-editor Henry Mayhew, like many of his contemporaries, both artists and writers, sought his material on the streets of the Metropolis. He subsequently authored the seminal social survey *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1851. This particular (anonymous) article, *On the Cockney Pronunciation,* is a bravura philological championing of common speech, with typography that brilliantly elucidates the author's rhetoric.

NO CULTURE IS A MONOLITH, no era; there were many sub-plots in the Victorian epic. Yet time flushes out diversity, and the notion of "Victorian Design" quickly conjures an image of eclectic hyperdecoration. The opposite is also true. Beyond the poster, the title page, and the exotic foundry specimen, your everyday Vickie typography was smart, generic and utterly of its own time.

The page layout (fig. 1) of *Punch* magazine, a work of precise, elegant restraint, persisted from the magazine's founding in 1841 for almost a hundred years, the only change being an increase in text size in the 1890s. Very classic, practically indestructible, and perfectly modern.

Its form was the culmination of a period of radical typographic modernization in London, beginning around 1800 and notable for the emergence, by the mid 1830s, of a spectacular variety of new type genres (fig. 2) from the foundries of Thorne, Figgins, Caslon et al,—sans serif, fat face, Egyptian, 3D, and so on. During these years, the Didone, or modern, style replaced the old styles, killing off the long "s" (fig. 3), "ct" and "st" ligatures, and non-lining figures, while weight contrast and mixing typefaces became the new ways to create interest in one's typographic layout, outmoding the traditional oppositions of roman versus italic and caps versus lower case.

The headline

BY THE TIME of this fairly typical 1843 *Punch* page (fig. 1) the sans serif type style, albeit without a lower case, was well established. Its use here is deft and sophisticated, as, by dint of multiple contrasts of value, size and form, a single line faces off against a massed page of scintillating Scotch Modern, not to mention the overbearing running head.

Art history places the modern movement during the early 20th century, and type history follows suit, chronicling the emergence of the sans serif in the late 1920s as a Bauhaus-branded expression of reductive functionalism. In this scheme of things great store is put upon the sequence "Realism > Modernism > Post-Modernism", making it impossible to accept the original sans serif faces (and other contemporary typographic experiments in pure plastic formalism) as expressions of modernism, concurrent as they are with realist painting, and preceding the invention of photography. Nonetheless, Vincent Figgins beat Paul Renner (Futura) to the punch by a century. The evidence could not be clearer: his 1836 specimen (fig. 4) shows a bold sans serif, spelling out the word "modern". The Caslon & Livermore 1837 specimen contains 15 pages of bold condensed, all-cap sans serifs; William Caslon IV had shown the first sans 21 years earlier. Renner discussed the concept of the Modern, and how it is a process rather than the style of a particular era, but it's unlikely that Figgins or Caslon theorized about such stuff. They just did it. The Crystal Palace was a piece of engineering, far removed from architecture or art; the fine arts carried the heavy intellectual load; decoration added merit to applied art; and nothing could be further off the map

ON THE COCKNEY PRONUNCIATION.

ARTICLE No. 2.—V *versus* W.

RIMM, in his correspondence, says, "*Regnard et la plupart des poëtes comiques étaient gens bilieux et mélancoliques. C'est que celui que rit et celui qui fait rire sont deux hommes fort différens.*" True as Euclid! Your *laughers* are a set of merry crimson-cheeked rogues, with infallible livers; whereas, the *laughees* are yellow and long-visaged martyrs to dyspepsia and blue devils. Bad digestions *make* jokes; good digestions *take* them. The true time for joking is after dinner, when the bile is on the flow; verily jests are secreted in the gall-bladder. Such are the articles of my belief. Accordingly, MR. PUNCH, I have deferred continuing my vindication of the Cockney Orthoepy until such time as a hyper-hypochondriacal bilious attack should grant me the proper jocular inspiration. Thanks to Providence and a crab-supper, it has come at last. I have, at the present writing, a tongue as yellow as a Margate slipper, and eyes like a brace of bubbles in a horse-pond. I feel as miserable as a repentant sheriff's-officer. Disgusted with the world—perverse—querulous—and malicious—nothing on this dull earth I am satisfied could afford me consolation, save a good, soul-stirring kick at the "reverse" of some nervous Jew-attorney—Soh! the jocular steam is up. I let go the head-rope, and steer due Cockaigne.

In my last article, I said that the friendly interchange of the *v's* and *w's* which so pre-eminently distinguishes the Cockney dialect of the English language from all others, involves a question of history, as well as philology. I will begin with the philological part of the subject. All the Indo-Teutonic languages, as they are called, are descended, it must be borne in mind, from the Sanscrit—which, as I before observed, may be considered as their great grandfather. These languages—or, at least, such as concern my present purpose—are divisible into two grand branches—viz., into those which change the *w* in certain words into *v*, and *wice wersâ*, those which change the *v* into *w*. Thus, the following are the several terms in the different tongues above alluded to, for the—

Cockney, Vine	*Latin*, Vinum.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Win.
Middlesex, Wine.	*French*, Vin.	*Icelandic*, Vin.
Welsh, G-wyn.	*Gothic*, Wein.	*Danish*, Viin.

Here it will be perceived that the *Welsh* adopts the *w* (the *g* being but an aspirated prefix to that letter, as the *q* in the Latin *qu*, and the *h* in the Anglo-Saxon *hw*, since converted into the English *wh*—but more of this anon); the *Latin* and *French* change the *w* into *v*; the *Gothic* and *Anglo-Saxon* change the *v* into *w* (the Goth. being merely old and pure Sax.); while the *Icelandic* and *Danish* change the *w* into *v* (the Icel. standing in the same relation to the Dan. as the Goth. to the Sax.) With the exception of these simple and characteristic transitions the word is evidently the same in all the tongues.

Now, how runs the early history of England? According to all accounts, it seems agreed that this "right little, tight little island" was the scene of continual squabbles among the before-mentioned nations—the country having about every four hundred years a different race of men for its rulers, and a different language for its vernacular—or, to speak conformably to the above division of tongues, the *w's* being in the ascendant at one cycle, and the *v's* at another—so that as the dissensions which occurred at a later period between the houses of York and Lancaster, have been styled "the wars of the white and red roses," we may with equal propriety denominate the feuds between the Welsh, the Romans, the Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans, which form the entirety of the primeval history of England,

"THE BATTLES OF THE V'S AND W'S."

To go briefly over the period referred to.—First, we have the *w's* under the *ançien régime* of the Welsh or Britons, constituting the wernacular of the country—then the *v's* get into power under Julius Cæsar, and reign for about four centuries. At the expiration of this time, the *w's* are again brought into fashion by the Anglo-Saxons, and continue "the mode" for a like term of years—whereupon Canute the Dane ascends the throne and the *v's* are once more heard throughout the land. Then the Saxon sway is restored under Edward the Confessor, when everything Danish being woted wulgar, the *w's* are for the third time incorporated with the mother tongue. Finally, William the Norman walks over and takes possession of the country, and lo! the dynasty of the *v's* is incontrovertibly established among us.

Now what, MR. PUNCH, *must* all this prove to a mind in the least sensible to syllogisms? or rather, must not that man be blind as Bedlam to reason, to whom it would not demonstrate that—in a tongue like the English, which is necessarily, from the circumstances above quoted, a hotch-potch of Welsh, Latin, Saxon, Danish, and French—the interchange of the *v's* and *w's* persisted in by the Cockneys, displays a profound intuition respecting the origin, principles, and genius of their native language.

But it may be said I have adduced only one instance of the homogeneity of the letters in question. To smash all scepticism on this point, I add a dozen more—enough surely to dumb-founder Professor Pyrrho himself.

Welsh, G-wynt.	*Welsh*, G-werth.	*Welsh*, G-well.
Latin, Ventus.	*Latin*, Virtus.	*Latin*, Val-idus.
Gothic, Vinds.	*Gothic*, Wairths.	*Gothic*, Wail-a.
Anglo-Saxon, Wind.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Weorth.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Wel.
Icelandic, Vindr.	*Icelandic*, Verd.	*Icelandic*, Vel.
Danish, Vind.	*Danish*, Værd.	*Danish*, Vel.
French, Vent.	*French*, Vertu.	*French*, Val-ide.
Middlesex, Wind—Vent.	*Middlesex*, Virtue—Worth.	*Middlesex*, Well—Valid.
Cockney, Vind—Went.	*Cockney*, Wirtue—Vorth.	*Cockney*, Vell—Walid.
Sanscrit, Wartha.	*Latin*, Vid-ere.	*Latin*, Vell-e.
Latin, Verbum.	*Gothic*, Wit-an.	*Gothic*, Wil-jan.
Gothic, Waurd.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Wit-an.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Wyll-an.
Anglo-Saxon, Word.	*Icelandic*, Vit-a.	*Icelandic*, Vil-ia.
Icelandic, Ord.	*Danish*, Vid-e.	*Danish*, Vill-e.
Danish, Ord.	*French*, Voir.	*French*, Voul-oir.
French, Verbe.	*Middlesex*, Wit, (*as* TO WIT) *and* Vision.	*Middlesex*, Will—Vol-ition.
Middlesex, Word—Verb.	*Cockney*, Vit, (*as* TO VIT) *and* Wision.	*Cockney*, Vill—Wol-ition.
Cockney, Vord—Werb.		
Latin, Vac-illare.	*Latin*, Vic-us.	*Latin*, Vinc-ere-Victum.
Gothic, Wag-an.	*Gothic*, Wik-o.	*Gothic*, Wig-ans.
Anglo-Saxon, Wag-ian.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Wic.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Wigg-an.
Icelandic, Vaga.	*Icelandic*, Vik.	*Icelandic*, Vig-r.
Danish, Be-væge.	*Danish*, Vig.	*Danish*, Wüg.
French, Vac-iller.	*French*, Vois-inage.	*French*, Vainc-re—Etre-victorieux.
Middlesex, Vac-illate—Wag.	*Middlesex*, Vic-inity *and* Wick.	*Middlesex*, Vanq-uish—Be vic-torious.
Cockney, Wac-illate—Vag.	*Cockney*, Wic-inity *and* Vick, as Hampton Vick.	*Cockney*, Wank-vish—Be wic-torious.

But my fellow citizens are not only exposed to the contemptuous chuckles of the Middlesexons for denominating her blessed Majesty "Wictoria," but they are treated with equal ridicule for entitling her "the *Kveen*." Oh, the insolence of ignorance! Had the boobies received a grain more education than magpies they would have known that both terms were alike correct, and, moreover, that the latter was especially *classical*. Let them prick up their "ambitious ears," and listen to what Master Scaurus says in p. 2253 of his *Gram. Lat. Auct. Antiqui.* "*Q littera æque retenta est, quia cum illa V littera conspirat, quoties consonantis loco ponitur, id est pro Vau littera—ut Quis Qualis.*" To which Professor Ernest Jäkel, in his *Germanische Ursprung der Lateinischen Sprache und der Romischen Volkes*, adds, "That is to say, we must read no *q* with it, but only pronounce the u as v—viz. vis valis. Surprising indeed," he continues, "does the likeness of a considerable number of Latin words with the Old and New High Dutch words then become! *Quatuor* now becomes (*q*) *Vatuor;* the Teutonic *Fedwor;* the Gothic *Fidwor;* English, *four*. *Quinque* becomes (*q*)*Vin*(*q*)*ve*, the old *fynf;* the German *fünfe;* Anglo-Saxon *Fif;* English *Five*. *Quis* becomes (*q*)*Vis;* the Gothic (*h*)*Was;* Anglo-Saxon (*h*)*Wa*; English *W*(*h*)*o*. And *Quid* = (*q*)*Vid;* Gothic (*h*)*Wata;* Anglo-Saxon (*h*)*Wæt;* English *W*(*h*)*at*." The fact is, the Latin *qu* was equivalent to the Welsh *gw*, and the Gothic and Anglo-Saxon *hw*—the initial consonant acting, as I said before, as a mere aspirated prefix; consequently the Latin *Quid* would become in pronunciation *k-vid;* Anglo-Saxon *h-wæt*—the change of *v* into *w*, and *d* into *t*, being perfectly characteristic of the two languages.

To put the question, however, beyond the possibility of a doubt, I add a leash of flabbergasting examples.

Sanscrit, Chatur.	*Latin*, Qualis *or* Q-valis.	*Latin*, Quare *or* Q-vare.
Welsh, Pedwar.	*Gothic*, Hweileiks.	*Gothic*, Hwar.
Latin, Quatuor *or* Q-vatvor.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Hwylc.	*Anglo-Saxon*, Hwær.
Gothic, Fidwor.	*Icelandic*, Hvilikr.	*Icelandic*, Hvar.
Anglo-Saxon, Feower.	*Danish*, Hvilken.	*Danish*, Hvor.
Icelandic, Fiorir.	*French*, Quel *or* Q-vel.	*French*, Quoi *or* Q-voi.
Danish, Fire.	*Middlesex*, Quality *&* Which.	*Middlesex*, Where—Wherefore *and* Query.
French, Quatre *or* Q-vatre.	*Cockney*, K-vality *&* Vhich.	*Cockney*, Vhere—Vhere-fore *and* K-vary.
Middlesex, Four *&* Quarter.		
Cockney, Four *and* K-varter.		

How do you feel now, Master Middlesex?—rather *k-veer*, I flatter myself.

So much for the V's and W's, MR. PUNCH. When I am next bilious, I purpose treating of the Cockney's use of the aspirate—the terms *hisn*, *yourn*, *hern*, and many like classicalities. For the present you must allow

FIG 2. A selection from the *Figgins* specimen, 1836, and the *Caslon & Livermore* specimen, 1837.
Early 19th century experiments in type design were schismatic, fundamentally rifted from the traditional premise of slow stylistic evolution. This was pure plastic invention—reductive, conceptual, modernist.

FIG 3. *Demise of the long "s".*
Traditionally, there had been alternate forms of the lower case "s": short for use at the end of words, long elsewhere. Around 1800 the cumbersome long form, which required kerning and frequently ligatures, began to fall from use.

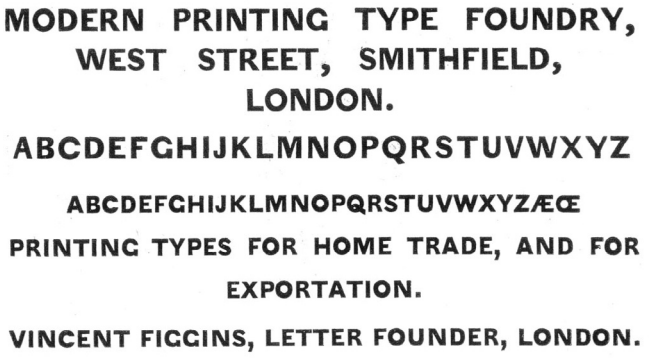


FIG 4. *Specimen of Printing Types,*
V. & J. Figgins, London, 1836.
Two-line Pearl and Brevier Sans-serif. An experimental design (compare the sizes) with a geometric quality notable in the circularity of the round letters, something which would soon be eclipsed by the fuller curves of the grotesque style, not to return until the 1920s.

than the naked shape of letters. There were no design trade journals, no critics to ask "Dude, where's the lower case?" (The original sans was, with modernist efficiency, a unicase.)

T.C. Hansard, in his monumental *Typographia* (1826) devoted but a handful of paragraphs to the aesthetics of type design, mainly to roundly diss the latest "Monstrosities!!! ... the book printing of the present day is disgraced by a mixture of fat, lean and heterogenous types, which to the eye of taste is truly disgusting," with a sneer at the burgeoning market for job (commercial) printing, "...for which purpose it appears so appropriate..." Hansard attributed the trend entirely to the capriciousness of type founders; we recognize a cultural ecology in the marketplace, where all are both shapers and shaped.

The initial

PART HUMAN, PART serpent, part G, wholly "Grimm" and "bilious" (as befits the immediate text); this is the kind of opium-addled, hellucinogenic multiple entendre the Surrealists claimed for their pre-history. Deconstructing the semantic boundary between letter and image, the anonymous artist channeled a macabre, gothic psychosis; one that destroyed Grandeville, acquiring great cachet.

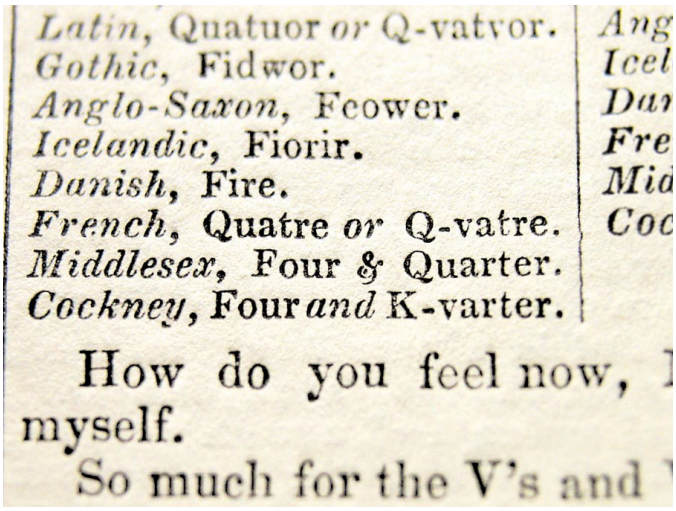
For his friend Dr. Georget at the Paris Insane Asylum, Theodore Géricault, explorer of the extremes of the human condition, had painted a series of clinical portraits of various kinds of derangement. Resident *Punch* artist John Leech, possibly the illustrator here, was similarly inclined. Leech had been a medical student, turned on to art by his anatomical drawing. Early *Punch*, named in part after the French publication *Charivari,* was full of wild-eyed characters and anthropomorphic drop caps.

The text type

ONE CAN ONLY shake one's head in awe at the dedication required to hand-set this page, in particular the three-column tables comparing words in ten different languages (several extinct), alternating between roman and italic every word, with the occasional small cap, aesc, and umlaut thrown in for good measure, all in six point size—for a weekly magazine! (fig. 5)

A marvel of skill and efficiency, the mid-century roman, the Scotch Modern, is small and compact, yet with its huge serifs, expansive in spirit. At the same time, there is a strict moral tone to the obsessively neat detail and the abhorrence of orifices, as sphincter-like the serifs all but close off the aperture. Seeking to outdo one another, founders of the era produced smaller and smaller types, the Bible shrinking like a cell-phone to pocket size. The exaggerated proportions of the serifs made this a bigger, friendlier face than its nominal size would have indicated, and the delicate bite of letterpress ensured legibility at the threshold of vision. Per column inch, it is among the most efficient typography ever.

This was high technology; yet not in our understanding of being automated, but rather, dependent on the virtuoso technique of the punch cutter and the printer. The innovative typefounders of the 1820s and '30s were peers


Latin, Quatuor *or* Q-vatvor.
Gothic, Fidwor.
Anglo-Saxon, Fcower.
Icelandic, Fiorir.
Danish, Fire.
French, Quatre *or* Q-vatre.
Middlesex, Four & Quarter.
Cockney, Four *and* K-varter.

How do you feel now,
myself.
So much for the V's and

FIG 5. *Punch,* July 1, 1843.
Detail of page 7.
The quality of 6 pt. Scotch Modern letterpress type, biting into pure rag stock. Punctiliously, flush left setting is mixed with justification of lines that are almost full measure, helped by discretionary use of the ampersand.

FIG. 6. *A London Street Scene.*
John Orlando Parry, 1835.
Watercolour painting, presumably made with the aid of a camera obscura, depicts an explosion of fly-poster typography in a city crazy for entertainment. The larger size of fonts, many of them two-colour, were made of wood, or from metal type sand-cast from wooden originals.

to Henry Maudslay, who improved the slide rule and built the first precision lathe (the "mother tool of the industrial age"—Witold Rybczynski, *One Good Turn*). The modern style of type was not, then, so much an imitation of the sparkling quality of engraved lettering, but an expression of every designer-engineer-artist-craftsman's quest for finesse; and this in an age when those job labels were not quite so mutually exclusive as they are now.

The page layout

THE *PUNCH* MISE-EN-PAGE is not original, by today's standards. Printers by and large stuck to common industry practice, with little deviation. Personality was in the details. There was one style of text type, and one way to lay out a periodical: with the columns butted up tight, separated by a fine rule.

The *Punch* layout style differed from that of a broadsheet newspaper only by the addition of rules around the edge of the "live" area. Its two-column format, with text bounded by fine rules, and a double rule beneath the running head, was the look of the popular radical newspapers, such as *The Poor Man's Guardian,* of the early 19th century, which published at pamphlet size to avoid repressive newspaper taxes. The satirical *Punch* was heir to this scene. (The tax had been reduced from 4d to 1d in 1836.)

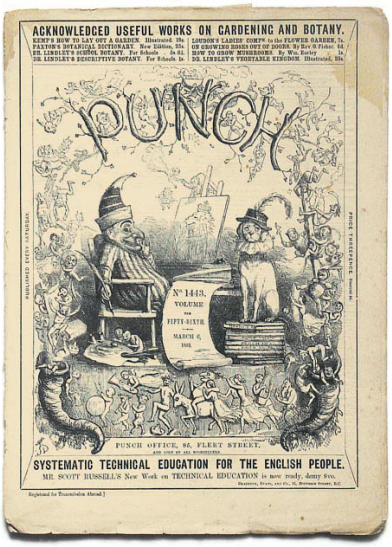
If type design is considered a peer to typographic layout, a partner inextricably linked to it but not following in its footsteps—rather, having its own agenda—then it's possible to recognize the implicit modernism of the early 19th century typefaces, freeing the evolution of this quality from its association with the fine art movements of almost a century later.

Punch had lots of pictures—imagery was the trend. Fleshing out the word, mid-century typefounders and poster artists (fig. 6) created 3D styles, magazine artists drew fanciful initials, and illustrations brought periodical pages to life. The first picture news weekly, *The Illustrated London News,* was launched in 1842 (*Punch* co-editor Mark Lemon was creative consultant) to runaway success.

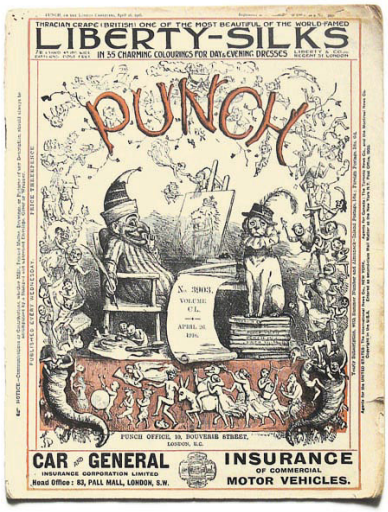
THESE GRAPHIC CHANGES did not happen in isolation, but were part and parcel of the general turmoil that accompanied the birth of the modern industrial state. In politics, the suffrage crisis (only 3% of men with the vote, no women) had put the country on the brink of armed rebellion prior to the Great Reform Bill of 1832, which redesigned the structure of society. New lifestyles emerged in the 1830s with the advent of mass transit by rail and bus. J.M.W. Turner (lauded by John Ruskin in *Modern Painting,* 1843) expressed the modernism of the age in his 1844 painting *Rain, Steam, and Speed;* Figgins expressed it in his conceptual type designs; and Bradbury & Evans, Printers, Whitefriars, expressed it with ***Punch.***

THE PUNCH COVER SCENES FROM A LIFE

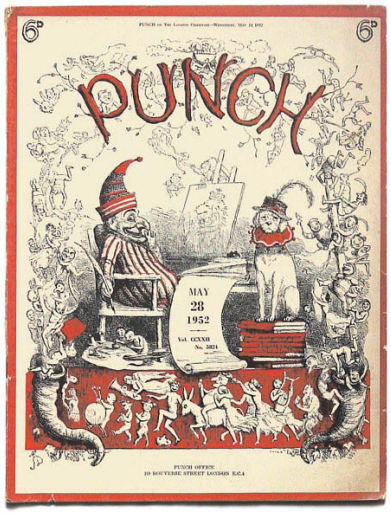
July 1, 1843
Punch began in 1841 as a hip, anti-establishment magazine. The design genre here is not far removed from that of the fine book title page. Its style is severely neoclassical, neat and symmetrical, with the clean simplicity which characterizes modernism in any era. The typography is discreetly understated. The cover art, by J. Meadows, shows a grossly maniacal Mr Punch stretching the masthead banner across his distended belly, while straddling a blasting trumpeter resting on a large drum. It is a lewd, grotesque, and aggressively vulgar polemic. On either side are the contributors of Art and Literature, two demonically stage-lit juvenile players.



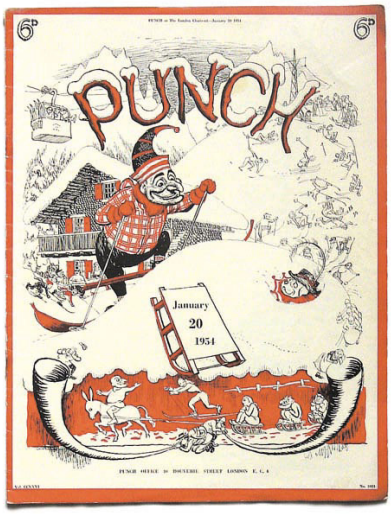
March 6, 1869
Richard Doyle's 1849 illustration (which persisted until 1954) represented a change of attitude and a progression. The cosy rustic lettering of the name; Mr Punch smirking at his self-contained little dog joke; and the encircling cornucopia-cavalcade of mirth; these are a gentler form of satire, emphasizing the humour of the brand. Commercial interest has encroached too, with advertisments at top and bottom. By 1850, the young radical readers of *Punch* had settled down, while the growing prosperity of a large part of the Victorian masses had created a politically conservative middle class that would provide the magazine with a steady market for more than a century. Note the magnificent bold condensed sans serif capitals. The discolouring of the paper signals a change from the high quality of traditional rag-recycled paper to a fragile stock made from the newly invented material of chemically pulped wood fibre.



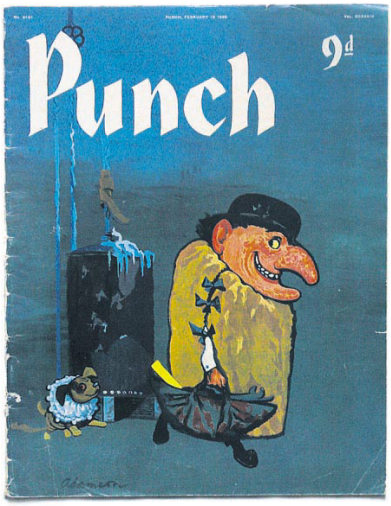
April 26, 1916
Spot colour, and a further encroachment of commercial interest.



May 28, 1952
Spot colour with bleed border. A final, cleaned-up iteration of the classic design.



Jan. 20, 1954
Coated stock. Swan song: a fresh illustration each issue, using Doyle's original 1849 character.



Feb. 19, 1958
Belated paradigm shift. New masthead and a full bleed, full-colour illustration.