

A HISTORY OF PRINTING IN SCOTLAND

The first printing press in Scotland was set up in Edinburgh in 1507 by Walter Chepman and Andrew Myllar, two merchants in the city. They were encouraged to embark on the new trade by James IV who granted them exclusive privileges to practise this art on 15th September 1507

SHOW CHARTER

Acting under this privilege, Chepman & Myllar obtained materials from France and began to print tracts of a popular kind, consisting chiefly of short romances, ballads, and other poems, for the most part of Scottish composition.

They include the first dated printed book – The Complaint of the Black Knight printed in 1508. The poem, The Complaint of the Black Knight was often attributed in Scotland to Chaucer. In fact the author was another English poet, John Lydgate.

SHOW BOOK COVER

The more important work of publishing Acts of Parliament and books of law was postponed by their royal patron; and for a time all they produced were these minor publications.

Until 1788 it was supposed that all the earlier works of the first Scottish printers had been lost; but then a number of the tracts were discovered in a poor state somewhere in Ayrshire. These were carefully bound up and are now among the most valued treasures of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh.

A facsimile of them was published in 1827, but only a small number of copies were issued, and the book is consequently rare. The collection, which is entitled "The Knightly Tale of Golagrus and Gawane, and other Poems— printed at Edinburgh by W. Chepman and A. Myllar in the year 1508"— consists of ten poems and an essay; and among the authors are Dunbar, Chaucer, and Henryson.

There were a few other works of note printed in Edinburgh during the sixteenth century

- In 1526 a foreigner, who gives his name as Jodocus Badins Ascensius, produced an edition of " Boetii Historia Scotorum." (a brief history of Scotland)
- Fifteen years after the Acts of the Scottish Parliament were ordered to be printed, and the work was entrusted to Thomas Davidson, who was by then the King's printer. A copy of this book, printed on vellum, is also in the Advocate's Library, and is a fine specimen of typography.
- A later King's printer named Lekprivik printed all of the Acts of Parliament from the reign of James I. Things were starting to develop now and in addition to his Edinburgh establishment, Lekprivik had printing offices at St Andrews and Stirling. He also printed a considerable number of books.
- Thomas Bassandyne published a folio Bible in 1576; and Alexander Arbuthnot, yet another King's printer, published a copy of "Buchanini Historia," (a history of Scotland) in 1582.

The progress of the printing industry was slow in those early days because it started to spread both facts and opinions among the population, and it became an object of jealousy for both the Church and the State. Those connected with the press felt they had a mighty power at their command, and they exercised it freely.

After the Reformation in Scotland, the General Assembly assumed the censorship of the press, and no books of a religious kind were allowed to be printed until they had obtained the approval of the Church Court. Even then the printer had to obtain a license from the magistrates before he could proceed with the work.

There are grounds for admitting that some restrictions were necessary; it's recorded that one printer – we don't know who – issued a book and designated the King "the Supreme Head of the Church," in the dedication. He also published an edition of the psalms with an obscene song appended. However, for these offences, the only punishment inflicted was an order to call in all the objectionable books, and to remove the dedication and the last leaf of the psalms.

The seventeenth century was a troublesome period for Scottish printers. In 1637 Young, printer to Charles I, printed a Book of Common Prayer in a style unequalled anywhere at the time; but this achievement was an unfortunate one for the printer, as the Covenanters were so outraged at the content that they forced him to flee the kingdom.

When the Civil War broke out later in Charles' reign, Young's partner, Evan Tyler, became printer to Cromwell, and subsequently sold his patent to a company of stationers in London. The company sent up a manager and some workmen, and opened a printing office at Leith, where they reprinted newspapers obtained from London. Unsurprisingly, the business didn't succeed. The types etc were bought by a number of stationers, who set up offices in which they printed treatises on divinity and school books. The quality was said to be poor though.

A costly attempt was made to revive and improve the art by Archibald Hyslop and William Carron, who brought materials from Holland, and began to work in a very neat style; but they met with only partial success.

The printing trade was then thrown into confusion by a Glasgow printer, named Anderson, coming to Edinburgh, and, in the name of the other members of the trade, securing the rights of King's printer.

Although it was Anderson who assumed the title of royal printer, the privileges of the office were to be shared equally among the Edinburgh printers.

A dispute put an end to the latter part of the arrangement, but not to the patent granted to Anderson, whose widow (he was by then dead) assumed a monopoly of the printing business. In terms of the patent, "no one in the kingdom durst print any book, from a Bible to a ballad, without licence from Anderson."

Mrs Anderson was determined to make the most of the important privilege she possessed, and as there was no competition, quantity and not quality was what she produced.

In a "History of Printing," written by a printer of that time, it is stated that "*nothing came from the royal press but the most illegible and incorrect Bibles and books that ever were printed in any one place of the world. She (Mrs Anderson) regarded not the honour of the nation, and never minded the duty that lay upon her as the sovereign's servant. Apprentices, instead of best workmen, were generally employed in printing the sacred Word of God.*"

Mrs Anderson made a most tyrannical use of her powers, and prosecuted every printer who dared to exercise his trade. Reids of Edinburgh, Saunders of Glasgow, and Forbes of Aberdeen, were among those who suffered most as in addition to having their printing offices closed, they were subjected to fines and imprisonment.

Eventually there was such indignation at the restrictions to which the printers were subjected, that Mrs Anderson's privileges were first curtailed, and ultimately annulled.

In 1700 some pamphlets criticising the Government were printed in Edinburgh, and the result was that *all* of the printers in the city were summoned before the Privy Council, and two of them were sent to prison.

An engraving offensive to Government was produced about the same time and the artist (and the person who assisted him) were tried for high treason. The engraving represented Caledonia in the figure of a woman from whose mouth issued the words, "*Take courage, and act as men that hold their liberty as well as their glory dear.*" The Lords found the libel not relevant to infer treason, but relevant to infer an arbitrary punishment. Unfortunately we don't know what.

Although the art of printing was introduced into Scotland well over 500 years ago, it was slow to assume importance as a branch of industry. We can get an idea of this from the book "A History of Edinburgh" written by Hugo Arnot of Balcormo in 1779.

(He was a Scottish Advocate, writer and campaigner - he opposed local taxation and road tolls as the means for funding road projects because they mainly hit the poorer part of the population. He's said to have held up the erection of the city's South Bridge for 10 years)

Arnot wrote that "*within these forty years, the printing of newspapers and of school books, of the fanatic effusions of Presbyterian clergymen, and of the law papers of the Court of Session, joined to the patent bible printing, gave a scanty employment to four printing houses. Such, however, has been the increase of this trade by the reprinting of English books not protected by the statute concerning literary property, by the additional number of authors, and many lesser causes, that there are now no fewer than twenty-seven printing offices in Edinburgh. It must be confessed, however, that printing at Edinburgh is not, in general, so well executed as in London, and that it is far inferior to the workmanship of the Messrs Foulis, of Glasgow, which, indeed, would do honour to the press of any country.*"

Printing had been introduced into Glasgow in 1630 by George Anderson, (we heard about him and his unpleasant wife earlier) who was succeeded by Robert Saunders in 1661. The whole printing business of the west of Scotland (except a newspaper published in Glasgow) was carried on by a Mr Saunders and his son till about 1730, when the art was improved, and the trade extended by Robert Urie.

In 1740, Robert Foulis began printing in Glasgow, and introduced a style of work which excelled in beauty and correctness. With his brother, Foulis printed a series of classical

works, which were highly regarded for the accuracy and beauty of their typography. An edition of the poems of Horace, printed in 1744, is especially famous for its correctness, which was achieved about by Foulis sending proof sheets to the College where they were hung up and a reward of £50 was offered to anyone who could find any errors. A few were overlooked, and six were found some time later.

SHOW HORACE FRONT PAGE

There was a big leap forward when the first newspaper in Scotland was printed - in Leith on the 5th August 1651.

This was the "Mercurius Scoticus, or a true character of affairs in England, Ireland, Scotland, and other forraign parts, collected for publique satisfaction."

It was published weekly, and contained eight small pages of print. Apparently the "Mercury" did not pay, for next year it replaced with a reprint of a London newspaper, entitled, "A Diurnal of some passages and affairs."

This newspaper wasn't successful either and only lasted for a year. Next to come along was the *"Mercurius Politicus, comprising the sum of intelligence with the affairs and designs now on foot in the three nations of England, Ireland, and Scotland, in defence of the commonwealth, and for information of the people. Printed in London, and reprinted in Leith."*

Interestingly, an edition of this paper began to be printed in **Edinburgh** in 1655, and that was the first newspaper published in the city. Five years afterwards the paper was declared to be "published by order of Parliament," and was then printed by Christopher Higgins, in Hart's Close, opposite the Tron Church.

In 1661, Thomas Sydserf, son of the Bishop of Orkney, began the publication in Edinburgh of the *Mercurius Caledonius*, he focused on *"the affairs now in agitation in Scotland, with a survey of foreign intelligence."* This was a weekly journal, but it ceased to appear after the end of three months.

Undeterred by the misfortune that seemed to have befallen all of the newspapers so far, attempts to establish a paper in Scotland continued. The "Mercurius Caledonius" was succeeded by *"The Kingdoms Intelligencer, of the affairs now in agitation in Scotland, England, and Ireland; together with forraign intelligence. To prevent false news. Published by authority."*

This journal enjoyed a longer existence than all its predecessors united. The "Edinburgh Gazette," an official paper, published by authority, was established in 1699 by James Watson; and a few years later the "Scots Postman," a three times a week journal, was started.

In the west of Scotland the first newspaper published was the "Glasgow Courant," which was started in November 1715. It issued from the printing office in the College. There was no stamp duty at the time the "Courant" began its life, so the price of the paper was very low - if you subscribed it was one penny per copy, and thruppence ha'penny to non-subscribers. This pioneer journal of the west did not survive beyond a few years.

Prior to 1813, thirteen distinct newspapers had been set going in Glasgow, but by that year eight had ceased to exist. Among the extinct journals were two bearing the patriotic titles of the "Caledonian" and the "Scotchman." The "Journal" was started in 1729. The "Herald," which has been the most successful of the Glasgow newspapers, was begun in 1783, and up till 1803 had the title of "Advertiser."

In 1815, when the "Herald" was published twice a week, the circulation was about 1100 copies. The price was 7d - 3d for the paper and 4d for the duty.

The publisher thought it was a wonderful thing when the edition of the paper containing an official announcement of the battle of Waterloo achieved a sale of 2,122 copies. The total number of copies of newspapers of all kinds printed in Glasgow in 1815 was 373,718.

The principle of taxing publications and pamphlets had been introduced by an Act of 1712, at the level of a ha'penny. The duty had risen over time to 4d. It was widely regarded as a tax on knowledge and was abolished 1855.

The progress of the newspaper press subsequent to the abolition of the stamp, paper, and advertisement duties was impressive. By 1851 eleven daily papers were published in Scotland. Of these Edinburgh had 3, Glasgow 4, and Dundee and Greenock, 2 each.

One of the failed newspapers which had been quite dominant was the "Edinburgh Advertiser" established in 1764 by James Donaldson, who accumulated a large fortune in the printing and publishing business; and when he died, in 1830, left £200,000 for the endowment of Donaldson's Hospital for the Deaf. The publication of the paper ceased in 1859 when it merged with Edinburgh Evening Courant.

Of the papers published today, five were only established fifty years ago: the first daily paper was issued as recently as 1847. The "Scotsman" was established in 1817, and became a daily paper in 1855.

About the year 1730 the "Gentleman's Magazine" and the "London Magazine" began to acquire considerable circulation in Scotland, and an Edinburgh publishing firm thought that some home manufactured literature of that sort might be acceptable. In 1739 they issued the first number of the "Scots Magazine," which had a favourable reception, and continued for many years the sole representative of magazine literature in Scotland.

A collection of essays and extracts from newspapers was started by Walter Ruddiman of Edinburgh in 1768, under the title of "The Weekly Magazine." This publication was the subject of an action raised to prove that it was a newspaper, and therefore liable to stamp duty. The verdict went against it, so Ruddiman separated the news part from the miscellany, and continued to publish them as distinct publications for a number of years.

A new era of the literature of the country dawned in 1802, when the "Edinburgh Review" made its appearance, and struck terror into the whole body of poets, essayists, and book-makers. The subtle analysis, the profound learning, and the scathing sarcasm of the Reviewers, set them far above all the magazine writers of the time; and they were both respected and feared throughout the whole domain of literature. Very few people knew who they were; their names were kept profoundly secret; and, in order to avoid suspicion, they reached their rendezvous at Constable's office in Craig's Close by various routes.

The next periodical publication of mark produced in Scotland was "Blackwood's Magazine," which was begun in 1817 by William Blackwood. It ceased publication in 1980.

SHOW BLACKWOODS MAGAZINE COVER

As an aside, my father was a printer and he served his apprenticeship at Blackwoods.

SHOW APPRENTICESHIP CERTIFICATE

This magazine was most successful and became the vehicle by which many men of note in literature rose to fame. Several high class magazines were established in England on the model of "Blackwood" however the high price at which they were sold put them out of the reach of the great body of the people. Nevertheless a thirst for knowledge had been awakened in the masses by the extension of education and a more general distribution of books.

That want was met in part by the appearance in Scotland in 1832 of "Chambers's Edinburgh Journal," and in London of the "Penny Magazine,". The Penny Magazine was published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It would be almost impossible to overestimate the effect which these publications had in elevating the tastes and extending the knowledge of the masses. They were sold at an unprecedentedly low price, and were full of pleasantly written papers of a miscellaneous kind.

(You're probably aware that the publishers of Chambers Edinburgh Journal were local chaps – the two brothers William and Robert Chambers of Glenormiston. They were born into a rich, mill-owning family in Peebles in 1800 and 1802. We're very close to the Chambers Institution on the High Street here.)

The magazines printed in Scotland around this time were nearly forty in number, and a large portion of these were produced in Edinburgh. This would appear to indicate that the city was a sort of gold mine for readers but at least three quarters were trivial productions of the ecclesiastical type, or of the kind supplied to Sunday School children.

Although Scottish printers enjoyed a degree of prosperity it was not until James Ballantyne of Kelso published Walter Scott's "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border" in 1802 that any serious attempt was made to improve the style of book printing. This work was printed from a beautiful new type in the most careful manner, and when it appeared, those connected with the metropolitan press could not believe that a provincial publisher had produced work infinitely superior to anything they had achieved. There was a big shake up across the industry, and a search for better things was begun.

Improvements in the form of type and in the mechanism of the press were introduced, and the result was that work executed in Edinburgh would bear comparison with that of any country in the world.

James Ballantyne was an interesting character. He studied law at the University of Edinburgh and started to practise in Kelso. He was invited to edit the 'Kelso Mail' which was first issued in 1797. After he set up printing premises in Edinburgh, Scott insisted that his publications were to be printed there. His younger brother, John Ballantyne, joined the firm and they set up a publishing business but it wasn't successful. James Ballantyne also became editor of the 'Edinburgh Weekly Journal'. In 1826 a financial crisis resulted in both the bankruptcy of Scott's publishers and the collapse of Ballantyne's printing business. It

was rescued by a trust but the debts were actually discharged by Scott's creditors. On his deathbed he wrote a memorandum of his long association with the famous writer who had been a generous friend and business partner.

Edinburgh had a multitude of printing offices not directly connected with publishing houses, but doing work for them. The best known were Ballantyne and Co, Clarks, Constables, Murray & Gibb, and Neill & Co. Neill & Co was the oldest in the city, having begun business in 1749. They printed many important works, chief among them was "Encyclopaedia Britannica." Neill & Co. have also printed the "Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland" for upwards of a century, and "Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh" since the foundation of the Society in 1789.

These printers offered many specialist services – engraving departments designed and engraved banknotes, lithographics produced portraiture, and others carried out book binding - all in connection with some of the more extensive publishing houses. If you counted all the different business directly connected with and dependent upon the printing trade at this time, when the printing industry was at its absolute peak, about 10,000 people were employed in Scotland, and of these fully one half were in Edinburgh.

The printing industry in Scotland never achieved such levels of success again and a good example of its decline is Pillans and Wilson.

Pillans and Wilson was an Edinburgh printers operating from the Scottish Enlightenment onwards, with a number of well-known clients. They existed from 1775 to 2002.

The firm was founded by James Pillans in 1775. It began in a tenement in Edinburgh's South Side but moved to Hastie's Close soon after. It then moved to Riddles Court on the Lawnmarket off the Royal Mile. In 1788 it was renamed Pillans and Son when Hugh Pillans joined the firm.

When James Pillans died, his son Hugh Pillans took over, and in 1827 he was joined by his younger brother John. They moved to new premises (as H and J Pillans) at James Court on the opposite side of the Lawnmarket. This building was destroyed by fire in 1857 but they found alternative premises on James Court and stayed there until 1877 when they moved to 18 Thistle Street in the New Town. By this stage the "H" in H & J Pillans was Hugh Scott Pillans, the founder's grandson.

In 1890, they were joined by W. Scott Wilson to create the firm Pillans & Wilson, extending on the Thistle Street site in 1892. By the First World War they also ran a stationery shop at 86 Hanover Street. In 1918 they moved to the Newington Works at 20 Bernard Terrace.

In the 20th century, the firm passed to Robert Wilson who was also President of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce from 1932 to 1934. In 1996, they became a Limited Company: Pillans & Wilson Ltd.

In 2002 the company merged with Waddies of Livingston creating Pillans & Waddies. Waddies had downsized and moved from Slateford in Edinburgh as they began to struggle. That's where my dad worked most of his life. Sadly this expansion was short-lived, as it coincided with a shrinking in publishing due to the internet, and the company closed in 2006 with the loss of 240 jobs. However, the name Pillans & Wilson is kept alive

as a trading name by Pillans & Wilson Greenaway, who are based in a small office on Leith Walk.

A quick internet search for Scottish printers brings up loads of small businesses, and desk top publishing means that we can all produce documents today, but the foundations of this industry are woven into the industrialisation of both Scotland and the world.

SHOW SMAILS BROCHURE

SHOW SETTING STICK AND PHOTO

ROYAL CHARTER

“At His Majesty's request, for his pleasure, the honour and profit of his realm and lieges, had taken on them to furnish and bring hame ane prent, with all stuff belonging thareto, and expert men to use the same for imprinting within the realm of the books of the laws, Acts of Parliament, chronicles, mass-books, manuals, matin-books, and fortuus, after the use of the realm, with additions and legends of Scottish saints now gathered to be eked thereto, and all other books that shall be seen necessary, and to sell the same for competent prices, by His Majesty's advice and discretion, their labours and expenses being considered.”

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pro amabilis. indidit*



BLACKWOOD'S
Edinburgh
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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH;

AND

T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

1829.

From . . .

WM. BLACKWOOD & SONS LTD.
Printers and Electrotypers

Telegrams—"BLACKWOOD'S, EDINBURGH"
Telephone No. 30636

32 THISTLE STREET

EDINBURGH 2, 29th June, 1948

THIS CERTIFIES that Alastair Anderson,
24 Broughton Road, commenced his apprentice-
ship as a Compositor on 28th June, 1948.
The term of apprenticeship ruling at this
date is seven years.

A. B. Baird Wilson
Manager

