

DT003 - How computers rendered hot metal printing obsolete

The general secretary of the National Graphical Association, Mr Joe Wade, says in his article (6 June 1979) that he is 'concerned about people'. Every thinking person must be concerned about those who have worked through a long apprenticeship in hot metal printing only to find their hard-won knowledge useless. But the fact is that printing technology has been superseded by computer technology. Typesetting has entirely ceased to be 'technical'. In fact the most appropriate skill for keying into computer terminals is that of the typist. The skill of a hot metal printer is irrelevant. As a parliamentary draftsman I keyed the text of Bills I was drafting into the computer. I found the text editing facility invaluable, but I needed to do the editing myself. This was during a 1975 experiment which had to be abandoned because printing unions insisted on re-keying everything. The NGA attitude is a remarkable instance of union rigidity. Mr Wade might as sensibly insist on his members holding the journalist's pen and doing his writing for him under dictation.