

Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences

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Cyclopaedia: or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences (two volumes in folio) was an [encyclopedia](#) published by [Ephraim Chambers](#) in [London](#) in 1728, and reprinted in numerous editions in the eighteenth century. The *Cyclopaedia* was one of the first general encyclopedias to be produced in English.

The 1728 subtitle gives a summary of the aims of the author:

Cyclopaedia, or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences: Containing the Definitions of the Terms, and Accounts of the Things Signify'd Thereby, in the Several Arts, both Liberal and Mechanical, and the Several Sciences, Human and Divine: the Figures, Kinds, Properties, Productions, Preparations, and Uses, of Things Natural and Artificial; the Rise, Progress, and State of Things Ecclesiastical, Civil, Military, and Commercial: with the Several Systems, Sects, Opinions, etc; among Philosophers, Divines, Mathematicians, Physicians, Antiquaries, Criticks, etc.: The Whole Intended as a Course of Ancient and Modern Learning.



Noteworthy features

The first edition included numerous cross-references meant to connect articles scattered by the use of alphabetical order, a dedication to the King, [George II](#), and a philosophical preface at the beginning of Volume 1. Among other things, the preface gives an analysis of forty-seven divisions of knowledge, with classed lists of the articles belonging to each, intended to serve as a table of contents and also as a directory indicating the order in which the articles should be read.

Printing history

A second edition appeared in 1738 in two volumes in folio, with 2,466 pages. This edition was supposedly retouched and amended in a thousand places, with a few added articles and some enlarged articles. Chambers was prevented from doing more because the booksellers were alarmed by a bill in [Parliament](#) containing a clause to oblige the publishers of all improved editions of books to print their

improvements separately. The bill, after passing the House of Commons, was unexpectedly thrown out by the House of Lords; but fearing that it might be revived, the booksellers thought it best to retreat though more than twenty sheets had been printed.

Five other editions were published in London from 1739 to 1751 and 1752. An edition was also published in Dublin in 1742; this and the London editions were all 2 volumes in folio. An Italian translation appearing in Venice, 1748-1749, 4to, 9 vols., was the first complete Italian encyclopaedia. When Chambers was in France in 1739 he rejected very favorable proposals to publish an edition there dedicated to Louis XV.

Chambers' work was carefully done, and popular. It had, however, defects and omissions, as he was well aware; and at his death, on 15 May 1740, he had collected and arranged materials for seven new volumes. George Lewis Scott was employed by the booksellers to select articles for the press and to supply others, but he left before the job was finished. The job was then given to Dr. John Hill. The *Supplement* was published in London in 1753 in two folio volumes with 3307 pages and 12 plates. Hill was a botanist, and the botanical part, which had been weak in the *Cyclopaedia*, was the best.

Abraham Rees, a Nonconformist minister, published a revised and enlarged edition in 1778 and 1788, with the supplement and improvements incorporated. It was published in London, as a folio of 5 vols., 5010 pages (but not paginated), and 159 plates. It was published in 418 numbers at 6d. each. Rees claimed to have added more than 4400 new articles. At the end he gave an index of articles, classed under 100 heads, numbering about 57,000 and filling 80 pages. The heads, with 39 cross references, were arranged alphabetically.

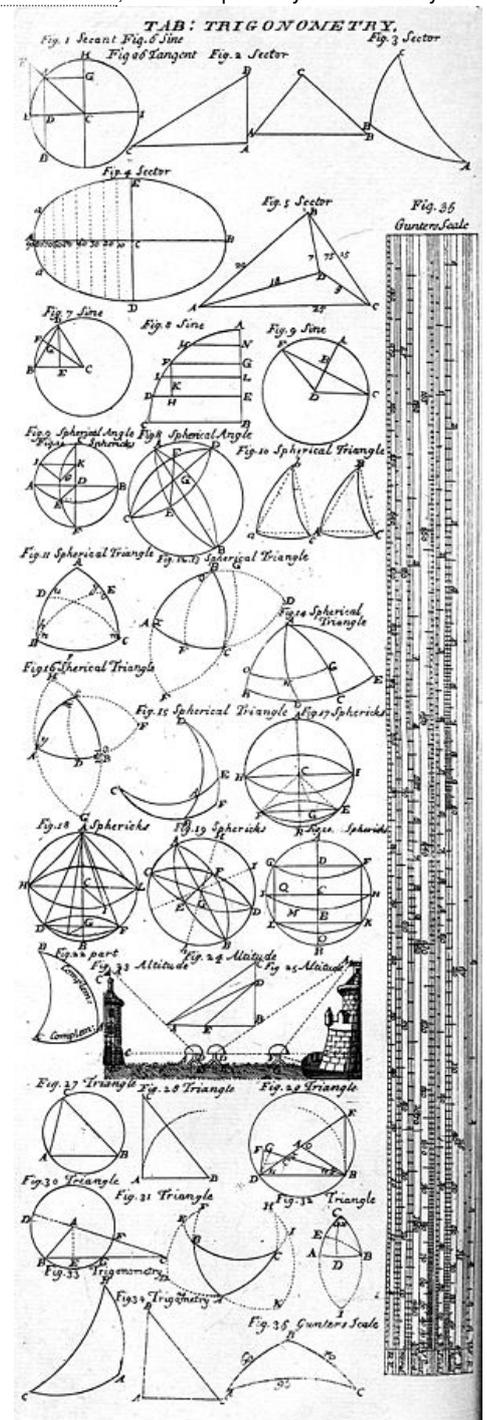
Precursors and the *Encyclopédie*

Among the precursors of Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* was John Harris's *Lexicon Technicum*, of 1704 (later editions from 1708 through 1744). By its title and content it was "An Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences: Explaining not only the Terms of Art, but the Arts Themselves." While Harris's work is often classified as a technical dictionary, it also took material from Newton and Halley among others.

Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* in turn became the inspiration for the landmark *Encyclopédie* of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, which owed its inception to a proposed French translation of Chambers' work begun in 1743 by John Mills, assisted by Gottfried Sellius.

Further reading

- Bradshaw, Lael Ely. "Ephraim Chambers's Cyclopaedia." *Notable Encyclopedias of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Nine Predecessors of the Encyclopédie*. Ed. Frank Kafker. Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1981. 123-137. (ISBN 0-7294-0256-8).
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- Kafker, Frank. A. *Notable encyclopedias of the late eighteenth century: eleven successors of the Encyclopédie*. Oxford : Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1994.
- Kolb, Gwin J. and James H. Sledd. "Johnson's Dictionary and Lexicographical Tradition." *Modern Philology* 50.3 (Feb. 1953): 171-194.



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- Shorr, Phillip. *Science and Superstition in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Treatment of Science in Two Encyclopedias of 1725-1750*. New York: Columbia, 1932.
- Walsh, S. Patraig. "Cyclopaedia." *Anglo-American General Encyclopedias: A Historical Bibliography, 1703-1967*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1968. 38-39.
- Yeo, Richard. "The Best Book in the Universe": Ephraim Chambers's Cyclopaedia. In *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 120-169. (ISBN 0-521-65191-3)
- Yeo, Richard. *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Yeo, Richard R. "A Solution to the Multitude of Books: Ephraim Chambers's Cyclopaedia (1728) as "the Best Book in the Universe."" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v. 64 (1), 2003. pp. 61-72. (ISSN 0022-5037)

External links

- [Chambers' Cyclopaedia, 1728, 2 volumes, with the 1753 supplement, 2 volumes; digitized by the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center.](#)
 - [Search the Cyclopaedia](#)
 - [Index of entries \(OCR, contains many spelling errors\)](#)

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