

Offor, George (1787–1864), literary editor and book collector, was the son of George Offor. He started in business as a bookseller at 2 Postern Row, Tower Hill, London, from which he retired with a competency. By the advice of his friend J. S. C. S. Frey, he learned Hebrew, and afterwards studied Greek and Latin. His knowledge of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature, especially of theology, became very extensive, and he assembled a very large collection of early printed English Bibles, psalters, and testaments. In religion a Baptist, Offor was an enthusiastic admirer of John Bunyan, and gathered together a unique collection of Bunyan's scattered writings and of early editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. An interest in William Tyndale took him to Brussels in search of details of his martyrdom. During the revolution of 1830, while near Vilvoord, Offor was taken prisoner by a detachment of Dutch troops and was briefly detained in the prison built on the ruins of the castle at Vilvoord where Tyndale had been confined. Offor, who was a justice of the peace, was married to Sarah Ann and had at least two sons, George and Charles. He died at his home, Grove House, Grove Street, South Hackney, on 4 August 1864, and was buried in Abney Park cemetery.

Offor's biographical work on Bunyan, which drew on much new material he had found in the State Paper Office, was marred by a cumbrous style and bitter polemical spirit, and has long been superseded. His bibliography of Bunyan, prefixed to a three-volume collected edition of Bunyan's *Works* (1853), remained useful until replaced by F. M. Harrison's *Bibliography* (1932). Offor's 1853 edition continued for even longer—with all its faults—to be the sole collection of Bunyan's writings. It was from 1976 replaced by the Oxford edition, whose general editor, Roger Sharrock, justly commented on Offor's work as containing 'an amount of painstaking if amateur bibliographical information, and a verbose and often melodramatic evangelical commentary'. His other Bunyan publications included a careful reprint (1848) of the first edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* with notes of all subsequent authorial adjustments.

Offor's library, with nearly 4000 literary items and including more than 500 Bunyan rarities, was destined for sale at Sothebys over eleven days from 27 June 1865 onwards, but much was lost in a fire at the auction rooms on 29 June. About a thousand volumes salvaged from the blaze were sold by Puttick and Simpson the following year. Many of the surviving Bunyan items came into the possession of Sir Leicester Harmsworth (sale, Sothebys, February 1947); the Offor family's portion of the remainder was presented in 1964 by his grandson Richard (1882–1964), sometime librarian of the University of Leeds, to the Elstow Moot Hall, in the village of Bunyan's birth, and is now in the charge of the Bedford Central Library.

Offor compiled an introductory Hebrew reader (1812) and produced a revised edition of the Hebrew psalter (1820). A reprint of Tyndale's 1526 New Testament, with an introductory memoir (1836), was more substantial. He edited several other protestant reprints and projected a reprint of Coverdale's Bible. His collections towards a history of the English Bible between 1525 and 1679 are in the British Library (Add. MSS 26670–26674). The British Library also holds many printed volumes bearing Offor's copious annotations.

GORDON GOODWIN, rev. ALAN BELL

Sources *GM*, 3rd ser., 17 (1864), 396, 528 • *The Athenaeum* (24 June 1865), 831 • *The Athenaeum* (3 April 1886), 449 • *N&Q*, 3rd ser., 6 (1864), 150, 485 • *N&Q*, 3rd ser., 8 (1865), 20, 85, 160 • *The miscellaneous works of John Bunyan*, ed. R. Sharrock and others, 13 vols. (1976–94), vol. 1 • F. M. Harrison, *A bibliography of the works of John Bunyan* (1932) • *CGPLA Eng. & Wales* (1864)

Archives BL, collections for history of the English Bible and extracts from religious tracts, Add. MSS 26670–26674 | Elstow Moot Hall, Bedfordshire, books from Offor's collection

Likenesses T. Gilks, woodcut, BM, NPG

Wealth at death under £6000: probate, 2 Nov 1864, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*