

Printing

Printing from woodblocks is the oldest method of all.

Before Gutenberg invented moveable type, around 1450, books and broadsheets were produced by writing the text on wood in reverse, as in a mirror and then cutting round the letters, dabbing the block with ink then pressing the paper on the top.

Blocks could be used over and over again in different books.

Early cutters worked on the 'side grain' of the wood, a plank cut along the trunk, often of a fruit wood e.g. pear or cherry.

Designers such as Durer and Holbein produced delicate prints.

They used carpenters tools such as knives and chisels.

Printers began to prefer copper prints which gave a finer effect; woodcuts were banished to broadsides and chapbooks.

Craftsmen began to use the dense end grain of wood sliced across the trunk or branch rather than along it.

Boxwood proved the best because it grows so slowly that the growth lines are very close.

The hard surface meant that engravers could use the fine tools that were used for copper and silver.