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BY JOHN D. COWLEY

"Although the literature of English law has already received attention from bibliographers from time to time, there is still room for a more detailed description of the printed books than has yet been attempted. Most of the lay workers in this field have made serious mistakes through lack of acquaintance with legal history or the books themselves, while the learned historians of the law have relied too freely on trade catalogues and standard works of reference, such as the Dictionary of National Biography. Hence the need for a further review of the subject, if only by way of prolegomena to the study of the printed abridgments." — Preface



The literary form known as 'abridgment' has become so popular among lawyers that it has acquired a significant place in legal literature and exercised a considerable effect on the development of the law itself.

Cowley's goal for this bibliography was to record as far as possible all printed editions of abridgments, digests, dictionaries and indexes of English law in general from the earliest times to the year 1800 and to illustrate the development of the alphabetical system of digest making. Abridgments of special subjects, such as criminal law, real property and justices' law, have been excluded, as the scope of this work would have been unnecessarily extended with their inclusion. The only exception to this rule are the *Year books of assises abridged*, *Style's Practical register* and the equity digests, all of which are slightly less general in their scope than the original abridgments of the year books. The works described within fall into the following four categories:

- I. Abridgments and indexes of the statutes
- II. Abridgments of common law and equity (digests of case law, equity and statutes combined are included)
- III. Common law indexes
- IV. Dictionaries, which eventually become practically legal encyclopedias

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