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978-0-521-05552-9 - The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England

John Feather

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**CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN
PUBLISHING AND PRINTING HISTORY**

**The Provincial Book Trade in
Eighteenth-Century England**

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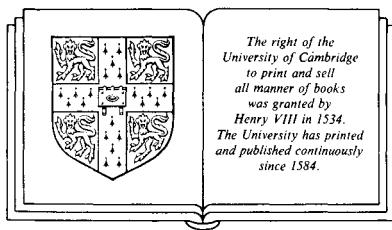
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IN MEMORIAM

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Preface

The English provincial book trade has been the subject of serious historical study for rather more than a century. In 1879, W. H. Allnutt, an Assistant at the Bodleian, read a paper on 'Printers and printing in the provincial towns of England and Wales' to the first annual meeting of the Library Association, held at Oxford. Allnutt's pioneering work was an account of the introduction of printing into provincial towns, and over the next eighty years was followed by numerous local studies, most of them by librarians or by those amateur historians who have contributed so much to our knowledge of the minutiae of the history of provincial England. Many of these studies are excellent, soundly based as they are on documents in record offices and private archives, and on the study of provincially printed books to be found in the local collections of our public libraries. Printing, especially book printing, has inevitably attracted the greatest attention; it is more exciting than bookselling, and its products can be seen and handled on library shelves. In 1959, Paul Morgan summarised the achievements of his predecessors in a lecture on 'English provincial printing' delivered in Birmingham. In 1977, appropriately in Oxford and addressing the Rare Books Group of the Library Association, Morgan showed that histories or directories of the trade had been published for eighteen of the thirty-nine English counties; work is now in progress on similar studies of at least nine others.

Despite all this effort, however, surprisingly little is known of the provincial book trade as an economic entity. We have lists of names, trades, places, and dates, but no attempt has previously been made to flesh out these bare bones of knowledge. This book is an attempt to do just that. Without the work of the last century such a synthesis would have been impossible, and it is difficult even now. Yet I do not believe that the attempt is premature. Book history, including the commercial history of books, is an increasingly popular subject. Regional studies of it are proceeding apace, and I hope that I have at least provided a perspective within which such local studies of the trade can be viewed more sharply.

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[More information](#)*Preface*

I have been primarily concerned to solve a single problem: how those living outside London obtained their books. In considering this problem, I have inevitably confronted others: the structure and organisation of the book trade; its growth and development; the demand for books in the provinces; and the economics of provincial bookselling and printing. Nevertheless, I hope that I have not strayed too far from my central theme of book supply, or from my central thesis that the provincial trade, despite all the interest in its printing activities, was essentially distributive.

I make no claim to have said the last word on these matters, and indeed it is my hope that this first attempt at a general history of the provincial trade will stimulate further local research. I do believe, however, that the essence of my argument is accurate, and that local studies will be enhanced by being placed in this national context. We live at the end of the age in which the printed word has been the unchallenged medium of mass communication. Perhaps that is why we are so fascinated by its history and influence, and why its importance in the broader history of our society is becoming more generally recognised. This book is offered as one small contribution to our understanding of the dissemination and significance of printing, and the crucial role which it has played in the history of western culture in the last five hundred years.

JOHN FEATHER

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My last conversation with the dedicatee of this book was about the provincial book trade. I was engaged on a cataloguing project which was becoming tedious, and I relieved the tedium by indexing the names of booksellers whose names appeared in the documents being catalogued. I was puzzled by the recurrence of certain provincial names in prospectuses and imprints, and asked Graham Pollard if he knew why these names and not others appeared there. We agreed that a more detailed study of the provincial trade was needed; I hope that my readers will think that we were right.

If Graham Pollard inspired me by exhortation, David Foxon has done so by example. His name appears in several notes, but that is merely the tip of the iceberg of my intellectual indebtedness to him. His own work, our conversations over the last decade and, not least, his careful and critical reading of an earlier draft of this book have helped me beyond measure in attaining whatever merit this work might have.

The bulk of the research was done while I was Munby Fellow in Bibliography at Cambridge University Library in 1977–78. I can only hope that the results will repay the confidence of the Electors. The late E. B. Ceadel, J. C. T. Oates, David McKitterick, Brian Jenkins, and their colleagues welcomed me as a friend, and were unfailingly helpful to their demanding guest. John Oates was equally kind in smoothing my way to a Fellowship at Darwin College, where the then Master, Fellows, and students provided a memorably agreeable social context for my stay in Cambridge.

The editors of this series, David McKitterick and Terry Belanger, have both read the typescript with the utmost care, and I owe to both of them many valuable suggestions. Needless to say, I accept sole responsibility for what is written here.

Part of the research was undertaken with an award from the Small Grants Fund of the British Academy, which I gratefully acknowledge.

My former colleague Paul Morgan has freely shared his great knowledge of the provincial trade, as have many others in this field. It

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is almost invidious to select names, but I should particularly like to mention Bernard Barr, R. J. Chamberlaine-Brothers, Peter Freshwater, Richard Goulden, David Stoker, and Peter Wallis. Another former colleague, Sheila Edward, checked many references and greatly assisted in the proof reading, among many other kindnesses.

I am grateful to the librarians and archivists who made materials available to me, and wish to acknowledge their permission to print documents which are copyright to their owners. I am particularly grateful to Mr John Cheney, of John Cheney and Sons Ltd, Banbury, for allowing me to consult and quote the archives of his firm and family.

A lecture based on some of the material used in this book was delivered to several audiences in the United States in 1981 and 1982. I should like to thank them, and my hosts, for their generous reception, and for the valuable stimulus which an American audience always provides.

Mrs Cynthia Robinson has coped valiantly with my bad typing and worse handwriting.

Lady Eden is reported to have said that there were times when she felt that the Suez Canal was flowing through her drawing room. Sarah Feather has lived with the provincial book trade for as long as I, and has taught me that an author's thanks to his wife are no mere convention.

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This book is based upon the published work of many scholars, especially on that of those antiquaries who have combed public and private repositories for the documentary evidence of the history of the book trade, and those who have compiled directories and bibliographies. My notes bear witness to the magnitude of their contribution. I have not, however, felt it necessary to give a full list of my sources, although I must mention here two basic works without which the study of the English book trade would be impossible. Both are now sadly out of date, and in need of replacement, yet they are still indispensable: H. R. Plomer's *A dictionary of the printers and booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668 to 1725*, published by the Bibliographical Society in 1922; and the continuation by Plomer, G. H. Bushnell, and E. R. McC. Dix, *A dictionary of the printers and booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1726–1775*, published by the same society in 1932. I have already published a list of other work on the trade in *The English provincial book trade. A checklist of secondary sources* (Oxford (Oxford Bibliographical Society, occasional publication, 16), 1981).

I have, however, undertaken a good deal of archival research to supplement previously published work, and some notes on this may be useful. In the Public Record Office, I have searched systematically for the wills of members of the trade proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PROB 11); for cases relating to the trade in the Court of Chancery, especially among the Chancery Master's Exhibits (C 104) and in the records of the Vice-Master and Commissioners in Bankruptcy (B 1–6); and for records of apprenticeship (1R 1/45–53). The records of the Sun, Alliance, and London Insurance Group Ltd, partly still in the possession of the company, and partly in the Guildhall Library, London, proved useful in several respects. In the Bodleian Library, Oxford, I have used the invaluable archives of John Nichols, acquired by the Library in 1975–76 (MS Eng. lett. b. 11–19; c. 354–72), the letter book of Kincaid and Bell (MS Eng. lett. c. 20, 21), and various documents in the Gough and Rawlinson

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collections. The University Archives at Oxford provided some useful wills and inventories. It gave me particular pleasure to use some of the manuscript material (as well as many printed books) in the Munby Collection at Cambridge University Library. The British Library has provided a few letters and minor documents, and I have also made use of the Minute Book of the proprietors of *The General Evening Post*, formerly in the possession of the late Wilmarth S. Lewis, and now the property of Yale University as part of the Lewis collection at Farmington, Connecticut.

Among local records I have made much use of the one substantial archive of a provincial bookseller known to me, that of John Clay of Daventry in the Northamptonshire Record Office. The Record Offices of Bristol, Essex, Gloucestershire, Humberside, and Staffordshire, have also provided material. Mr John Cheney kindly permitted me to use the archives of his family firm, still in the firm's possession in Banbury.

Finally, I have made use, to a far greater extent than may be superficially apparent, of the books printed in the provinces. This was largely undertaken from the substantial collections of the Bodleian and Cambridge University libraries. In this context, I ought to add that the British Library entries for the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue became available, through BLAISE, only as this book was in the final stages of preparation for the press. My successors will, of course, take advantage of this valuable new tool of eighteenth-century studies; I have been unable to do so, but I do not believe that my conclusions have been materially affected by the lack.

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Note on Dates and Places

All year dates have been normalised to a year beginning on 1 January, except in direct quotations. Dates before 2 September 1753 are Old Style, and after that day New Style.

Place names are given in their usual modern form. Counties, however, are those which existed in the eighteenth century, and do not, in many cases, correspond to the boundaries in force since the Local Government Act of 1972. I have roughly defined 'provincial' as more than twenty miles from London.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the notes.

<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
B.L.	British Library
<i>BNYPL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the New York Public Library</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>JHMAS</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences</i>
<i>JPHS</i>	<i>Journal of the Printing Historical Society</i>
<i>JRSS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Statistical Society</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>NQ</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>PBSA</i>	<i>Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America</i>
<i>PHIBB</i>	Project for Historical Bio-Bibliography
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
P.R.O.	Public Record Office
R.O.	Record Office
<i>SB</i>	<i>Studies in Bibliography</i>
ser.	series
<i>STC</i>	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave. <i>A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland . . . 1475–1640</i> . London, 1926. 2nd ed., revised by W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and Katherine F. Pantzer, Vol. 2. London, 1976
<i>TCBS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society</i>
<i>VCH</i>	<i>The Victoria History of the Counties of England</i>
Wing	D. G. Wing. <i>Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America . . . 1641–1700</i> . New York, 3 vols., 1945–51. 2nd ed., Vol. 1. New York, 1972