

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 1: Edinburgh

Part One: Beginnings

The history of book printing in Edinburgh begins with the granting of a patent, dated 15 September 1507, to Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar— ‘burgessis of our town of Edinburgh’—by James IV. It was at the specific request of the King that Chepman and Myllar brought the press from France for ‘imprenting within our Realme of the bukis of our Lawis, actis of parliament, chroniclis, mess buiks ánd portuus¹ efter the use of our Realme, with addicions and legendis of Scottis Sanctis’ and they were granted a measure of protection in order to guarantee them recompense for their ‘rycht greit cost, labour and expens’ in the enterprise.

Walter Chepman was a man of property, well known to the King, and probably supplying the capital necessary to start the business as well as the premises in the Southgait (Cowgate) where it was to be based. Myllar, on the other hand, seems to have supplied the technical know-how. Already a bookseller, he had traveled to France to learn the trade at Rouen, only returning to Edinburgh around 1507 with the techniques and technology which were required. Throughout the century Scottish printers were to retain close links with France which were only surrendered under the gradually increasing influence of English and Dutch taste and developments.

As well as those items which the Chepman—Myllar partnership were authorised to print in their original charter they also printed many of Dunbar’s and Henryson’s poems including *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy*, *The Twa Marrit Wemen and the Wedo* and *The Gest of Robyn Hode*. The jewel of their press and the primary motivation behind its creation was the *Aberdeen Breviary* of 1509—10. The *Aberdeen Breviary* was written by William Elphinstone, bishop of that town, and was a two-volume work intended to provide an authentically Scottish form of service which would replace the then current English one.

In the confusion and trauma which followed the catastrophe of Flodden, the newly founded printing trade suffered with the rest of the country. Royal patronage was brought to an end and, after the death of Andro Myllar c.1511, no printer of note appeared in Edinburgh until the advent of Thomas Davidson in the late 1520’s.² Davidson was the first printer in Scotland to use Roman type in *Strena*, a poem written c.1528 to celebrate the accession of King James V. and he was also commissioned to print the Acts of Parliament in 1541.

The years leading up to and including the Reformation saw a dramatic increase in the number of printers and printing material fuelled by the gathering storm of debate, argument and denunciation. The degree of confusion arising from these years of secular and religious intrigue and division can be gauged by the fact that it was felt necessary in 1552 to enact a law ‘anent prentaris’ which attempted to regulate the printing of all material by making it necessary to gain the approval of ‘sum wyse and discreit persounis depute thairto be the ordinaris quhatsumever’ to guarantee the orthodoxy of the particular work. Failure to do so could lead to the seizure of goods and banishment. Although these were dangerous times, a printer could, with sufficient nerve and circumspection, turn the situation to advantage. John Scot was one such. In 1552 he printed the *Catechism of Archbishop Hamilton*, and in 1553 the Acts of Parliament. Immediately after the Reformation he printed the Reformers’ *Confession of Faith* but, perhaps inevitably, became unstuck when, in 1562, he was arrested by the magistrates of Edinburgh for printing the work of a Catholic priest. He did not print again until 1568.

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Robert Lekprevik was another printer deeply involved in the politics and intrigue of his time. Closely associated with the reformed kirk (the General Assembly lent him £200 towards printing the Psalms in 1562 and, in 1569, awarded him a yearly stipend of £50). He was made King's Printer in 1567 after having printed the Acts of Queen Mary and her predecessors. However, despite this wealth of distinction and support, he was arrested in 1574 for the printing of an unlicensed tract and jailed. He did not print again until 1581.

His work is distinguished in two particular respects. Firstly, in 1567 he printed the first book in Gaelic, *Foirm Na Nurrnuidheadh Agas freusdal na Sacramuinteadh*, a translation of John Knox's Book of Common Order by the Bishop of the Isles. This was followed in 1568 by the first medical treatise to be printed in Scotland, *Ane Breve Descriptioun of the Pest Quhair In the Causis, Signis and sum special! preservatioun and cure thair of ar contenit*, written by an Edinburgh doctor, Gilbert Skeyne, whilst the town was plague-ridden.

In his edition of Henryson's *Moral Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian* (1570) can be seen, in the 'civilit' typeface, the continuing attachment to French rather than English taste and technology.

The dominance of French influence can also be seen in the career of Thomas Bassandyne who had worked in Paris and Leyden before returning to Scotland where he took Queen Mary's side. Bassandyne's main claim to fame rests with his role in the printing of the first Bible in Scotland. With his partner, Alexander Arbuthnot, he produced a reprint of the Geneva Bible of 1561; the New Testament appeared under Bassandyne's name in 1576, the Old Testament under Arbuthnot's in 1579.

Edinburgh printing enjoyed a close and long-standing connection with the Monarchy. The printer Robert Waldegrave was a particularly good example of this. Born in Blackley, England, he learned his trade in London, where he became involved in a controversy over the role of bishops in the Anglican church and had to emigrate suddenly, first to France and then to Scotland. While in Scotland he printed a great number of works and, having reached the position of King's Printer, he produced the first book on maritime jurisprudence in Britain, *The Sea Law of Scotland, shortly gathered and plainly dressit for the reddy use of all sea-faring men*. He also printed the works of James VI himself, *Daemonologie* (1597) and *Basilikon Doron* (1597), the latter (containing James' instructions to his son on the art of ruling) was judged to be such sensitive material that the printer was sworn to secrecy and only seven copies were printed, to be distributed among James' most trusted servants. When James went to London to accept the English crown, Waldegrave went with him.

The Union of the Crowns in 1603, with the subsequent departure of the court to London, badly affected the Edinburgh printing industry. It removed a major source of patronage, and the total number of books produced in the years immediately following 1603 dropped sharply. However, all was not lost. The Kirk, the University, the Law Courts and private individuals remained and there was always a market for classics such as Barbour's Bruce, reprinted by Andro Hart in 1614, which harkened back to a time when relations with England were much more clear-cut. Current Scottish intellectual achievement was also well served by the native printing industry: witness Andro Hart's printing of John Napier's book on logarithms, *Mirifici Logarithmorum Canonis Constructio*, published in 1614 and reprinted in 1619.

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It was in 1633 that the first Scottish edition of the Authorised Version of the Bible was printed by Robert Young, printer to Charles I. It arrived at a time of religious tension and uncertainty, and an edition which included illustrative plates proved to be highly controversial. This atmosphere of tension gave rise to a twenty-year cycle of war, famine, instability, invasion and repression from the Bishops' Wars of 1639—42, through the 'English' Civil War to the Cromwellian occupation. These circumstances were not conducive to either the writing or the printing of books. Evan Tyler, who was made King's Printer in 1642, later 'defected' to the parliamentary faction and went on to print for both parliament and the General Assembly 'diverse seditious, rebellious and scandalous papers destructive to his Majesties government and to the Government of this Kirk and Kingdome'³ which, upon the Restoration, cost him his earlier distinguished position. He returned to Edinburgh in 1660 after some time in his native England, where he continued his printing career, eventually being reinstated by King Charles II.

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Part Two Chequered Careers

The latter part of the seventeenth century is dominated by one family: the Andersons. Andro Anderson (whose father had introduced printing to Glasgow in 1638) was made King's Printer by Charles II. However, he printed few works and, when he died in 1676 his wife Agnes (who reverted to her maiden name of Campbell) took over the business, the title and the monopoly which went with it. Inheriting little else but debts from her husband she pursued the monopoly ruthlessly, prosecuting any who dared print without her permission. Her domination of the printing industry in Scotland lasted for forty years, punctuated by legal disputes, appeals, allegations of bad workshop practice and condemnations of the atrocious quality of her work.

Her Bibles came in for especially heavy criticism, containing errors such as 'he killed' for 'he is killed', 'longed' for 'lodged', 'covereth the sinner' for 'converteth the sinner' and 'his eyes' for 'his ears'. In one edition an italic 'a' was used 700 times in five columns when its Roman equivalent was used up in the fount of type.⁴

As James Watson, her most tenacious opponent, put it: 'nothing was study'd but gaining of money by printing of Bibles at any rate; which she knew none other durst do, and that nobody could want them'⁵. This being taken into account and notwithstanding the atrocious quality of her work (which was in many cases only slightly worse than the generally bad printing of the time), her financial achievement was remarkable. Having inherited debts of £745 18s. 8d. from her husband she left a legacy of £78,196 10s. 6d. upon her death in 1716.

Agnes Campbell's 'reign of terror' over the Scottish printing trade was brought to a close in 1711 when, upon the expiry of her patent, successful application was made for it by James Watson and Robert Freebairn, both Edinburgh printers.

Watson had already led a somewhat chequered career. His father had been ruined by a mob's destruction of his Grassmarket printing premises and had been forced to set up his press in the sanctuary of Holyrood Abbey. In 1700 James Watson printed a controversial pamphlet called *Scotland's Grievance Concerning Darien* and was promptly jailed for the aspersions it cast upon the good faith of various prominent persons. Freed by the Edinburgh mob in a night of rioting to celebrate the Toubacanti victory, Watson turned himself in to the authorities the next morning. He was eventually banished to the Gorbals for a year.

Upon his return he soon found himself entangled in legal argument with Mrs Campbell. The opening engagement in a general antagonism which was to last until 1711 and which figured largely in Watson's *History of Printing* (1715). The book detailed the abuses of Mrs Campbell's regime and argued the necessity of a revival of the high standards and good name of printing.

Robert Freebairn entered into partnership with James Watson following the collapse of the Anderson empire, sharing the office of King's Printer. In 1715 he printed the Declaration of the Jacobite Earl of Mar. After participating in a failed attempt to capture Edinburgh Castle, Freebairn fled the town. He joined the Jacobite army at Perth and used a printing press which had been commandeered in Aberdeen to produce an understandably biased account of the Battle of

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Sherrifmuir. On the failure of the rebellion he escaped to the Continent, returning surreptitiously during the 1720's to reclaim his post as King's Printer.

The collapse of the Anderson/Campbell printing monopoly signalled a general proliferation in the number of printing shops as well as an increase in the general quality of work. This proliferation drew men into the trade who had, previously, been only marginal to it. Among these men was Thomas Ruddiman.

A noted academic, Ruddiman, in 1714, had written a classical textbook, *Rudiments of the Latin Tongue*, which had become a standard. In the next year he entered the printing trade with his brother Walter. Together they produced a newspaper, *The Caledonian Mercury*. In recognition of his reputation as 'the most learned printer that North Britain has ever enjoyed' he was made printer to the College of Edinburgh in 1728. A man of Jacobite sympathies he was said to have printed the proclamation of James VII as King which the Young Pretender caused to be read out from the Mercat Cross of Edinburgh when he arrived in the town. In the aftermath of the 1745 rebellion he printed a series of books on disputed areas of Scottish history. In escaping punishment for his Jacobite leanings, Ruddiman was more fortunate than some. One printer, Robert Drummond, who published a condemnation of the atrocities which took place after Culloden had his works publicly burned in the streets while he was forced to stand by wearing a label which read 'For printing and publishing a false scandalous and defamatory libel'. He was then banished from the city for a year on pain of a £100 fine and serving the year in jail.

In the Edinburgh of the Enlightenment, some of the city's printers played a part in the general spirit of enquiry and intellectual activity. Ruddiman was one example. Another was Patrick Neill, founder of the firm of Neill & Co and also a renowned botanist, partly responsible for the establishment of West Princes Street Gardens.

In 1739, at the age of fourteen, Neill was apprenticed to a printer by the name of James Cochran. He then joined the firm of Hamilton & Balfour, eventually becoming the senior partner. Hamilton's departure in 1762 gave rise to the firm of Balfour & Neill, which in turn became, upon Balfour's retiral in 1765, Neill & Company. Until its demise in 1973 it was to be one of Edinburgh's foremost printing firms.

While still partnered with Balfour, Neill took on an apprentice by the name of William Smellie. The son of an architect, he proved to be so precocious as to earn himself the responsible post of corrector while still an apprentice, adding seven shillings to his weekly wage of three shillings. He went on to fulfil his early promise, setting up shop with his old master Balfour. He became printer to Edinburgh University and edited the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as well as the *Edinburgh Weekly Journal*. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* was printed in Edinburgh in 1771 by Carruthers and Bell with extensive copperplate illustrations. Smellie went on to print the Edinburgh Edition of Burns's poems in 1787. His other intellectual accomplishments included being candidate (failed) for the post of Professor of Natural History in 1793 and Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries for Scotland whose proceedings he also printed.

James Pillans, an apprentice of William Smellie, went on to open his own shop in Riddle's Court around 1775. While in Riddle's Court, James Pillans admitted his son Hugh as a partner in the firm which then became J. Pillans & Son. A separate business had been carried out by another son John,

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and the two merged in 1827 when the firm became H. & J. Pillans. Soon after this merger the business moved across the Lawnmarket to new premises at James's Court. When this building was destroyed by fire in 1857 the brothers re-established their business in another building in James's Court where they remained for another twenty years.

The late eighteenth century witnessed the arrival of a new printer on the Edinburgh scene. Peter Williamson had been born near Aberdeen around 1740, kidnapped as a child and sold as a slave in America. On regaining his freedom he had settled down and married. He was then attacked, captured, tortured and enslaved by Indians; he escaped and made his way back to civilisation. On his return he discovered that his wife had died in his absence. He next joined a force which was being raised to fight the French and their Indian allies. Wounded and captured at the siege of Otago, he was deported to Plymouth as a prisoner of war. On account of his wound he was discharged from the army and given six shillings to return to Aberdeen. This money allowed him to reach York, where he raised some more by writing an account of his adventures. This enabled him to complete his journey to Aberdeen.

Upon his arrival in Aberdeen he was arrested on the basis of the account he had given of his kidnap, which incriminated members of the council. His book was burned by the public hangman: he was imprisoned, forced to recant, fined ten shillings and banished from Aberdeen. He made his way to Edinburgh where 'at the lug of the law', he successfully prosecuted Aberdeen Town Council, using his awarded damages to establish himself in a coffee shop at the rear of the courts.

Williamson's career as a self-publicist reached a high point when, in 1769, he obtained a printing press from London, taught himself to print in the backroom of his coffee shop and produced his first book — William Meston's *Mob Contra Mob*. As a preface to this, Williamson included an open letter to the printers of Edinburgh which casts some light on the closeness with which trade secrets were guarded at the time. In a cynical, ironic 'tribute' to his 'brethren printers' he noted the complete unwillingness of any of the printers to instruct him in the art. 'I was born near Aberdeen', he added, 'where it is thought a crime to be honest; and I think such precepts the best lessons a Printer can get'.

However, in the end, Williamson resolved that he would 'always stand up for my Brethren Printers, and for the liberty of the press; and shall be watchful to check every scoundrel who may have the impudence to pry into our secrets without our permission'. Having thus embarked on the course of printing Williamson pursued it vigorously. As well as further editions of his Indian adventures, he went on to print his *Directory for Edinburgh, Canongate, Leith and Suburbs* (the first), an alphabetical account of the whole world, the publicity for his Edinburgh Penny Post service and, finally, an account of his own *Trial of Divorce*.

Such colourful characters as Peter Williamson, however, were the exception rather than the rule. The general trend in the latter part of the eighteenth century was towards the amalgamation of smaller firms into bigger ones and it is in this period that we first come across names which were to last into the twentieth century.

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Part Three

The Era of Industrialisation

Thomas Oliver began his printing career in a humble way, composing type upon his mother's hearth-stone. Twenty years later, in 1808, he took on as a partner a bookbinder by the name of George Boyd, so giving rise to what was to become one of the longest lasting and most famous of Edinburgh printing firms. Originally based in various buildings around the High Street, Oliver & Boyd moved to their premises in Tweeddale Court in 1820. The firm worked closely with James Hogg, John Gait and Thomas Carlyle and specialised in the publishing of Scottish poetry. By 1836 they were the first firm in Edinburgh to combine printing bookbinding and publishing on a large scale within a single building.

Another long lasting firm, T. & A. Constable, had their origins in this period. Archibald Constable, the publisher, married the daughter of the printer David Willison and eventually inherited his business, forming a joint printing and publishing enterprise.

As a whole the eighteenth century is dominated by the Glasgow firm, the Foulis Press, whose impressively accurate and beautifully printed editions of classical texts gave Scottish printing for the first time, an international reputation for excellence. It is also the period which, in its later stages marks the emergence of printing as a major industry rather than a small scale craft; one of the firms in the forefront of this development was that of James Ballantyne and Co.

Founded in Kelso in 1796, Ballantyne's enjoyed a particularly close relationship with Sir Walter Scott. This began when James Ballantyne printed a run-off of Scott's *An Apology for Tales of Terror* as a sample for Edinburgh publishers. Archibald Constable was sufficiently impressed to instruct this new company to proceed with Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, which was to be widely praised for, among other things, the high quality of its printing. It was while the *Minstrelsy* was being printed that the firm moved from the Borders to Edinburgh in 1802. At first setting up near Holyrood, they next moved to Foulis Close in the Canongate before settling in Paul's Work, north back of Canongate, at the foot of Calton Hill.

In many respects Ballantyne's was typical of the general trend of printing in nineteenth century Edinburgh, enjoying a close relationship with author and publisher, a good reputation for high quality work and combining this with a very large output of books. In Ballantyne's case this can be seen in the handling of Scott's *Waverley* which was an immediate and massive success and brought the Paul's Work plant to capacity production. The relationship between Ballantyne, Scott and Constable was too close, however, and when Constable's collapsed in 1826 both James Ballantyne and Scott were also bankrupted. The resulting debts were to kill Scott when, in an attempt to pay them off, he worked himself to death.

In 1833 T. & A. Constable moved to bigger premises in Thistle Street under the supervision of Thomas Constable, their new director. Two years later he was made King's Printer, in 1859 printer to Edinburgh University and, in 1869, his son Archibald maintained the family honour by being made, in turn, King's Printer.

Another famous Edinburgh printing firm began its long history soon after T. & A. Constable. R. &

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R. Clark was founded in 1846 and went on to play a prominent role in Edinburgh's printing life, enjoying particularly close relationships with the authors Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling and George Bernard Shaw.

The story of William and Robert Chambers is part of the folklore of the self-made entrepreneurs of nineteenth century Scotland. When their father's business failed the family moved to Edinburgh where thirteen-year-old William had to find work and became apprenticed to Mr Sutherland, a book-seller. When the younger Robert left school he attended the Latin class at Edinburgh University—for one day, when he discovered he could not afford the fees. Then, at sixteen and on William's advice, he opened a bookshop with a stock of his old schoolbooks and the remains of his father's library. When William's apprenticeship ended, he first joined Robert and later opened his own bookshop nearby.

Soon the teenage bookseller brothers moved into authorship, printing and publishing as well. William bought an old handpress and, after months of painstaking effort, produced and sold his first work, *Songs of Robert Burns*. Next he set, printed and bound Robert's own *Traditions of Edinburgh*, which proved an immediate success and is still in print today. This was in 1819 and marked the beginning of William and Robert Chambers. In 1932 arrangements were made with T. & A. Constable to under-take their printing including the famous *Chamber's Journal* but the publishing side of the business still continues in Edinburgh.

The year 1837 saw the beginnings of a firm which was to become one of the best known of Edinburgh printing firms throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Originally founded as William Oliphant & Co., a new partnership took over in 1841 and the firm became Murray & Gibb, based in George Street. The business moved to Thistle Street Lane in 1845 due to the increasing volume of trade. In 1864 Mr William Oliphant Morrison, a relation of the original Mr Oliphant, joined the firm becoming a senior partner upon the death of Thomas Murray in 1872. In 1879 the firm was re-named Morrison & Gibb, a title it was to retain until its closure in 1985.

Thomas Nelson was originally a bookseller, trading from his shop at the Bowhead. Thus it was a natural progression for him to move into the printing industry. He began in a modest way, working above his shop, stereotyping reprints of well known books. He soon expanded, however, moving his works to premises at Castle Hill Business grew at such a rate that soon another move became necessary and, in 1843, Nelson & Sons moved to their Hope Park works where they were to remain, until dislodged by a disastrous fire in 1878. They set an innovative example in the mass production of cheap literature such as *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

A company closely associated with Edinburgh book printers were the bookbinders Hunter & Foulis Ltd. They were founded by William Hunter at Strichen's Close, off the High Street, in 1857 as William Hunter & Company. Douglas A. Foulis took over the firm in 1925 and it became Hunter & Foulis Ltd., in 1946. A more recent milestone in the company's long history was their take-over of Henderson & Bisset in 1968. In spite of the demise of the large book printing houses in Edinburgh, it is noteworthy that Hunter & Foulis Ltd., continue as a family business and remain one of the largest publishers', bookbinders in the UK.

Inasmuch as the nineteenth century was the era of industrialisation it was also the era which saw the introduction of industrial relations as we know them.

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Traditionally, workshops had been organised into 'chapels', involving both masters and men, which regulated the internal affairs of the shop and raised funds to cover special occasions, sickness and misfortune. Increasing size of workplace, unavoidably, began the separation of masters and men. By the time of the Combination Acts (1799 and 1800), which proscribed trade unions, this process was well established and printers, amongst others, resorted to the 'Friendly Society' and met semi-formally in ale-houses in order to maintain their organisations.

It was from this sort of organisation that the first major dispute in Edinburgh's printing history arose. In 1803 the compositors of Edinburgh submitted a request to the sheriff that they be allowed to convene a meeting of the craft. Their grievance was that, although trade was flourishing prices were steadily rising and wages had remained static since 1792. Permission was granted and a request for an increase in wages was passed to the employers. When this initial request was refused the case was taken to law and a decision returned against the compositors. However, on appeal to the Court of Session, this decision was reversed and an Interlocutor was issued which, as well as awarding the case to the compositors, gave the new scale of prices the force of law.

This ensured some years of calm but the economic turmoil which followed the Napoleonic War meant that the new scale of wages became quickly out-dated by events. Aided by the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824, the process of unionisation continued and, in 1836, the General Typographical Association of Scotland was formed. It was concerned mainly with the regulation of prices and with controlling the number of apprentices. It found itself strained by the large number of small strikes which the latter issue provoked and so, in 1844, it became the Northern District of the National Typographical Association (a British organisation).

Soon after this the Northern District Board found itself with an adversary. Alarmed by the growth of trade unionism, the printing employers of Edinburgh formed themselves into an organisation, the Master Printers Association, to defend their own interests. In October 1846, they issued a three-part resolution:

- 1 That no journeyman shall be taken into employment who either leaves or threatens to leave his employer on 'strike'.
- 2 No journeyman shall be taken into employment without producing a certificate from his last employer.
- 3 That in all cases Masters shall prefer Non-Unionists to Unionists.

The new union could not allow such an obvious and dangerous blow to pass unchallenged. The bitter dispute which followed lasted a year and ended with the demise of the Northern District Board of the National Typographical Association.

The late forties were years of deep economic depression and this made the revival of the union much more difficult. Nonetheless, this was slowly accomplished and the Edinburgh Typographical Society rose from the ruins of the Northern District Board. In December of 1851 the Edinburgh Typographical Society gave its approval to a proposed amalgamation of all Scottish printing societies and the Scottish Typographical Association eventually came into being on 1st January 1853.

The introduction of new technology into the printing industry was a relatively smooth and gradual process. Steam presses became a feature of the workshop as early as 1815 while the much more

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complicated composing and distributing machines were not to arrive until the last three decades of the century. Their arrival had long been foreseen and the objection raised was not against their use but against the employment of unskilled hands to operate them.

Thus when the last great dispute of the nineteenth century arrived in 1872 it was not the encroachment of new technology which gave rise to it but the desire among the men to reduce their hours to 51 per week and to secure a rise of ½d. per 1000 lines on piece rates of pay.

The employers acted *en masse*, as the Master Printers Association, in refusing these demands and 750 men came out on strike. Four months later it was found that these places had almost all been filled by non-union men, women and children. The strike was ended. Almost all of the strikers were re-employed and the main significance of the dispute was that for the first time women compositors were trained and employed by the major firms.

Robert Clark, of R. & R. Clark, claimed the distinction of having trained Fanny McPherson to be the first woman compositor in Britain. She subsequently taught other women and remained with the firm for sixty years. An earlier attempt at training female compositors had been made at the Caledonian Press. This had been set up in 1861 by the Scottish National Institution for Promoting the Employment of Women in the Art of Printing a philanthropic body whose representative was quoted as saying 'it would be a very great advantage to the public if wages were brought down'.⁶

The Caledonian Press was short-lived, lasting only until 1865; its short duration reflected its charitable, rather than profitable, nature. In 1869 it was estimated in the pages of the *Scottish Typographical Circular* that 'the probability is that not above 24 women in the United Kingdom are at the present day earning a living as operative printers'.⁷

Relationships between masters and men were not always so antagonistic and were often cordial. One particularly celebrated instance was the occasion when, in March 1868, Nelson's entertained 'the whole journeymen printers and stereotypers of Edinburgh' (estimated at 2000 people in all) beneath one roof. This entertainment took the form of a lecture on the art of printing a lantern show of 'pictures from Punch shown by oxyhydrogen light, and accompanied with critical remarks by the Rev. Mr Simpson', music and singing.⁸

Employers would regularly contribute towards the costs of works' outings such as Chambers' trip to Perth where 'the firm defrayed the travelling expenses' for 263 people, or Murray & Gibb's trip to the grounds of Hopetoun House for games and tea for which the firm hired a steamer as well as providing prizes for the games. William Fraser, of Neill & Co., played a major role in the founding of the Edinburgh Compositors Benefit Society in 1824.⁹

Both masters and men subscribed to the fund raised for the relief of the printer-poet Alexander Smart and his family when he was prevented from working by illness. They also paid for the establishment of a printers' library in 1856.

Another aspect of the industrialisation of printing in the nineteenth century was the toll which the new conditions took of the workers' health. Men stood upright at a frame for as many as twelve or fourteen hours a day in crowded, badly ventilated and damp rooms (perhaps also plagued with noxious fumes). All these factors contributed towards a high mortality rate, particularly from

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tuberculosis and other respiratory complaints. In 1860, the same year in which Alexander Smart wrote that ‘the best of all tonics is labour’s sweat, for bracing the nerves of men’, the obituary columns of the *Scottish Typographical Circular* listed the deaths of men aged 19, 28, 31 and so on. Out of 35 printers who died in 1866, 14 died of pulmonary tuberculosis and it was generally accepted at the time that the printer’s trade was one which made him particularly susceptible to ailments of the lungs and chest.

In many respects these problems were due to the inadequate nature of the workshops, buildings which were wholly unsuited for the mechanised industry which printing had suddenly become. Neill & Co., for example, were still using the same buildings in Old Fishmarket Close in 1890 that they had first used in 1769, and Ballantyne’s factory at Paul’s Work had been built long before they had begun to use it in 1803. Morrison & Gibb also found it impossible to carry on in their offices in Thistle Street Lane and, in 1887, they moved to new premises at Tanfield.

Following the destruction by fire of their Hope park works in 1878, Nelson & Sons set up a temporary printing works in the Meadows, with the permission of the Town Council, while their new plant was being built. This took two years and when they did finally move into the new Parkside Works at Park Road they erected the two pillars bearing a lion and a unicorn (which can still be seen at the eastern entrance to the Meadows) as a token of their appreciation to the Town Council and especially the Lord Provost, Thomas Jamieson Boyd, who was also a senior partner of Oliver & Boyd.

H. & J. Pillans moved from James’s Court to Thistle Street Lane in 1877 and, in 1886, became H. & J. Pillans & Wilson with the appointment of Mr W. Scott Wilson as a major partner. The firm moved to another address in Thistle Street Lane in the next year where they remained until 1919 when they moved to Newington.

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Part Four

Decline and Development

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw improved conditions within the workplace matched by increased production and a high reputation for the products of Edinburgh's printing presses.

The industrial troubles of earlier times were not repeated to the same extent; the lock-outs of 1912 and 1916 did not involve as many men as earlier disputes and were of comparatively short duration. The main exception, in terms of numbers if not time, was the General Strike of 1926.

At the time of the General Strike the Scottish Typographical Association had recently made an agreement with the employers that 14 days notice would be given of any strike action, including any General Strike. However, when the T.U.C. issued the order to strike, the Scottish Typographical Association did so and Edinburgh's printing presses came to a standstill. When the Strike was just as suddenly called off nine days later it left the print workers in a very difficult position, having torn up their agreement with their employers. The T.U.C. would not or could not attempt to safeguard the jobs of strikers, leaving individual members in a very isolated position. However, the Master Printers Association approached the S.T.A. with a compromise solution and an agreement was soon reached which, in the book printing industry at least, allowed for a return to normal working with a minimum of bitterness.

Issues within the printing industry had begun to take on a different aspect; rather than wages, hours or apprenticeship schemes, the growing use of female labour and steadily rising unemployment became the main concerns against a background of economic uncertainty. If very little could be done about levels of unemployment, strenuous efforts were made to control the use of female workers. In the first decade of the twentieth century it was estimated that there were between 700 and 800 female compositors in Edinburgh who were increasingly occupied in working the new composing Monotype machines. The fact that women received roughly half the wages of men made this an important issue. In 1910 an agreement was reached which meant that no new women would be admitted to the compositors' trade and in the following year those already in it formed the Edinburgh Female Compositors Society. Although this agreement put an end to the training of female compositors (as well as leading to an increase of 50 per cent in their wages), many women continued to be employed within the industry in other tasks.

General economic conditions in the first half of the twentieth century were not very favourable for the printing industry in Edinburgh. The years immediately following World War I and the years 1931—32 were the worst for unemployment. The trade suffered from many economic difficulties. For example, the reputation for quality which Edinburgh had attained led to the payment of high wages, allowing undercutting by competitors who were also nearer the main market of London. At the same time the demand for high quality books was lessened by the spread of the lending library and the increasing availability of good, cheap editions of popular works. This was an aspect of the market which the Edinburgh printers had also sought to exploit. R. & R. Clark, for example, had for years been producing the *Sixpenny Waverley* series issuing all of Scott's novels in bright paper covers in editions of hundreds of thousands, selling at 6d. each.

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Even among this general atmosphere of decline, firms did manage to flourish and the expansion of certain firms (usually through amalgamation) is a keynote of this period.

Neill & Co. moved from their old, cramped quarters at Old Fishmarket Close to the new spacious Bellevue works at Canonmills in 1898, becoming near neighbours to Morrison & Gibb who were based at Tanfield. When the Bellevue works were destroyed by fire in 1916, Neill & Co. moved to Ballantyne's old factory at Causewayside which had become vacant when Ballantyne's merged with a London company earlier that year. Neill's further expanded in 1935 when they bought the Riverside printing company.

In 1930, against the general trend of the times, T. & A. Constable moved into new, enlarged premises at Hopetoun Street.

In many ways the story of Morrison & Gibb is very similar to that of Neill & Co.: in 1896 they amalgamated with the firm of Scott & Fergusson, a process they repeated three years after their centenary (1928) when they took over the even older firm of W. & A. K Johnston and again in 1932 when they took over Mould & Tod Ltd. This last expansion was accompanied by the erection of a large new building adjacent to the Tanfield works forming a two-acre site within which all of the stages in the production of a book could be carried out from typesetting to binding.

Among all of these changes, however, something of the 'Edinburgh Tradition' of high quality work and a particularly close relationship with the author did survive: R & R Clark maintained a long and happy relationship with George Bernard Shaw from 1898 until his death in 1950.

In 1946, when he was approached by Penguin for permission to publish a series of ten of his plays, Shaw stipulated one condition: that 'Clarks of Edinburgh must do the printing.' One hundred thousand copies of each were produced in record time:

The ending of the Second World War did not herald a quick return to normality for Edinburgh printing houses, largely because of the continuing shortages of raw materials. Apart from the economy war-time restrictions which continued for some years, returning servicemen found little had changed and there were certainly few, if any, signs of the tremendous technological developments which lay ahead. Monotype composition and letterpress printing were the main processes for bookwork and commercial houses, with offset printing largely confined to map printing and a small number of commercial houses.

As materials became more readily available, business began to prosper and by the early 1950's, Edinburgh appeared to have re-established itself as the country's main book printing centre. It was not appreciated then, that the change in ownership in 1946 of one of Scotland's leading book printers, R & R Clark Ltd., was but a forerunner of many during the next few decades which would contribute to the decline of the Edinburgh book printing trade.

Regrettably, the revival of trade and the relative economic boom were seriously disrupted by a major strike in 1959. In the late spring of that year, the ten British print unions submitted claims for a ten per cent wage increase and a 40-hour week but these were firmly rejected by the employers. As members of the Printing and Kindred Trades Association, the Scottish print unions representing 14,000 workers in some 350 companies were involved and after protracted but unfruitful

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negotiations the industry closed down on 18th June. It took all the wisdom and skill of Lord Birkett, acting as independent chairman, to eventually guide the negotiations towards a final agreement between the two sides and work was resumed on Thursday 6th August.

The first signs of major technological change came with the introduction of the first photo-composition machines. Those early models were largely adaptations of existing hot metal Monotype and Linotype units but as new manufacturers entered this field and competition intensified those first generation machines became quickly out-dated. In the early 1960's the SCWS printing department in Glasgow and Skinners in Edinburgh were probably the first companies in Scotland to install those early models. By the mid-60's many firms had installed second generation machines (electromechanical, matrix fonts) but rapid developments were taking place and 1968 saw the introduction of third generation machines (electronic escapement, CRT, and digitised fonts). Research and development in this field continued and by the mid-70's book houses had available dedicated front-end systems using computers for automatic page make-up. More recent has been the development and implementation of direct-input keying and keying on to floppy disks on PC's for supplying formatted text from author direct to phototypesetters.

Commercial printers have in the last decade been very seriously affected by the development of the phenomenal changes brought about by the Apple Macintosh and Postscript page description language. Those linked to laser printers have made possible the establishment of Desk Top Publishing which, with little training, enables previously traditional customers to set, make-up, and print their own brochures, booklets, stationery, for relatively small capital outlay.

The spread of photocomposition also signalled an increase in offset printing and so many, if not all, of the large book-printing houses were faced with the prospect of enormous capital investment programmes to replace the slower running letter-press machines which had been such faithful workhorses for so many years. To those costs had to be added the not inconsiderable expenditure in retraining staff in the handling of film and the skills required for manning large offset presses. The old established letterpress houses endeavoured to meet the offset challenge by introducing presses with less heavy printing beds to obtain increased speeds and also switched from stereo plates mounted on metal to polymer plates mounted on honeycomb bases with the same object in mind. Those were only partially successful and as publishers switched their publications to offset printing, with all the advantages of photolitho reprinting, the end of the stereo plate was in sight. As virtually all publishers' long life reprints had been printed from stereo and electro plates for many years this was a mortal blow to letterpress book printing.

New companies being set up at this period had the great advantage of investing directly into new technology and, in certain classified areas, were aided by then government policy. Edinburgh was at a particular disadvantage as it was designated a non-development area and therefore was excluded from grants which applied elsewhere in Scotland.

The development of specialist houses such as those for film-setting became another serious and increasing problem for the old-established book-printing house which had for so long offered composition, printing and bookbinding services all under the one roof. Many publishers began to use those specialist houses in the UK for photocomposition but then opted to send their films to overseas companies to undertake the printing and binding. Labour costs were so low in such places as Hong Kong and Singapore that, in spite of the additional costs of shipping finished products back

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to the home market, UK book printers found their own prices had become uncompetitive.

The search for additional capital to re-equip to meet the overseas challenge and the intensified competition at home in a smaller market resulted in a series of mergers but, regrettably, many old established names were not to survive the tremendous changes taking place.

Mention has already been made of the change in ownership of R & R Clark which was gifted to the University of Edinburgh in 1946, the year of its centenary. In 1962 it became part of the Thyne Group and, after a management buy-out in 1979, became part of the ill-fated Clark—Constable merger. Neill & Co., founded in 1749 as earlier recorded, ceased trading in 1973.

In 1962 Nelsons became part of the Thomson Organisation and in 1968 the printing and binding departments were merged with Morrison & Gibb. The enlarged company was itself taken over first by Oxley Printing Group and then in 1981 by Clark—Constable but this combined company survived only a few years.

Oliver & Boyd was bought by the *Financial Times* in 1962. The publishing department was soon to become part of the Longman Group and in 1968 the printing and binding departments were merged with the Darien Press and Constable's, also owned by the *Financial Times*, in the latter's enlarged premises at Hopetoun Street.

Pillans & Wilson (established 1775) was bought over by Colorgraphic PLC an English based company in 1987.

Companies, not specifically book printers, which have survived the upheavals of the past few decades include George Waterston (established 1752), John Bartholomew (established 1826), now part of the Murdoch empire, Waddie & Co. (established 1860), and William Thyne (established 1871), and George Stewart (established 1879).

The demise of the book printing trade in Edinburgh over such a relatively short period has raised concerns that its proud role in the history of the city might be allowed to fade just as swiftly from memory. To safeguard against such a possibility, Scotland's Printing Heritage has been set up with the aim of establishing a permanent archive in Edinburgh. The principal objective would be to conserve, within one building, suitable examples of the Scottish printer's craft throughout the years while there is still time, it is hoped, to obtain examples of the equipment as well as verbal and written evidence of its development.

As a first step a 'taster' exhibition *A Reputation for Excellence: The History of the Edinburgh Printing Industry* is being held in the Central Library, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh.

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1 Portuus is a portable breviary (*Scottish National Dictionary*).

2 A printer by the name of John Story was active in Edinburgh during the early 1520's using the equipment of Chepman and Myllar. Very little evidence of his career survives, although there is surviving testimony to the difficulty of getting books printed in Scotland around this time. See *Annals of Scottish Printing*, p.102

3 Quoted from an official document stripping Tyler of his title and awarding it to an Edinburgh bookseller by the name of Duncan Mun, 'whose studie and endeavour has been all his tyme for the knowledge and science of Printing and so is become able and qualified thairfor'. W.J. Couper, *Scottish Rebel Printers*, pp.11-12

4 These examples, and more, can be seen on p.5 of William T. Dobson's *The Introduction of Printing into Edinburgh*.

5 According to an Act of Parliament, dating from the publication of *Bassandyne's Bible*, it was a punishable offence for any householder above a certain, not particularly high, financial level not to have a Bible in the house.

6 Quoted in the *Scottish Typographical Circular* from a meeting held in October 1860.

7 *Scottish Typographical Circular*, 1 September 1869.

8 The invitation read: 'For one evening let us lay aside care or irksome duty, and come out with those we love best, and let us look each other fairly in the face. In the matter of head we do not much differ; at heart we are agreed. We need to have the bow unstrung occasionally. Let us do so in company for once, and see if we can help each other to a happy evening'.

9 He also wrote a series of articles on the subject of Friendly Societies in general for the New Edinburgh Philosophical Society in 1827—1828.

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