

Chapter 3

Edinburgh as a centre of publishing

The diffusion of ideas during the Scottish Enlightenment and the international impact of Scots thinkers would not have been possible without Edinburgh's pioneering publishers. As an historic centre of innovative publishing, printing and bookselling, Edinburgh gave writers access to a localised print network that could produce and distribute their work on a wide scale.

After the stranglehold of London publishers over copyright privileges in Britain was lifted in 1774, there was a surge of Scottish publishing activity that built on the success of early pioneers. Since then, the book trade has always played an important part in the local economy. In 1763 there were six publishing houses in Edinburgh for a population of 60,000. By 1790 there were 16 publishing houses and today there are over 80 publishing companies in Edinburgh, whose population has grown to 450,000.

The very first printing press was set up by Andrew Myllar and Walter Chepman in 1507, and printing continued to gather momentum throughout the fifteen hundreds. By the seventeenth century, Scottish printing grew further, spreading to Glasgow and Aberdeen, although Edinburgh retained its pre-eminence. The eighteenth century was a period of creativity and elegance and Edinburgh became a world centre of excellence for book-binding. William Creech, an extraordinarily successful businessman, published the works of major figures of the Enlightenment at this time, as well as giving national and international circulation to the poems of Burns.

For a time, Edinburgh challenged London as the main centre of



1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

publishing in Britain. A belief in the printed word as an instrument of education and progress in society and the presence of ambitious early publishers helped create the boom.

The business of writing

Archibald Constable (1774-1827) began as a bookseller's apprentice in Edinburgh and published both the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. But it was his business acumen combined with the creative energy of Walter Scott that created his most successful partnership. 6,000 copies of *Waverley* were sold in the first six months, and 2,000 of *Guy Mannering* within a day of publication.

Like Constable, William Blackwood (1776-1834) started as a bookseller's apprentice. He is best remembered as the founder of *Blackwood's Magazine*, which predated Victorian periodicals in publishing contemporary fiction serially.

Many of today's global publishing houses have their origins in Edinburgh, including Chambers, Nelson, John Murray and A. & C. Black. Yet another bookseller's assistant who began with barely a penny to his name started the first of these. William Chambers (1800-1883) partnered his brother Robert, a talented and prolific writer, most famously publishing *Chambers Encyclopaedia*. The Nelson mentioned is Thomas Nelson, who employed one of the first travelling representatives in Scottish publishing. His son continued the tradition of innovation by using the railway network to sell books throughout Britain.

1. Thomas Nelson and Sons' colophon
2. William Creech, publisher, who gave national and international circulation to the poems of Burns
3. The printer's device of Andrew Myllar, who set up the first printing press with Walter Chepman in 1507
4. Archibald Constable, painted by Andrew Geddes
5. *Waverley*, which sold 6,000 copies in its first six months of publication



1.

2.

3.

4.

1. Francis Jeffrey, in whose home *The Edinburgh Review* was established in 1802
2. John Murray I, founder of one of the UK's leading publishing houses
3. David Livingstone, missionary and explorer, whose work features in the extensive John Murray archives
4. David Livingstone is rescued from his brush with the lion

Established in 1768, John Murray Ltd was one of the leading British publishing houses with an unrivalled list of authors. The National Library of Scotland has submitted a leading bid to acquire the John Murray Archive, a national treasure consisting of over 150,000 items, papers and manuscripts of writers published since the company was founded.

The writers include some of the greatest world figures from the past 200 years, including Jane Austen, Charles Darwin, David Livingstone and Lord Byron. The Scottish Executive has pledged £6.5 million towards the bid, and a decision about an application to the National Lottery Fund is expected in early 2005.

Finally, Adam Black (1784-1874) purchased both the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the copyright and stock of Walter Scott's works to enable his business to expand and diversify. From its London base it continues to specialise in reference publications.

Collins and Macmillan and Co. were founded in Glasgow. William Collins was sold to Rupert Murdoch for \$717 million in 1988: a far cry from the days of those penniless apprentices!

Scandal, gossip and criticism – all in the name of art

The Edinburgh Review was established in 1802 at Francis Jeffrey's house in Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh. Published first in Edinburgh but later in London it appeared quarterly, setting a new standard in criticism.



5.

6.

7.

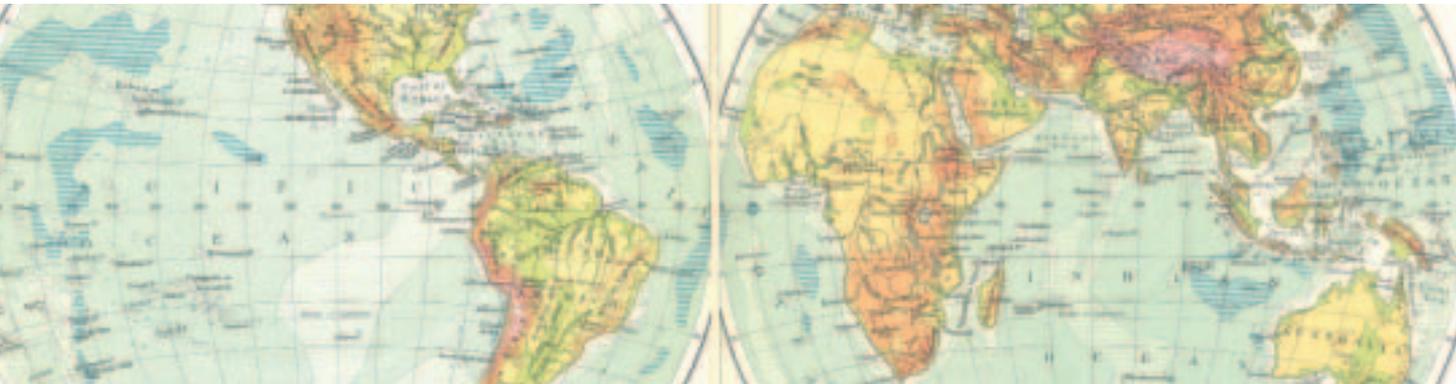
8.

At its height it reached a circulation of 14,000; some issues were so popular that they were reprinted up to ten times. *The Edinburgh Review* was the most influential literary journals of its time in the English-speaking world. Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle were contributors to the *Review*, which was circulated all over the British Empire. International readers included Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Samuel Adams in America.

Blackwood's Magazine, established in 1817 as a conservative response to the liberal politics of *The Edinburgh Review*, was a permanent feature of literary life in Edinburgh for 150 years. Founded by William Blackwood, the magazine owed much of its success to its talented young editors, John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson whose sharp satire and parody turned the magazine into the most shocking and best-selling review of its time. *Blackwood's Magazine* went on to attract internationally acclaimed writers including Thomas De Quincey (who spent the last 30 years of his life in Edinburgh), Joseph Conrad, Anthony Trollope, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, John Buchan, JB Priestley, Neville Shute, and serialised all but one of George Eliot's novels.

Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, begun in 1832, was the first cheap periodical of an educational nature widely accessed by the masses. Its phenomenal success belied the Scottish taste for learning. Published by William and Robert Chambers, the journal was one of the most popular of the Victorian age, with a circulation of 50,000 – 80,000 copies. It pioneered a new form of serious but inexpensive periodical publishing.

- 5. Thomas De Quincey, one of the internationally acclaimed writers who lived in Edinburgh for the last 30 years of his life
- 6. Oscar Wilde, sometime contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*
- 7. Thomas Carlyle, another famous contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*
- 8. John Gibson Lockhart, one of the talented young editors of *Blackwood's Magazine* and son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott



1.

1. The worldwide influence of the Scots – felt in every corner of the globe

Spreading the word

The Scots, with their strong commitment to education and the printed word, and a long tradition of publishing, carried these ideals with them to all corners of the world during the eighteenth century. As immigrants to America, Canada, Australia and colonial visitors in India and Africa, Scots established newspapers, and recorded important literature celebrating local culture and languages for posterity.

In America it was a Scot, John Campbell, who published the first regular newspaper in America, the *Boston Newsletter*. Almost 200 years later in 1801, another Scotsman, Alexander Hamilton began the *New York Post* – which is still being published today. James Gordon Bennett – no doubt as to his place of birth – sometimes called the father of modern American journalism, was the first to print a financial article, had the first society page and was the first to employ European correspondents for his *New York Herald*, the predecessor of the *Herald Tribune*.

Many newspapers proliferated in British India, some of which remain classics of the world press. The *Bombay Gazette* was founded by John Stevenson, the first person sent to India by the Scottish Missionary Society, and edited by another Scotsman, Dr George Buist. Scots also played an important part in the printing and grammar of Indian language. John Borthwick Gilchrist, born in Edinburgh, instructed in Urdu and Hindustani. By deciding to use Devanagari script for his *Hindustani Dictionary*, Gilchrist established the alphabet currently used for printing Hindi.



2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

A second flowering

The last 30 years has seen a resurgence in growth of Scottish publishing. Around 90 companies and organisations publish books in Scotland, with the trade remaining firmly rooted in Edinburgh. The greatest focus of Scottish publishing is on reference, academic and scientific books – a sector in which Scottish publishers have excelled since the days when *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was started. However, a third of Scottish publishers publish fiction, producing disproportionate numbers of international bestsellers.

As the home of a vibrant publishing industry, Edinburgh plays host to 50 publishing houses. Contemporary companies such as Canongate Books, Mainstream and Birlinn with its Polygon imprint have maintained Edinburgh's international publishing profile with strong new imprints selling rights internationally. Polygon has published many internationally acclaimed books, including the best-selling *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith. Canongate Books is one of Edinburgh's – and Scotland's – biggest business success stories. The company came to prominence in 2002 when it became the first Scottish publisher to win the Booker Prize with *Life of Pi*. On the back of this, it was also awarded Publisher of the Year at the British Book Awards in 2003.

Scottish publishers have continued to innovate. Together with new media specialists, Screenbase, Canongate have pioneered animated book promotions on the Internet and in film, bringing new titles to a wider audience. This initiative has attracted worldwide attention and is tipped to spearhead a global trend.

2. *Chambers Pocket Dictionary*, one of the many reference books published in Scotland
3. McCall Smith's *The Full Cupboard of Life*, published by Polygon
4. *A Highland Lady in France*, re-published by the leading Scottish history publisher, Tuckwell Press, first published in 1898
5. Re-print of Neil M. Gunn's *Sun Circle* first published in 1933
6. Scottish publishers produce a wide range of titles, from academic to fiction

Overleaf:

Cover detail from Booker Prize winning novel *Life of Pi*, published by Canongate Books. Painting by Andy Bridge.

