

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Introduction

A History of the Dundee and Perth Printing Industries, is the third booklet in the series *A Reputation for Excellence*; others are *A History of the Edinburgh Printing Industry* (1990) and *A History of the Glasgow Printing Industry* (1994). The first of these gives a brief account of the advent of printing to Scotland: on September 1507 a patent was granted by King James IV to Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar 'burgessis of our town of Edinburgh'. At His Majesty's request they were authorised 'for our plesour, the honour and profit of our realme and liegis to furnish the necessary materials and capable workmen to print the books of the laws and other books necessary which might be required'. The partnership set up business in the Southgait (Cowgate) of Edinburgh.

From that time until the end of the seventeenth century royal patents were issued to the trade, thus confining printing to a select number.

Although there is some uncertainty in establishing precisely when printing began in Dundee, there is evidence that the likely date was around 1547. In that year John Scot set up the first press in the town, after which little appears to have been done over the next two centuries to develop and expand the new craft. From the middle of the eighteenth century, however, new businesses were set up and until the second half of the present century Dundee was one of Scotland's leading printing centres.

Printing in Perth began in 1715, with the arrival there of one Robert Freebairn, referred to in the Edinburgh booklet. He had entered into partnership with James Wilson following the collapse of the Anderson empire, sharing the office of King's Printer. After participating in a failed attempt by the Jacobites to capture Edinburgh Castle, he had to flee the town, joining the Jacobite army at Perth, where he was almost immediately called upon to operate the first printing press installed in the town.

Undoubtedly, the most outstanding contributions to Perth's printing history were made by several generations of the Morison family. Commencing with Robert Morison, the elder, who combined his bookselling business with being Postmaster of Perth in the first half of the eighteenth century, the family connection with printing continued unbroken until at the age of 45 years David Morison retired from the business and left Perth in 1855.

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Part One: Dundee

It is not possible to pinpoint precisely the date when printing was introduced to Dundee but there is some evidence that it was around 1547. Shortly after the death of Cardinal Beaton of St Andrews in 1546, an Edinburgh printer named John Scot took refuge in Dundee from the persecution of the Scottish Privy Council. John Scrymgeour, Constable and Provost of Dundee, was commanded to apprehend him and take him prisoner to the Council. The Provost refused to undertake this task and as a result it is thought that Scot set up his printing press within the burgh and continued there until he found means to establish himself in St Andrews. No examples of his work have been found either in Dundee or St Andrews but there is a strong probability that Wedderburn's *Gude and Godlie Ballates* was printed by Scot in 1567 after his return to Edinburgh.

The next reference to printing in the town is to be found in Lamont's *Diary* in the year 1661 when a number of theses written by St Andrews professors were 'printed in Dundee'.

In 1678 another work, a map of the County of Forfar bearing a Latin description, was printed in Dundee. The publisher was the Rev. Robert Edwards, minister of Murroes, but the identity of the printer is not known.

From that time little is known of the progress of the press until the beginning of the next century when an attempt was made by a number of the clergy to establish printing in the district. It appears from the parochial records of Foulis Easter that on 18 April 1703 the Presbytery of Dundee directed a special collection be made in the churches. As a result Foulis gave the modest sum of one pound and four shillings 'to Daniel Gaines to help him in setting up the Art of Printing in Dundee'. Whether Gaines pocketed the proceeds of this pious contribution and made off is not known, but there is no evidence that he succeeded in reviving the art as no printed matter bearing his name seems to exist.

It was not until 1755 that Henry Galbraith & Co. established a printing business in Dundee, but no records have been found to show in which part of the burgh their office was situated. Although credited with the production of two major works, viz: the whole of the theological works of Isaac Ambrose in one large folio volume and *Ostervald's Bible*, there is evidence that the two texts were printed in Holland. The title-pages and lists of subscribers were printed by Galbraith, hence the confusion over who was responsible for the production of both titles. Printed in 1763, the Bible was dedicated to 'Patrick Maxwell Esq., Lord Provost of Dundee'.

Thomas Yule Miller has written about this period, when the population of the town was around 14,000. Trade, chiefly linen manufacturing, was in a flourishing state and about one hundred small wooden vessels belonged to the port which had a single landing quay but no harbour. Land travel was by means of the stage coach.

News of what was going on in the kingdom and in other parts of the world was extremely limited. There were no newspapers, and letters were regarded as expensive: the postage costing sixpence. It was in this environment that Henry Galbraith & Co. sought to contribute to the enlightenment of the people by launching a newspaper. The year 1755 saw the birth of Dundee's first newspaper entitled the *Dundee Weekly Intelligencer*. Unfortunately this first enterprise did not receive the support it

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

deserved and the newspaper quickly succumbed.

It is known that from c. 1770 to c. 1775 a printing business was run in the Kirk Wynd by Laurence Chalmers and David Ogilvie, but no examples of their work have been traced.

Around 1775 Thomas Colville took over Galbraith's business and until his death in 1819 printed a number of books and a range of periodicals and newspapers. It is claimed with some justification that he did more than anyone to introduce the printed word to the populace of Dundee.

Thomas Miller wrote 'Colville was gifted with great inception, energy and industry, and left behind him a name on the page of local history'. One could add 'perseverance' to those qualities as he experienced many fluctuations of fortune. One example of this occurred in 1776. Early in the year he started a weekly publication called the *Dundee Weekly Magazine or a History of the Present Times* which resembled its Edinburgh contemporary the *Edinburgh Weekly Amusement*. Unfortunately the magazine was suppressed in the summer of the same year by a decision of the Court of Exchequer.

Also in 1775 Colville printed a work by Charles Thornton entitled *A Table Calculated for the use of Weavers, shewing the length the pirns will run according to the size of the web*. About the same time he produced a weekly newspaper which again was short lived.

Colville must be given full credit for publishing the first *Dundee Directory* in 1782. It was entitled the *Dundee Register of Merchants and Trades* and consisted of 72 pages. This publication was intended to be the first of a regular series but unfortunately, because of lack of support, it also became the last of its kind when Colville printed a second *Directory* in 1809. It was published in January of that year, priced 2s 6d. Although the population of the town had risen by then to about 30,000 only 700 copies were sold and Colville abandoned his plans for an 1810 edition. Another of Colville's works was the *Dundee Magazine and Journal of the Times* which he first printed and published in January 1799. Four or five volumes of this work were issued, each volume containing about 700 pages.

Colville was invited to print the recently founded *Dundee Weekly Advertiser and Angusshire Intelligencer* in 1801 and continued in charge of the production until 1805 when a change of ownership resulted in the paper being printed and published by the new proprietors in Peter's Buildings, St Andrew's Place, Cowgate. Not to be outdone, Colville started a rival paper to the *Advertiser* which he entitled the *Dundee Mercury*. This consisted of four pages and was published weekly on Wednesdays, price sixpence. Colville's office at this time was situated in Bisset's Close on the north side of the Overgate near the 'Cross' and was distinguished from the adjacent buildings by a figure of Mercury above the entrance. After seven years of striving to compete, the *Mercury* closed down, leaving the field to the *Advertiser*.

Undaunted, Colville and his son, Alexander, again ventured into publishing in 1815 with the *Dundee Magazine* but this too met an early fate. One more attempt was made to provide a weekly newspaper when, on 20 September 1816, Colville and his son produced the first number of the *Dundee Courier*. Its page size was 14 ins by 10.5 ins and the price 7d. On his death in August 1819, Colville's business passed to his son Alexander.

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Soon afterwards the business became bankrupt and the newspaper and plant were offered for sale. A number of influential citizens met and proposed that David Hill, who printed a struggling newspaper in Montrose, be approached and asked to take over the *Courier*. This he did in November 1823 and continued to edit and publish the newspaper for the next ten years. When his health was failing, Hill assumed Charles Alexander as a partner and the company, Hill & Alexander, continued to publish the *Courier* for many years. For a further period the proprietors of the newspaper were Charles Alexander & Co. until it was taken over by W. & D. C. Thomson.

Shortly before 1800, Francis Ray came to Dundee and for a brief period before Colville took it over in 1801, he was the printer of the *Dundee Advertiser*. It is claimed that he issued the first *Gazetteer of Scotland* as well as an edition of Rollin's *Ancient History* containing engravings by Thomas Ivory of Dundee.

In 1808 the *Advertiser* appears to have been purchased by Mr R. S. Rintoul who for the next seventeen years was editor, printer and proprietor. During the following twenty-five years the paper was printed by Alexander Macdonald, the printing office being then in Argyle Close, Overgate. In July 1851 John Leng moved north from Hull to become the new editor, printer and publisher and soon afterwards part proprietor of the newspaper. Probably his most successful new launching was the *People's Journal*, which quickly built up a wide circulation throughout the country. His long and distinguished service to the community was recognised when he was awarded a knighthood.

Contemporaries of Thomas Colville were William and James Chalmers. The former opened a bookseller's shop at 10/12 Castle Street in 1788, and in 1805 his brother James took over and expanded the business by adding a printing office at 7 New Inn Entry and an ink manufactory at No 4. In 1829 the company issued their first *Directory* and in the same year their *Mercantile Tables* was published. By 1851 all printing was carried out at Thom's Close in the High Street. James Chalmers introduced the first lithographic works to Dundee in 1829 and is renowned as the designer of the first adhesive stamp in 1834.

When the poor people of the town suffered great hardship during a severe depression, James Chalmers cleaned out his ink boilers and made soup in them for the distressed. The soup was ladled out at the workshop door by his pressman. James Chalmers died in 1853 and his son took over the business, running it under the name of C. D. Chalmers until 1870 when it was changed to Chalmers & Winter. On the death of C. D. Chalmers in 1877, David Winter succeeded to the business. He subsequently formed a partnership with James Duncan (foreman printer) and John Duncan (bookbinder) under the designation Winter, Duncan & Co. In 1907 the company changed its name to D. Winter & Son. Remarkably, David Winter continued in business until 1932 when, at the age of 96, he died suddenly of a heart attack. He was succeeded by his son, Frederick, who was head of the firm until his death in 1960. In that year Ann Winter was appointed chairman and was still in that office in 1995 at the age of 92. The company was sold in 1987 but the name David Winter & Son has been retained.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Valentines were an important Dundee family mainly connected with the weaving industry. When his own textile company failed, John Valentine set up cutting wood blocks for another local textile firm. In 1822 the firm became known as John Valentine & Son when his son James became a partner.

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

The partnership ended in 1840 with John continuing in woodstamp cutting whilst his son ventured into printing, engraving and photography. James became interested in daguerreotype during the 1840s, and his photo survey of the Highlands won him the Royal Warrant Order in 1868. Two of James' sons, George and William, entered the business; the latter succeeding to the firm and raising it to international status. When William died in 1906 in St Andrews the company's labour force in Dundee had risen from 30 in 1886 to 600. William's son H. J. Valentine mastered the collotype and photochromic processes; the latter had been developed in Switzerland. The picture postcard as we know it was invented in the 1890s and Valentines used both processes in its production. In 1903 the postcard craze was at its height and Valentines claimed around 25 per cent of the entire market. Valentine's Kingsway factory, occupied in 1937, was built on the second postcard boom of the 1930s, but after the Second World War the business became less profitable. As business declined, control of the company weakened and the firm merged with Waddington in the 1960s. The postcard line ended in 1970 and for a period the firm concentrated on greeting cards. Sadly, after further management changes the firm closed down finally in October 1994.

In 1829 John Pellow, the son of a dock gateman, was born in Dundee and served his apprenticeship at the *Courier*. Shortly after completing his apprenticeship he moved to Glasgow, but in 1851 he returned to Dundee and founded the business of which he was the sole proprietor until his death. His first business premises were in the New Inn Entry, but as trade developed he moved to larger premises in Murraygate and then later to the High Street. When his business expanded further he returned to a larger building in Murraygate.

Pellow published annually an almanac widely known as *Pellow's Dundee Almanac*. He was also the publisher of the *Dundee Register* and the *History of the UP Church in Dundee*.

Although deeply involved in public affairs, undoubtedly Pellow's chief interest was in the work of the Good Templars. For many years he was on the General Committee of office-bearers of the Dundee Gospel Temperance Union. This active interest in temperance work may well have sprung from the tragic life of his brother, Peter, who had served his apprenticeship with him at the *Courier*. By all accounts Peter was a colourful character who, among other activities, was to be seen frequently playing his fiddle at local dances. Peter died of apoplexy, his failing health not helped by heavy drinking.

John Pellow had four sons, three of whom were printers. One of these, James, on leaving his father's company, moved to Edinburgh where he set up business with a friend called Harvey, naming the firm Harvey Ltd. When Harvey died James Pellow carried on the business himself at 13 Forth Street in the city. After his death in 1935, the business was taken over by the Dickson family and is now located at Loanhead in Midlothian.

John Durham, a native of Portobello, near Edinburgh, came to Dundee in 1835 and set up his printing business at 49 High Street, later moving to Argyll's Close, off the Overgate. After a successful career, John Durham died in 1877 and left the business to his son James who was already a partner. James is perhaps best known for his work as a geologist. He wrote many papers on geology and this work was recognised when he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

On John Durham's death, John Kinnoch, who had been with the company for several years, became

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

a partner. He had served his apprenticeship in the office of *Perthshire Constitutional* and moved to Dundee in 1858 when he was twenty years old. For the next fifty years he was the active manager and did much to develop the business. When John Kinnoch died in August 1911 the business passed to his son George and his partner William Lamb in premises at 11—19 Overgate.

James P. Matthew & Co., printers, publishers, bookbinders, and stationers, was founded in 1854. It appears the company was first situated at 32 Meadow Entry, Meadowside, and later at 11—15 Cowgate. Perhaps the firm was best known as printers and publishers of the *Dundee Directory* which they produced from 1864 until 1927.

William Kidd who had worked for Frederick Shaw, bookseller, set up his own business at 3 Union Street in 1871. On Shaw's retiral, Kidd purchased the firm and moved to 112 Nethergate. As a consequence of the rapid development of the business and thus the need for increased accommodation, Kidd built the handsome block in Whitehall Street known as the 'Palace Buildings' and moved there in 1885. The machine-room was located in the basement where a number of new presses were powered by an 'Otto' gas engine of six horse-power. The litho department was situated on the first floor above the shops while the bookbinding and composing departments occupied the third and fourth floors respectively. Among the books published by Kidd were Maxwell's *History of Old Dundee*, Allen's *Guide to Navigation*, and numerous guide books to Dundee, Arbroath, etc.

In the year 1886 William Burns, a practising stationer in business in Dundee, was joined by his friend William Harris to form a joint venture as stationers, booksellers and printers at 112 Nethergate, a location already familiar to that trade. William Burns had served his time and gained experience with several firms in the city while William Harris had learned his trade in Cupar. From the start the new firm engaged in both letterpress and lithographic processes. The staff during the early years of the company consisted of eight adults and thirteen juniors in addition to the two partners.

Behind the retail shop was a small one-storey building with an entrance from Yeaman Shore and Sea Close, and within this a beginning was made to the printing side of the business. For a time bookbinding was 'sent out', but in 1890 Strathmore Hall, a dance hail in the Sea Wynd, was offered to rent and the company took this opportunity to establish its bookbinding department there. It became increasingly inconvenient to have departments housed separately so in 1892 a tenement building in Sea Close was demolished and a four storey building erected as the workshop. Burns and Harris continued to expand into the general trade of the city and one of their most successful developments was the printing of coloured labels for distillers and also the preserves and confectionery trades. The orders for those labels ran into millions and given that all the double crown sheets had to be bronzed by hand, this will give an indication of the scale of the operation. Milk was not supplied at that time to protect workers from the effects of bronze dust entering the nostrils. Instead, a ration of snuff was issued.

There were three disastrous fires during the life of the company after its move to Long Wynd. The first was in 1900 when the factory of James Keiller & Son of marmalade fame was burned to the ground. Another was the great fire in Watson's Bond in 1906. On the third occasion Burns & Harris were the victims. Paper hung in the printing-room roof became ignited and the pressmen were literally left 'without a roof over their heads'. Fortunately, business was not interrupted even during the reconstruction period.

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Around 1927 another printing company in Dundee, Paul and Matthew situated in the Murraygate, ceased trading and Burns & Harris purchased the publishing rights to the *Dundee Directory*. The *Directory* was published annually over the next half century but in the early 1970s production costs started to outstrip the market value and in 1974 the last edition went to press. From the late 1920s the business continued to expand until disaster struck again with a devastating fire at the factory premises on 11 January 1957, gutting the machine-room and severely crippling the office premises. What might have been a lethal blow to the company was mitigated by the fact that a year earlier the young third generation of the Burns family had purchased a small printing concern in Arbroath, Central Printers (Arbroath) Ltd, which had significant space available. This was acquired temporarily and, together with the goodwill and help received from competitors, the company retained their staff on full time until they could be relocated in the new expanded factory on the original site. In 1967, the death of William Harris, son of the co-founder, left the company in the hands of the Burns family and the great-grandchildren of William Burns, one of the founders, continued to manage the business. In April 1995 Burns & Harris (Print) Ltd and George E. Findlay & Co. Ltd merged forming the new company name Burns Harris & Findlay Ltd.

George Langlands Harley was born at Colesberg Kopye near Kimberley, South Africa, on 27 January 1867. He moved to Lochee with his widowed mother after his father died from sunstroke, and at the age of eleven he applied for a job with William Kidd and was indentured on a five years' apprenticeship to the stationery trade. Among his recollections was his opening of the soaked letters washed ashore at the 'Ferry' in the mailbags from the wrecked train after the Tay Bridge disaster in 1879.

When the founders of Burns & Harris left William Kidd's employment to set up their own business, Harley joined them and served that company for 21 years. In 1904 he was able to raise £1000 to start business on his own account. He opened a small shop at 102 Nethergate and at the same time he acquired a double flat at Gowan's Court, 21 North Tay Street, where he installed his initial printing plant: an Arab platen, a double crown flat bed cylinder press, several type cases, a proofing press and a guillotine. Downstairs from this letterpress jobbing office was the works of Robert Blackwood, himself a lithographer recently in business. The close proximity of the two young firms led to many years of co-operative neighbourliness.

The strain of setting up and running his own business began to affect Harley's health and this led to his decision to offer a partnership to William Cox. In 1907 the business became known as Harley & Cox. As it prospered it was necessary to move to new premises at East Henderson's Wynd. At the same time, the opportunity was taken to set up a litho department. The company remained there until 1921 when the owners of the property put it up for sale. It was decided that rather than purchase the building the company should seek a new and larger location and this took them back to Gowan's Court, opposite their original building. Soon afterwards they installed their second Intertype machine costing £1300. In 1924 William Cox died but the senior partner, George Harley, served the company until 1944 when he died in a tragic drowning accident.

In 1908 the Cresswell Printing Press was founded by T. M. Sparks in premises at 2 and 4 Peter Street. He had been trained as a bookbinder but decided to add printing to his business and in 1911 moved to larger accommodation at 12 and 14 Peter Street. The press continued to do business there for the remaining years of its seventeen years of existence. The choice of the company title is

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

interesting. The press was established in the heart of old Dundee, in a very old thoroughfare running between Murraygate and Seagate, and close to the site of the old Town House and Market Cross. Nearby there was formerly another landmark of bygone Dundee, the Dog Well. The Cross and the Well were combined to obtain the Cresswell Press.

The growth of the printing industry in the city during the second half of the last century can best be measured by consulting the *Dundee Directory*. In the 1856—57 edition 11 printers are listed and this number had risen to 13 in 1874. However, by the end of the century the number of printers had risen to 25. Of these perhaps the greatest success story is that of D. C. Thomson.

When William Thomson, a Dundee shipowner in the 1870s, took over shares in a local firm which published the *Dundee Courier and Argus* and the *Weekly News*, he could not have foreseen the success which was to follow from that modest beginning. In 1886 he took complete control of the company and made his son D. C. Thomson a partner with full authority over the firm, then named W. & D. C. Thomson. Some time later another son, Frederick, joined the firm.

In the years that followed, several nephews of D. C. Thomson entered the firm, including another notable figure in the company's history, W. Harold Thomson, whose sons are chairman and vice-chairman today (1995).

From the time W. & D. C. Thomson was established until the turn of the century, there was fierce competition in Dundee with the larger and longer established firm of John Leng & Co. That company published the *Dundee Advertiser* and the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* as well as the *People's Journal* and *People's Friend*.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century the Thomson business became the more successful of the two. In 1905 the name of the company was changed to the present D. C. Thomson & Co. Ltd. A year later an arrangement was made with the Lengs to pool the two businesses with Thomsons as the majority partner. For a period the Lengs continued to manage their side of the business, but eventually both came under the full management of the Thomson family.

On the newspaper side, the *Evening Post* launched by the Thomsons in 1900 joined up with the *Evening Telegraph* in 1905 and continues today under that title. The *Sunday Post* was launched in Glasgow in 1914. It was first known as the *Post Sunday Special* until it took its present title in 1919. It has been one of the success stories of the industry. In 1926, following the General Strike, the *Dundee Advertiser* merged with the *Dundee Courier*, which today has one of the largest circulations among provincial newspapers in the UK.

Soon after the First World War, the firm decided to expand its magazine business to take up printing time on presses not fully occupied by newspapers. This was made possible by the development of an additional fold to a tabloid newspaper by what is known as a pony folder. The company first entered the children's market with the *Adventure*, a text story for boys, which was launched in 1921. This was followed rapidly by the *Rover*, *Wizard*, *Vanguard*, *Skipper*, and *Hotspur*. In 1937 came the first of the comics, *Dandy*, and soon afterwards the *Beano* which still has the largest sale of children's comics in the UK.

The period following the Second World War saw a great expansion in Thomson's business, not only

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

in the launching of many new magazines and children's papers but also Christmas annuals.

The company is rightly proud of the fact it continues as an independent family firm. In fact, the group is the only truly Scottish controlled company among the principal newspaper publishers in Scotland — all their publications are owned and based in Scotland.

It has never been their policy to acquire outside publications. The purchase of the *Scots Magazine* in 1927 was an exception. It was first published on 9 February 1739 as a 48-page booklet, price six-pence monthly, edited and printed in Edinburgh. A favourite with Scots both at home and abroad, it celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1989 as the world's oldest popular periodical.

The printing scene in Dundee today is in contrast with the picture at the end of the last century when some twenty-five firms were trading. There is little doubt this is due to the spread of new technology and, perhaps equally important, the ability of business in general to install their own office printing equipment.

This short history of printing in Dundee cannot end without recognising the important contribution to the industry made by the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art. Initially printing classes were established in Bell Street but in 1959 a Department of Printing was set up in the College's new building in Perth Road with completely new equipment. In its early years the department was responsible for the day release training of printing apprentices in the city and also from Perth. In later years apprentices from Aberdeen were accommodated for block release training and courses were further developed by the introduction of the Printing and Publishing Industrial Training Board Pilot Scheme. The Scheme made history as for the first time it enabled students from the highlands and islands to attend further education in print.

Credit must be given to Dundee for setting up the first Distance Learning Course in print in the UK. This drew students from as far afield as London, Devon, and Northern Ireland. It says much for the dedication of the staff that all 131 teaching units were written by members of the staff in their own time. The increasing spread of new technology, both within and outwith the trade, resulted in a diminishing demand for formal apprentice training and the Department of Printing closed in 1986.

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Part One: Perth

Although it is known that one of the first recorded bookbinders in Perth, Archibald Steedman, was active towards the end of the sixteenth century, it was over a century later that the first printing press reached the city. During the rebellion of 1715 the Earl of Mar had to order types and a press from Aberdeen to print the Jacobite proclamations and other documents of the Old Pretender.

There is a Minute of the Town Council of Aberdeen, dated 20 October 1715, in the following terms:

The said day the Provost produced an order sub-scribed by the Earl of Mar, Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty's forces in Scotland dated at Perth the 14th day of October inst. directed to the Magistrates of Aberdeen ordering them to deliver forthwith to Robert Drummond, servant to Robert Fairbairns (Freebairn), the best printing press, with such typs, utensills, and other materials as Mr Drummond should choose and find necessary, and to see them packed up in good order, and to provide horses and proper carriages for transporting them to Perth, or where the army shall be at that time; after reading of which order the Provost held thereof, or the value of the same and that the thesaurer should advance what money is requisit for makeing boxes and others for holding the same, and for transporting all to Perth, which being considered be the counsell they approved of sending of the said press, typs and utensills thereof to Perth or where the army shall be, and appoynts the thesaurer to grant ane oblidgeement to the said James Nicoll for returneing the forsaid press, typs and utensills to him in also good condition as they wer received, and makeing up any deterioration thereof, or paying him the value of the same; as also appoynts the thesaurer to pay what charges shall be debursed for makeing boxes and other carriages for transporting the said press to Perth or where the army shall be, and for men and horss hyre, and expenses in carrying the same there; and the saids expenses to be allowed to the thesaurer in the first end of the accompts; and the counsell will consider, when the printing press is returned, what loss the said James Nicoll sustains throw the want thereof.

The products of the press included not only the Proclamations but also an account of the Battle of Sheriffmuir. Towards the end of the year a well-printed pamphlet was published entitled *Scotland's Lament, Confabulation and Prayer* and is a 12 pages quarto. It bears the colophon: 'Perth, Printed by Mr Robert Freebairn/For the Benefite of all-Lovers of God and their Country, 1715'.

The Council was to consider possible loss sustained by James Nicoll 'when the printing press is returned' but it is questionable if it was ever returned. It is known that the press was certainly sent to Perth, for in a later Minute the Aberdeen treasurer was authorised to obtain money to pay the expenses of the conveyance. It is very likely that James Nicoll saw the last of his press, types and other utensils when he watched them being packed into their boxes. This probability is based on the fact that, within a month, the Battle of Sheriffmuir was fought, and during the immediate period which followed the situation became very confused.

Mr James Young, a foreman for a time at the *Courier* office, used to tell of an old-fashioned press which lay in a corner of the *Courier* office for many years. It was said by some that this was the press which printed the Jacobite Proclamations.

During the period of its short life in Perth, the press was operated by an English printer with

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Jacobite sympathies, one Robert Freebairn, who had fled Edinburgh after a failed attempt to capture Edinburgh Castle. On the failure of the rebellion he escaped to the Continent, returning surreptitiously to Edinburgh during the 1720s to reclaim his post of King's Printer. He died on 10 May 1747.

After Freebairn there appears to have been little or no printing done in Perth until 1770 when George Johnston brought his press to the town from Aberdeen. In dedicating his first publication, Marchant's *Bloody Tribunal*, to the Provost and Council of the day, he claimed this was the first book to be printed in Perth. His stay in the town was short-lived, however, due in no small measure to the failure in 1774 of the *Perth Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* on which his business was so dependent. This octavo publication of thirty-two pages consisted of political matters, general literature, and notes on home and overseas events, and had been launched in 1772 by Robert Morison.

Robert Morison was born in 1722, the son of a bookbinder in the town. For the greater part of his life he was a bookseller and postmaster, but his entry into publishing in 1772 was to mark the beginning of the Morison family era which brought great distinction to the town. It is worthy of note that prior to this, in 1752, Morison had started a circulating library on the model of several in Edinburgh. Books were borrowed at one penny per night, or one shilling per month.

Robert had two sons who entered the family business. The elder son, James, born in 1762, entered the bookselling and publishing side of the business and was an accomplished linguist. He was largely responsible for a steady flow of publications and it is reckoned that between 1773 and 1800 over forty titles passed through the presses. Robert, who subsequently became a printer, was born in 1764. It has been suggested that Robert learned the art of printing from George Johnston, but this is most unlikely as he was only ten years of age when Johnston left Perth. If proof was needed of the family's entry into printing, this can be found from the title-page of *Cook's Voyages*. The imprint reads 'Perth: printed by R. Morison, junior, for R. Morison & Son, booksellers, 1785'.

In 1788 an edition of *Scottish Poets*, described as the first uniform edition, was issued. It was dedicated to the Earl of Buchan, a great patron of literature and, with all his eccentricities, a remarkable Scotsman. The issue is an attractive set of duodecimo volumes, illustrated with steel engravings. The Rev. James Scott, who wrote the article on Perth in Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account*, was informed by James Morison that at this time (1794) his presses were producing from 20,000 to 30,000 volumes per annum. In that year the University of St Andrews appointed the Morisons in Perth to be their printers.

The Abertay Historical Society Publication, *Publishing in Perth before 1807* by R. H. Carnie, describes in some detail many of the titles produced and published by the Morisons and pays tribute to the high standard of typography and the quality of the engraved plates. Special mention is made of *Seasons*, published in 1793, and evidence of the publishers' own awareness of the high standard achieved is contained in their statement:

In the present edition we have endeavoured to give it every recommendation which can be derived from valuable engravings, beauty of paper, elegance of type and correctness of printing. For we avow our honest ambition to contribute, as far as traders in our department of business can, to the Advancement of Literature and the progress of all the Sister Fine Arts in our native

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

country.’

In addition to eventually taking over the publishing side of the business, James Morison established paper mills at Woodend, near Almond Park, with his friend Henry Lindsay. It is said the mills produced 9000 to 10,000 reams of printing paper and 7000 to 8000 reams of packing paper annually.

James Morison was married twice, first to a granddaughter of Principal Tullidelph of St Andrews, and second to Grace Lindsay, a sister of his partner in the paper mills. William Morison, his son by the first marriage, was born in 1780 but died at the age of 26. His name is associated with the *Encyclopaedia Perthensis*, a work in twenty-three quarto volumes. It is said that young Morison was largely responsible for compiling this major work. The contents can be best described by quoting its full title, viz ‘*Encyclopaedia Perthensis or Universal Dictionary of Knowledge: collected from every source and intended to supersede all other English books of reference. Illustrated with plates and maps. In 23 volumes, R. Morison, Printer, Perth.*’

David Morison, born in 1792, was the son of the second marriage. Like his father, David was an accomplished Greek and Hebrew scholar and, in addition, he was an artist of some ability. He was only 17 when his father died leaving a widow and family totally dependent on the business. David had been educated as a lawyer but on his father’s death he was compelled to take over the family business.

After making himself proficient in letterpress printing, binding, and publishing, he added a lithographic department to the business. It is said that he used this new process not only for the pictorial illustrations of books but also for their decoration. Examples of the work he produced can be seen in the *Catalogue of the Gray Library, Kinfauns Castle*, the decoration work of which was drawn on stone by Morison himself and printed by Peter Cochrane who, like Morison, was self-taught. He also wrote the text and lithographed the drawings of Colonel Murray’s *Scenes in Scotland*.

David Morison did not remain in the publishing business for long. He had considerable knowledge of chemistry and established the Perth Ink Manufactory, later turning his attention to colour printing on various textures for wallpapers. The celebrity of the firm as a publishing house ended with David Morison but this was offset by its reputation for bookbinding. A number of journeymen were regularly employed in the Watergate bindery and the standard of their craftsmanship was highly regarded, particularly by county families for their private libraries.

In the supplement to mark the *Perthshire Advertiser*’s centenary in 1929, Alex Scott wrote of the Morison Press: ‘At the present day, little is known of the important part furthered and enacted in our city by the several generations of a family which, during a period of over eighty years, were the means of establishing an industry which may be fittingly termed the mainspring of our civilisation. From the evidence they have left behind them, one can discern the spirit they severally showed of promoting the craft towards a high distinction, the outcome of the cultured mind and thoughtful discrimination. Robert Morison, the founder, had along with his business capacity, a rich literary talent; a man, we would imagine, having the interests of his native city at heart, and keenly concerned in its history and traditions. This literary talent appears to have been transmitted to his successors, and to his son Robert particularly is ascribed the privilege of supplying important

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

information to the author of *Waverley* when engaged in his great work, *The Fair Maid of Perth*.’

In 1809 the Morisons established the *Perthshire Courier and Farmer's Journal* and it remained in their hands until 1853 when it was taken over by James Dewar. For twenty years the paper had no rival, but in 1829 the agitation in connection with reform saw the launch of the *Strathmore Journal* in Coupar Angus. When this rival paper moved to Perth it was renamed the *Perthshire Advertiser and Strathmore Journal* and printed and published by John Taylor in the King's Arms Close, High Street. When first published it cost 7d and comprised four pages, each with six columns of very small type.

Peter Drummond in one of his Perthshire sketches gives a graphic description of the printing of the *Perthshire Advertiser and Strathmore Journal* when it was managed by George Penny and printed by John Taylor. A brother-in-law of Taylor invented and constructed a machine for printing the paper more speedily than the existing hand press. Unfortunately, it had been imperfectly constructed and, although the results were fairly good, it was continually breaking down. On publishing days, Drummond's description was of 'Taylor covered with ink, struggling amidst a labyrinth of wheels, flaps, and threads, fretting, despairing, cursing, not loud but deep; and Penny, with a nose like an illuminated carbuncle, holding a dripping, heart-broken, tallow candle away in the vortex of the tangled thicket.' The press became known as Taylor's Infernal Machine. History is silent on the fate of this press, but it is known that 1857 saw the first use of steam power in the Perth printing office of Mr Robert Whittet, senior. It is claimed that the first publication to be produced in Perth using steam power was the initial number of *Excelsior, Murrays' Royal Asylum Gazette*.

What were the working conditions in the printing industry in the middle of the nineteenth century? In a lecture in 1892, James Bridges, a former baillie of Perth, described them. In 1883 the working hours were from 7 am to 8 pm, Monday to Saturday, with one hour break. Apprenticeships lasted seven years and the starting rate was one shilling and sixpence per week, rising by annual increments of one shilling plus to ten or eleven shillings. The standard journeyman's wage was twenty shillings per week, or thereabouts, but those newly out of their time earned between twelve and fifteen shillings.

It was the job of the youngest apprentice to prepare the workshop for the staff arriving in the morning. This meant he had to be at the office by 6 am to sweep it out, kindle the stove, and carry in such fuel as would be required to keep it going all day. In addition, he had to fill the lamps with oil and see that they were properly trimmed.

If he worked in a newspaper office, he could be found at 10 pm on Wednesday nights, in all weathers, waiting for the arrival of the London mail coach which brought copies of the *Times* and *Park Lane Express* published in London on the previous Monday. Sometimes he would wait until 2 am or 3 am and, having rushed home for breakfast after handing over the papers to the editor, he had to be back at the office to help handfold, put the papers into covers, and then deliver copies to subscribers. His work was rarely over by 2 pm and so this part of the week was almost an unbroken stretch of over thirty hours. Despite this, the trade was widely regarded as a desirable one. The earliest records of the organisation of print workers in Scotland show that a Perth branch of the General Typographical Association of Scotland existed from 1836 to 1844. When the Association was amalgamated in 1844 with the National Typographical Association, which covered England, Ireland and Scotland, societies of the Association were formed that year in Dundee and Perth. The

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Northern District resources of the National Association were severely tested in 1846 due to numerous trade disputes and a downturn in trade generally. Not unexpectedly, the death blow to the Northern District came in 1847 as a consequence of a serious strike in Edinburgh. Attempts were made to reform a Scottish Association in 1849 but it was not until 1853 that the Scottish Typographical Association was born. At its formation, the Association consisted of five branches but it increased in strength over the next two years. Perth was one of the new branches set up in 1855. Towards the end of the century the Perth branch became heavily involved in the struggle by male compositors against the recruitment of women, who were regarded as cheap labour. This had its origin in the major dispute in Edinburgh of 1872 when the jobs of men on strike were filled by non-union labour and by female labour.

In 1890 an attempt was made by a Perth firm to introduce female compositors and other companies maintained they had to do likewise if they were to compete. A lengthy dispute followed during which the former decision to admit women provided they were employed under the same conditions as men, but to oppose underpaid female labour, was upheld. Negotiations with two Perth offices proved unsuccessful and a resultant strike lasted from July until November, culminating in the closure of the two offices concerned.

After that dispute, industrial relations remained relatively calm for nearly seventy years until the printing industry was disrupted by a major strike in 1959. In the late Spring of that year all 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 STA, the Perth branch was involved and work ceased in the town on 18 June 1959 and was not resumed again until 6 August following the national agreement reached through the good offices of Lord Birkett who had acted as independent chairman.

In the *Perth Directory* published in 1832 by the Morisons at 14 High Street, the only printer's name entered was their own. However, it is known that at this time R. Crearer & Son had a printing press in Perth, in the Watergate, from which they issued small local publications. In 1818 they had printed John Sinclair's *Simple Lays* and in 1822 William Roy's *Specimens of Poetical Productions*.

The picture one has of printing offices in the city around the 1830s and 1840s is that of the Morisons still occupying their old quarters at 14 High Street; the Perth Printing Company (*Perthshire Advertiser*) had located itself in the Kirk Close; there was a printing office in King's Arms Close which had been occupied by Taylor, but he removed to Parliament Close and later to Dundee; Mr Charles Sidey, postmaster, had started a printing business in a cellar at the old Post Office at the corner of Charlotte Street; and there was the *Constitutional* at the Kirkside.

One name which came to the fore in 1830 and remains to this day is Woods of Perth. David Wood set up in business in the old High Street as David Wood & Son, Steam Printers, embarking on a venture which has now lasted 165 years. It soon earned and has maintained a reputation for high quality printing.

Around the turn of the century Woods moved to Mill Street and, at the same time, began to cater for the growing desire for quality production of the now popular postage stamp. This period heralded the launching of the publication *The Stamp Lover* and subsequently *The Philatelist*. It was in this field that Woods of Perth became respected as specialists in philatelic printing where even the

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

slightest colour variance often determines the difference between valuable and rare. In more recent times the company has demonstrated its continuing outstanding skills in colour printing in other fields, most notably by diversifying into high quality auction catalogues.

The printing office at 25 High Street (Old Ship Close) has a history of its own. This business appears to have originated with the launching of a newspaper, the *Perthshire Chronicle*, in 1836. It was one of the products of the celebrated Voluntary, containing and championing Radical and Voluntary principles. The *Perthshire Chronicle* was printed by James Whittet at 60 St John Street, in an old house within a coalyard on the south of Baxter's Vennel, and published at 25 High Street. In 1841 the paper became a Chartist organ but when Whittet relinquished the printing during that year it was taken over by William Belford who had for several years been foreman to Sidey. The *Chronicle* ceased publication in 1841 and the following year Belford became printer to the *Perthshire Advertiser*. He immediately introduced new type fonts and a new press capable of printing 1200 copies per hour.

When Whittet gave up printing the *Chronicle* he commenced business on his own account in the Old Ship Close. Sadly, shortly afterwards, he met his death by drowning in the South Inch lade.

John Fisher, a former foreman at the *Courier* and later carrying on a printing business in the Old Ship Close, started a weekly newspaper in August 1841. It consisted of twelve pages under the title *Perth Saturday Journal*. It was the first weekly periodical issued in Perth at a penny a copy. It was immediately successful and the twelfth issue appeared in enlarged form with the new and more ambitious title the *Perth and Dundee Saturday Journal*. Upon Whittet's death, Fisher took over his business and carried it on until 1852. This period was marked by great literary activity in weekly magazines, and with it the name of Fittis is associated. Until his connection with the business came to an end, Fisher printed most if not all of Fittis's publications.

Robert Whittet, son of James Whittet, took over Fisher's business and soon earned a reputation as a printer of outstanding merit. With the introduction of new plant, including as already mentioned an early steam-powered press, the business prospered so it was nothing less than a sensation when he suddenly left to take up farming in Virginia.

After Taylor transferred his office from King's Arms Close to Parliament Close, he started a Radical weekly newspaper the *Perthshire Independent and Central Herald for Scotland*. Its price was twopence halfpenny. The first number is dated Friday 19 February 1843 but after seven or eight weeks it ceased publication.

In 1842 Mr William Bayne set up a printing business at 25 High Street and, when Taylor left King's Arms Close, Bayne took over the premises. In 1843 he issued the *Dundee, Perth and Arbroath Weekly Magazine*, price one penny, which ran for six months. Later, he acquired one of Fisher's journals, the *Perth and Dundee Saturday Journal*.

Another short-lived newspaper was the *Northern Liberal* which was launched in 1852 in connection with the general election of that year. Its price was 3d. After three months it ceased publication.

Mention is made in the booklet *A History of the Glasgow Printing Industry* of the invention of the Cossar flat-bed web newspaper printing machine by Tom Cossar of the *Govan Press*. One of the

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

earliest installations of this press was at the premises of David Philips Printers, Crieff, in 1905. Before the arrival of the Cossar, the *Strathearn Herald*, which began publication in 1856, was printed first on a hand-press, then on a cylinder machine driven by manual labour, and for a further twenty years on a Wharfedale press. The last issue of the newspaper was printed on the Cossar on Saturday 30 March 1991; the newspaper is now produced by Scottish and Universal Newspapers at their plant in Perth. The Cossar is still in remarkably good condition; it is hoped a home can be found for the ninety-year-old press in a Scottish museum.

The printing scene in Perth during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was largely influenced by the *Perthshire Advertiser* and its eminent publisher and printer Samuel Cowan. Cowan was a native of Monkton, in Ayrshire, where his father was a schoolmaster. He was trained on a newspaper in Ayr, afterwards owned a newspaper in Stirling, and finally acquired the *Perthshire Advertiser*. He developed a considerable reputation as an author and historian and was for a time a town councillor and magistrate of the city.

Cowan greatly developed the printing side of his business at Watergate. It is said that at one time he employed around 100 compositors, many of them women. The staff was mainly employed in printing books for London publishers. However, business was adversely affected in 1890 by the strike directed by male employees against the continued employment of female labour in the printing office. In 1907 the firm, then named Cowan & Co. Ltd. went into voluntary liquidation. The business was first acquired by Donald Matheson, then subsequently taken over by the partnership of William Mackay and Kenneth Davidson. The outbreak of war in 1914 ended the business and the property was bought in 1915 by Henry Munro of Henry Munro Ltd, publishers, Glasgow and Aberdeen. He formed a subsidiary company to run the enterprise under the name of the Munro Press. The restrictions imposed by the war meant that it was not until the 1920s that the newspaper began to develop and prosper.

In 1929 the *Perthshire Courier* was purchased from John McKinlay and incorporated into the *Perthshire Advertiser* and this was followed in 1949 by the acquisition of the *Perthshire Constitutional and Journal*. In the Spring of 1995 it was announced that Scottish and Universal Newspapers was planning to centralise its printing operations in Lanarkshire. By late 1996 all titles, including the *Perthshire Advertiser*, would be distributed from a new factory on a greenfield site between Hamilton and East Kilbride.

The present company, John McKinlay, was founded in 1903 by Colin McDonald Smart, editor of the *Perthshire Courier* at premises in Charterhouse Lane. At that time John McKinlay was in Kowloon installing a newspaper press which he went on to operate for a few years. On receiving the offer of a partnership from Smart, John McKinlay returned to Perth and when the company moved to its present premises in King Street in 1909 it became known as Smart & McKinlay. On the death of Smart, McKinlay became editor and proprietor of the *Perthshire Courier* for a brief period. When he died at a comparatively early age, the business was taken over by his 18-year-old son and has continued in the family since.

Mention has already been made of Woods of Perth founded in 1830. Another of Perth's existing printers founded last century is Farquhar & Son Ltd who commenced business in 1870. The company was best known as bookbinders and paper rulers but moved into continuous stationery and general printing in the early 1950s.

A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

Founded in 1901, Milne, Tannahill & Methven moved from their original premises in Mill Street to Glover Street in 1981. In 1978 Munro & Scott were incorporated into the company but still retain their own identity. In 1970 the company changed over from letterpress to litho printing and now undertake the printing of journals, annual reports, catalogues, etc.

Although now reduced in numbers, the printing community in Perth still plays an important role in the life of the town. What has not diminished, however, is the high standard of its products and its ability to maintain a reputation for excellence.

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A REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Volume 3: Dundee and Perth

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