General Editor's Introduction

The *Oxford History of Popular Print Culture* reports research from a central set of questions. What did most people read? Where did they get it? Where did it come from? What were its uses in its readers' lives? How was it produced and distributed? What were its relations to the wider world of print culture? How did it develop over time? From one essay or volume to another there will be additional questions, other emphases, depending on the commitments of the writer or editor.

Print here is taken to include words and images. The central concern is with popular print culture in English, though where there are significant contiguous and interacting bodies of popular print in other languages these are also considered. 'Popular' may have several, at times conflicting significances, including cheap, much frequented, widely admired, speaking to or for 'the people', having certain distinctive features of form, style, material embodiment, and so on. Each volume editor and each contributor interprets the research mandate of the *History* in her or his own way. Some contributors are more concerned with print objects, others with readers' practices, others with modes of production and distribution, still others with ideological bearings. Different contributors answer the *History*'s research questions using different and at times conflicting theoretical and methodological approaches, as each person sees fit. For convenience of assembly the *History* is broken into regional and temporal sections or volumes while these sections recognize the international flow of popular print, the contiguity and continuity of its cultures, its local and regional differences. Broadly, the *History* recognizes the importance of the material forms of popular print to their meanings for readers, and both discusses these forms and, since many are ephemeral and difficult of access now, illustrates them as fully as possible.

The structure of the *History* was developed by the General Editor and the Oxford University Press; the work has been done by the volume editors and contributors.

**Gary Kelly**