

For the success of this enterprise, however, it is necessary that an enlightened government be willing to grant it a powerful and constant protection against injustice, persecution, and the calumny of enemies.

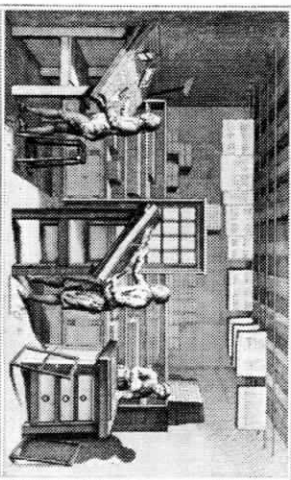
(‘Invention’, *Encyclopédie*, vol. VIII, 1765)

Engravings of Technology, from the *Encyclopédie*

In addition to its comprehensive examination of the arts and sciences, the *Encyclopédie* (see p. 21) included detailed entries and illustrations on the work and skills of tradespeople and master craftsmen. Contrary to the traditional downgrading of the ‘mechanical’ arts, the *Encyclopédie* attempted to raise their status by emphasising their usefulness in maintaining human welfare and supporting economic progress. The editor, Denis Diderot, himself the son of a master cutler, interviewed master craftsmen regarding their trades, tools and methods of production. Meticulous drawings were made for the *Encyclopédie*’s 2,500 engravings, contained in eleven volumes of plates, including illustrations of what were considered to be contemporary best practices. Diderot exclaimed, ‘How strangely we judge! We demand that people should be usefully engaged, and we disdain useful men!’

Figure 5.1 ‘Printing Press’

Source: *Encyclopédie* vol. VII, plate 1.



Note: Printing presses were essential tools for the communication and dissemination of ideas and knowledge in the eighteenth century, so it is no surprise that the editors of the *Encyclopédie* took a special interest in surveying all aspects of printing and book production. The Enlightenment both depended upon and promoted the growth of a print culture, disseminating ideas largely through the media of newspapers, pamphlets, journals, novels, scholarly books and engravings. Moreover, the long and complex history of the production of the *Encyclopédie* itself was testimony to the difficulty and importance of maintaining scholarly publication. It was prohibited in 1752, and again in 1759 when it was also placed upon the Catholic Index of forbidden books. Despite its importance, however, the technological development of printing was slow in the eighteenth century. The traditional, usually family-run, hand-press remained dominant, though many printing-houses became larger in the course of the century.

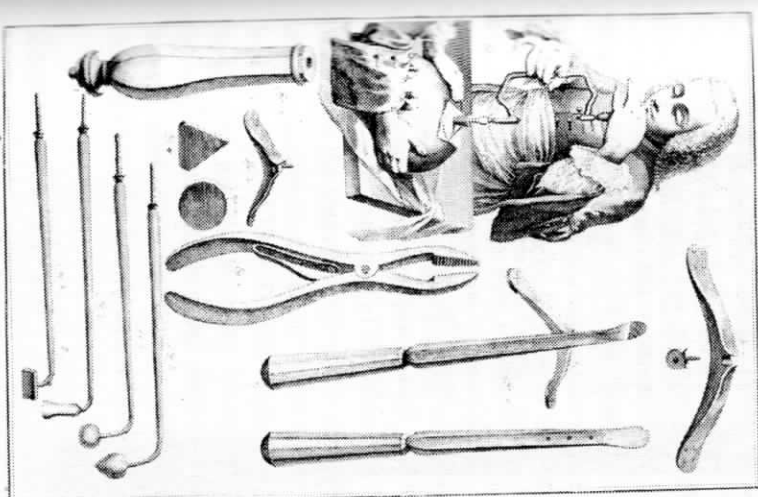


Figure 5.2 ‘Drilling Head’

Source: *Encyclopédie* vol. XII, plate XVII.

Note: Apart from a vast array of ‘quacks’, in the eighteenth century the medical ‘profession’ consisted of three groups: physicians (university-educated practitioners who diagnosed and prescribed for patients); surgeons (usually trained through apprenticeships, who performed most surgery, from extracting teeth to amputating limbs); and apothecaries (trained by apprenticeship, who kept shops and dispensed the physicians’ prescriptions). Surgeons and apothecaries were regarded as craftsmen and tradesmen, and were therefore not generally held in high esteem. In presenting the methods and instruments employed in surgery, the *Encyclopédie* helped to raise the prestige of the practice, and prompted further scientific investigation into surgical methods.

