

Printmaking Processes

At the end of the 20th century methods were developed to replace the need to hand carve wooden blocks. This enabled the fast, mass-production of images. The two main methods used to create these illustrations were Line Block and Halftone, these processes are discussed below:

Wood Engraving

Wood engraving was the initial printing technique for illustrating text cheaply and is a relief form of printmaking. This process begins with the artist drawing a reversed image onto a block of wood using a hard pencil, which could achieve extraordinarily detailed and artistic heights. Then this drawing would be sent to the wood engraver who would manually cut around each pencil line to create a printing surface.

The wood engraving process allowed the image block to be printed in the same operation as the text which reduced the cost of mass printing. However, this process had its downfalls as artists had to rely on a trained engraver to translate their drawings into something that could be printed. The result was not always translated correctly and so the published illustration would credit both the artist and the engraver.

Line Block

Line blocking was created at the end of the 19th century. This process produced relief printing blocks photographically which replaced the need for wood carving. The black-and-white negative was placed over a zinc plate coated with light-sensitive gelatine. When the negative is exposed to light, the gel hardens creating the lines of the illustration. The unhardened gelatine is then washed away leaving the lines that are to be printed exposed. A protective coat is applied to the lines and the other parts of the zinc plate are etched away. This Line Block process was most effective for drawings composed of black sketch-like lines.

The images below, which are included in this exhibition: *A Spectacle in Ink*, were printed in Punch using the Line Block method:



Fred Pegram, *The Dog*, 1904, *Pen and Ink on Paper*, *The University of Exeter Fine Art Collection*.



F. H. Townsend, *Lady and the Vicar's Wife*, 1904, *Pen and ink on paper*, *The University of Exeter Fine Art Collection*.



Tom Browne, Amateur Photographer, 1904, Pen and ink on paper, The University of Exeter Fine Art Collection.



Tom Browne, A Fellow Feeling, 1905, Pen and ink on paper, The University of Exeter Fine Art Collection.

Halftone

The Halftone method was an extension of Line Blocking, it allowed for work such as paintings and photographs to be mass-produced in colour. This change in technology has had a huge impact on how commercial artists worked and how magazines looked.

This process began with photographing the original artwork through a glass screen of fine gridded lines. The drawings are then translated onto a plate in a series of different sized dots. Once printed this created an optical illusion where the coloured dots seem to join and reproduce the full range of image tones.

The images below, which are included in this exhibition: *A Spectacle in Ink*, were printed in The Bystander and The Graphic using the Halftone method:



Gilbert Holiday, Scottish Express, Euston, circa 1900-1902, Chalk on paper, from the University of Exeter Fine Art Collection.



Charles H. Taffs, Lady with a Fan in a Chair, 1905, Oil on panel, from the University of Exeter Fine Art Collection.



Frank Craig, The Royal Enclosure, Ascot, 1905, Pencil, wash and gouache on paper, from the University of Exeter Fine Art Collection.