Publishers, Profits and Poverty

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A Biographical Directory of Publishing in Bohemian Fleet Street

By

Robert J. Kirkpatrick

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PREFACE

Fleet Street has been synonymous with the newspaper industry since the beginning of the 18th century. But for several decades in the 19th century it was also home to a secondary publishing industry, peopled by ambitious, avaricious, sometimes unscrupulous, often bankrupt and devil-may-care publishers, and a literary underclass of hacks and impecunious scribblers, who filled the pages of cheap periodicals and weekly penny-part serials aimed at the working class, and who formed a loose brotherhood, drinking in the area's numerous taverns and coffee houses and living from hand to mouth. This was Bohemian Fleet Street, the centre of the penny blood and the penny dreadful, the home of sensationalism and Gothic horror and romance, of Sweeney Todd, Spring-heeled Jack and Varney the Vampyre, works which issued from the offices of publishers such as John Duncombe, William Strange, George Purkess, Edward Lloyd, Edward Harrison and the Newsagents' Publishing Company, whose premises were found not only in Fleet Street but in its surrounding alleyways, courts and squares, and further afield in areas such as Soho, Holywell Street, Paternoster Row and the Strand. Some publishers became extremely wealthy through their activities, while others encountered bankruptcy, often more than once, and died in poverty.

Bohemian Fleet Street was also the home of an explosion in cheap publishing for children, particularly for boys, who, from the mid-1860s onwards, were tempted by a bewildering number of one penny (and later halfpenny) weekly story papers and serials containing sensational and exciting—and often bloodthirsty—tales of adventure, crime, sport, school life, war and the supernatural. Many of these tales were written by a coterie of hack writers who were every bit as impecunious as their earlier counterparts (indeed, some were the same writers, simply writing for a slightly younger readership, or seeing their earlier works re-issued and re-packaged), while others were written by authors who would not have considered themselves Bohemian, but who, like many Bohemians, lived and died in relative or total poverty. They were all part of a cut-throat circulation war every bit as unremitting as that fought by more traditional Fleet Street newspapers, with publishers and proprietors such as Edwin J. Brett, the

Emmett brothers, John Allingham, Samuel Dacre Clarke and the Aldine Publishing Company flooding the market with story papers and novelettes.[1]

Bohemian Fleet Street was also the home of the radical press—which campaigned for political reform, universal suffrage, improvements in wages and conditions for the working class, and the repeal of newspaper taxes. Its leaders included publishers and writers such as Richard Carlile, William Cobbett, Henry Hetherington, James Watson, John Cleave and George Jacob Holyoake. They published newspapers and periodicals which defied the law, refusing to pay the taxes that the Government demanded, often finding themselves in prison or subject to heavy fines, and fought vigorously for a free and unfettered press.

Finally, Bohemian Fleet Street was the home of a fringe press—the scurrilous, the scandalous and the satirical (epitomised perhaps by *Punch*), plagiarism, piracy and flagrant breaches of copyright law, and the decadent and pornographic—not necessarily cheap (and therefore with only an affluent audience) but subversive enough to cause concern amongst the Establishment.

All of this was fuelled by constant improvements in technology, a growing population, increasing levels of literacy, and a desire amongst the working and middle classes for cheap reading matter.

Almost as soon as it made its first appearance in the 1830s, cheap sensational literature attracted critical opprobrium—from the mainstream press, the judiciary, the church, and from a variety of self-appointed moral guardians—on the grounds not only that it was bloodthirsty, violent and badly-written, but also that it glorified criminality, encouraged a disrespect for authority, and, as the decades passed, it was also blamed for inciting readers (especially young boys) to commit crimes including burglary, robbery, blackmail and murder. But cheap literature itself was not born in the 1830s. Accessible reading matter for the masses had existed since the 17th century—broadsides, ballads, chapbooks and tracts, often sold by itinerant pedlars. From the beginning of the 19th century, the market was being flooded with cheap periodicals and newspapers, and cheap books, with some publishers gambling that cheap literature that sold well would be more profitable than expensive literature that sold far fewer copies.

Indeed, some publishers made enormous profits. When Edward Lloyd died in April 1890, he left an estate valued at, in today's terms, around £76

[1] For a complete history of boys' story papers, see Robert J. Kirkpatrick, *From the Penny Dreadful to the Ha'penny Dreadfuller: A Bibliographic History of the Boys' Periodical in Britain, 1762—1950*. (London: The British Library, and Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2013).

million. Between 1839 and the early 1850s he had been a prolific publisher of "penny bloods," sensational novels of Gothic horror and romance, crime and adventure, published in weekly instalments at one penny, amongst the most famous of which were *Varney the Vampyre, or The Feast of Blood*, and *The String of Pearls, or The Sailor's Gift* (the story of Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street). In the mid-1850s he began concentrating on his *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, which he had launched in 1842 and which went on to become one of the most successful newspapers of the Victorian era. While it was this that formed the basis of Lloyd's fortune, the seeds for his success had been sown much earlier, on the backs of "penny blood" authors such as James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest. Rymer died in August 1884, leaving an estate valued at, in today's terms, £800,000. Prest, on the other hand, who died in 1859, left nothing, being given a pauper's funeral by the local Poor Law Union.

Similarly, when Edwin J. Brett died in December 1895, he left an estate worth almost £10 million in today's terms. He had spent the previous 30 years publishing boys' story papers (the best-known of which was *Boys of England*) and "penny dreadfuls," the juvenile successor to "penny bloods." Several of the authors who helped lay the foundation for Brett's success, including Percy B. John, Bracebridge Hemyng and William Stephens Hayward, died with barely a penny to their name. And, of course, there was Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), who became the greatest newspaper baron of his era, but whose fortune (of £307 million when he died) was founded on the success of numerous cheap and cheerful periodicals and boys' story papers.

Around 20% of the publishers in this book were, in today's terms, millionaires when they died (although a few of these were family members who had inherited large sums and who carried on the business). A further 20% left legacies of between £100,000 and £1 million.

However, publishers were not immune from poverty. Publishers were often at risk of bankruptcy, running up debts launching new periodicals which quickly failed. 18% of those in this book found themselves in a debtors' prison at least once, and 40% were declared bankrupt at least once during their careers, with most of these eventually dying intestate.

Bohemian Fleet Street was also a place of degradation and poverty for many writers. The image of the hack writer—dissolute, disreputable, dirty, dishevelled, and often drunk—may be a well-worn stereotype but it had its foundations in real life, going back to the original Grub Street, a haunt of impoverished writers and scurrilous publishers and booksellers in the parish

of St. Giles in the 17th and 18th centuries.[2] Grub Street soon became a metaphor, shorthand for hack writers—the word "hack" being derived from hackney, a carriage, or a person, available for hire. One widely-quoted picture of life in Grub Street in around 1740 featured the Irish poet Samuel Boyse, who was described as having pawned all his clothes and was reduced to staying in bed wrapped in a blanket, through which he had cut a hole for his arm to enable him to write.[3] A century and a half later, things were little different, as evidenced by the publisher John Allingham (better known as "Ralph Rollington") who published several boys' story papers in the 1880s, and who described finding two of his authors, Vane Ireton St. John and Walter Viles, holed up in a lodging house in Margate, having pawned all their clothes and sitting a desk wrapped in sheets.[4]

Writers were poorly-paid, even by publishers who were becoming exceedingly rich. Many were freelance, with no guarantee of commissions or having work accepted. Other factors which contributed to the poverty of many writers included ill-health, the needs of a large family, an inability to put money aside for retirement, and, for some writers, the necessity of trying to maintain a middle-class lifestyle (dining out, socializing, employing servants and living in relatively expensive homes). Older writers often found themselves frozen out by younger ones; the First World War led to many publications being suspended or closed; and some publishers became heavily reliant on pirated and cheap material from America, leaving little scope for homegrown writers. Competition amongst writers was also a problem. In 1899 Walter Besant pointed out that in the 1891 census there were around 5,800 people recorded as authors, editors and journalists. However, he went on to estimate that there were around 20,000 people who were either full-time or part-time writers. 12,000 of these were contributing to penny weeklies, although only around a fifth of these were full-time authors. He also estimated there were 1,300 novelists, although again only a small proportion of these were making a comfortable living.[5]

Of course, some writers from Bohemian Fleet Street became very well-off, but these were the exception rather than the rule. Publishers were much

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[2] Grub Street was renamed Milton Street in 1830. Bohemian Fleet Street was immortalised in George Gissing's 1891 novel, *New Grub Street*, which centres on a talented but unrewarded novelist, Edward Reardon, and a cynical and manipulative journalist, Jasper Milvaine.

[3] Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. V (London: R. Griffiths, 1753), 168-169.

[4] "Ralph Rollington," *A Brief History of Boys' Journals, with interesting facts about the writers of boys' stories* (Leicester: H. Simpson, 1913), 32-33.

[5] Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), 1-2 and 57-59.

more likely to be well-off, but again there were many who lived and died in poverty.

One problem with investigating the lives and activities of many 19th century publishers is the lack of written records. These exist for many of the major publishers of the era—those who published successful newspapers, magazines, novels etc., and whose businesses lasted for many years, and whose lives and careers have been covered by memoirs, biographies and company histories—but many publishers of cheap literature left very little, their records being lost, destroyed, or may simply have never existed. Some publishers were, understandably given their output—radical or pornographic—very secretive.

The principal aim of this book is to provide more accurate and more detailed biographies of the major, and minor, figures from this field than have been published before. The life and work of some publishers, for example Edward Lloyd, Edwin J. Brett, John Dicks and Alfred Harmsworth are well-known today, but many have been neglected. Of the 100 or so publishers covered here, only 15 have an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ONDB*), with 23 given an entry in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism* (*DNCJ*).

The entries here, which are in a roughly chronological order, have been compiled using five principal sources, beginning with previously-published works such as memoirs, biographies and studies of 19th century publishing. Details of births, marriages, children, deaths, addresses, probate records etc. came from genealogy websites. The archives of the Royal Literary Fund, a potential source of financial help for poverty-stricken writers (held at the British Library), contain a great deal of biographical and financial information not available elsewhere, along with otherwise unrecorded details of writers' contributions to periodicals. The archives of *The London Gazette*, available online, is also a valuable source of detail about bankruptcies, partnerships, and addresses.

Finally, a major source of material has been national and local newspapers, the digitisation of which, on sites such as the British Library's newspaper archive, has made it possible to quickly unearth material that was previously only available by physically examining original copies, at places such as the British Library or local archives. Again, this has filled in many gaps regarding the activities of publishers—their advertisements often reveal hitherto unknown and unrecorded titles, enabling publication dates and changes of address to be more accurately identified, along with details of prosecutions, court cases and other material.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Because of the vast quantity of genealogical detail in each entry, and to avoid a surfeit of reference footnotes, it can be assumed that most of this information—in particular dates and places of birth, baptism records, marriage and divorce records, addresses, dates and places of death and burials, and probate details, came from Ancestry, Findmypast, Familysearch and similar online genealogy resources. Occasionally, some genealogical information came from birth, marriage and death certificates and wills purchased from the Government General Register and Probate Offices, and from files in the Royal Literary Fund archives. In many cases, details of publishers' addresses came from *The Post Office Directory* and *Kelly's Directory*, the online British Book Trade Index, and William B. Todd's *A Directory of Printers and Others in Allied Trades: London and Vicinity, 1800-1840.*

Readers should note that in the 1841 census the ages of people over 15 were usually rounded down to the nearest five years—for example, someone actually aged 24 would have been recorded as 20. This explains the occasional discrepancy in quoted ages. It is also worth noting that before 1837 only churches recorded births, marriages and deaths; the 1836 Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act established the General Register Office, and a system of national registration of births, marriages and deaths came into effect in 1837. Thus the absence of, in particular, many birth and marriage records noted in this book.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1869, James Greenwood wrote an essay condemning "those low-minded, nasty fellows, the proprietors and promoters of what may be truthfully described as 'gallows literature'."[6] He was particularly concerned with the effects of cheap sensational literature on the minds and morals of young readers, a concern which was taken up by many others and which still, to some extent, exists today. Four years later, he returned to this theme in another essay:

> At least a quarter of a century ago it occurred to some enterprising individual to reprint and issue in "penny weekly numbers" the matter contained in the *Newgate Calendar*, and the publication was financially a great success. This excited the cupidity of other speculators, in whose eyes money loses none of its value though ever so begrimed with nastiness, and they set their wits to work to produce printed weekly "pen'orths" that should be as savoury to the morbid tastes of the young and the ignorant as was the renowned Old Bailey Chronicle itself.[7]

After describing several examples of this "nasty" literature, Greenwood (who had himself written several penny-part serials and had worked for some of the publishers he was implicitly criticizing) pondered:

> … what sort of persons are these who are so ignoble and utterly lost to all feelings of shame that they can consent to make money by a means that is more detestable than that resorted to by the common gutter-raker or the common pickpocket! How do such individuals comport themselves in society? Are they men well dressed and decently behaved, and have they any pretensions to respectability? The bookselling and publishing trade is a worthy trade: do the members of it generally recognise these base corrupters of the morals of little boys and girls? or do they shun them, and give them a wide berth when they are compelled to tread the same pavement with them? My dear reader, I assure you that whether they are shunned or recognised by

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[6] James Greenwood, "Juvenile Thieves," *The Seven Curses of London*, (London: Stanley Rivers & Co., 1869), p 134. *The Newgate Calendar* was a collection of accounts of crime and criminals, originally published in 1773, anlthough the title is often used to refer to a variety of earlier and later similar publications.

[7] James Greenwood, "Penny Awfuls," *St. Paul's Magazine*, December 1873, p 162.

> those who know them is not of the least moment to the blackguardly crew who pull the strings that keep the delusive puppets going. Well-dressed they are—they can well afford to be so, for they make a deal of money, and in many cases keep fine houses and servants and send their children to boarding-school. They dine well in the city, and bluster, and swagger, and swear, and wear diamonds on their unsullied hands, and chains of gold adorn their manly bosoms.[8]

This was an echo of an observation made 23 years earlier by an anonymous correspondent to *The Morning Chronicle*:

> Since the year 1844, when Eugene Sue's "Mysteries of Paris" appeared in London, a great number of penny papers of a vitiating character have been published in London, Manchester, Liverpool, and other large towns. Many men of the lowest class have started into notice and become comparatively rich by the sale of these most immoral works. I am acquainted with no less than six men who are in a position to keep their town and country houses by these pernicious enterprises—men who were saddled with debts a very few years ago.[9]

While this may have been true for some publishers of the literature concerned, it was by far from being a universal truth. It was certainly the case that publishers such as Edward Lloyd, Edward Harrison, Henry Vickers and Edwin J. Brett died leaving substantial legacies, but many of their predecessors and contemporaries were far less fortunate. The publishing industry throughout much of the 19th century was extremely competitive, and numerous hopefuls, seeing the apparently insatiable demand for cheap literature, flooded the market with serials, story papers and newspapers, hoping to make a quick fortune but often finding that supply exceeded demand. Bankruptcies were frequent, although few publishers were deterred by spells in debtors' prisons and appearances in the bankruptcy courts, and they soon re-established themselves, sustained by their unshakeable belief, an army of willing authors and an increasing number of printers, desperate for business, happy to extend credit and under-cut each other.

Publishers also cut costs as much as they could, offered inducements to readers (the second instalment of a new serial given away free with the first, free colour plates etc.), and incentives to newsagents and other vendors, who, in turn, gave free advertising, as highlighted by James Greenwood in 1874:

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[8] Greenwood,"Penny Awfuls," p 167.
[9] *Morning Chronicle*, 14 February 1850, p 7.

> The ordinary discount to the trade on ordinary publications is 25 per cent, but the worthy publishers of "Alone in the Pirates' Lair" and "The Skeleton Crew" can afford to allow double that, and more. Wholesale you may buy the precious pen'orths at the rate of fivepence a dozen, and there is no risk to the dealer, since all the unsold copies from last week are changed for a similar number of the day's date. This is the lure that tempts the tobacconist and the sweetstuff vendor and the keeper of the small chandlery, and induces these worthy tradesmen to give to this pernicious, though profitable, class of goods all the publicity of which their shop window is capable.[10]

Towards the end of the 19th century, publishers of cheap fiction began to rely more and more on American stories, either pirated or plagiarised, as highlighted by Francis Hitchman:

> The American cheap press is drawn upon largely and unblushingly. More than one of the weekly prints, to be mentioned hereafter, is composed almost exclusively of reprints of this kind, while several of the remainder obtain from one-third to one-half of their matter from the same source. Two methods of procedure are open to the enterprising publisher. In one case he simply cuts the story out of the American journal and reprints it as it stands, trusting to the printer's reader to correct the eccentricities of American orthography. This method may be commended for its comparative honesty. The author, it is true, receives no compensation for the use that is made of his work, but he is served no worse than the hundreds of English authors of infinitely greater pretensions, whose work is similarly "conveyed" every day in the United States. The English reader, too, is not plundered. The story presents itself for what it is—a tale of American life by an American writer—and as such he gets it at a very cheap rate. Greater ingenuity is required for the second method, which is, however, less popular with publishers on account of the greater expense which it entails. Under this system the publisher hands over a copy of the work which he wishes to have edited for the English market to one of the hacks in his employment. Pen in hand, this latter goes over the whole book, altering, striking out, writing in, and generally transmogrifying it. The title of the book is changed, as are the headings of the chapters; over-long chapters are divided; two short chapters are run into one; the *dramatis personae* are re-baptised, names that are familiar to the students of English fiction being substituted for American names and titles; the "brown stone mansion on Fifth Avenue" becomes a stately edifice in Belgravia or Grosvenor Square; Saratoga or Long Beach becomes Brighton or Scarborough; the "trip to Europe" is a Continental tour or a visit to Scotland; and the millionaire's country-house on the Hudson River becomes a hunting-box in the Shires, or a fishing lodge in the West of Ireland. The people are similarly changed. The Senator is transformed into

[10] James Greenwood, "A Short Way to Newgate," *The Wilds of London* (London: Chatto & Windus 1874), pp 159-160.

> a Duke or an Earl at the least—titles are very cheap in fiction of this character—the M.C. blossoms out into an M.P.; the Pittsburg ironmaster into a Manchester cotton lord, and the Wall Street operator into a prototype of the Rothschilds or the Barings. When a little more care is thought desirable, the style is modified in accordance with English notions of the fitness of things, and the more obvious Americanisms are suppressed. The book thus becomes an English novel for all practical purposes at a cost to the enterprising proprietor of the penny weekly of about £5, which, if he is in an unwontedly generous mood, he may perhaps make guineas.[11]

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One of the key factors in the emergence of cheap literature was the campaign against newspaper taxes. Newspapers were first taxed in the early 18th century, and as successive governments became more concerned with criticism from the press so the newspaper tax steadily increased, as a way of curbing press freedom. In 1802 the tax was increased to threepence and in 1815 to fourpence per copy, in theory putting newspapers, which then cost seven or eight pence, out of the reach of the working class.[12] This led to an explosion in the number of newspapers whose proprietors/publishers refused to pay the tax (hence the term "unstamped" newspapers), with many of them, amongst the most notable being William Cobbett, Richard Carlile, Henry Hetherington, John Cleave and James Watson, becoming actively involved in campaigns to have the tax abolished, continuing their fight despite prosecution, fines and imprisonment. In addition, there were also taxes on pamphlets, advertisements, and paper. The fight against all the taxes eventually succeeded, with the newspaper tax cut to one penny in 1836 before being abolished in 1855; the tax on pamphlets repealed in 1833; the tax on advertisements halved (from 3 shillings and 6 pence per advert) in 1836, and abolished altogether in 1853; and paper duty was repealed in 1861. This led to a massive increase in the production of daily and weekly periodicals—in 1864, *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory* recorded 1,768 titles; by 1887 this had increased to 3,597; and by 1901 the number was 4,914.[13]

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[11] Francis Hitchman, "Penny Fiction," *The Quarterly* Review, (July 1890, pp 156-158.

[12] This did not, of course, prevent the working class from reading newspapers—or, for those unable to read, having them read out loud. Newspapers could be hired by the hour, and were also made available in inns, coffee shops, working mens' clubs, libraries and reading rooms.

[13] Cited in Deirdre David (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the British Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2012, 2nd edition), pp 47-48.

Many publishers of cheap literature therefore began their careers as radicals, publishing unstamped newspapers and periodicals, advocating press freedom, alongside parliamentary reform and campaigning on behalf of the working class. For some, cheap fiction was a sideline, any potential profits possibly being a way of subsidising other loss-making endeavours. A handful of publishers dabbled in pornography, probably because it could be extremely lucrative—indeed, William Dugdale was notorious as probably the most prolific pornographer of his era. Some publishers, notably Edward Lloyd, began by publishing cheap fiction and then moved to more "respectable" reading matter. Some, for example Edwin J. Brett, Charles Fox, Samuel Dacre Clarke and Charles Perry Brown, focussed most of their efforts on publishing for boys—weekly story papers, penny-part serials and novelettes. Some, such as John Limbird, John Maxwell and John Dicks, took it upon themselves to bring high-quality fiction to the masses, not only by way of periodicals but also by cheap books—Dicks's sixpenny paperbacks were, for example, by way of stark contrast to the traditional three-decker novels, a format established in 1815 and which maintained its price of 31 shillings and sixpence until the 1890s.

Some publishers began their working lives in the printing trade, or as stationers or booksellers; others began as writers; some followed in their fathers' footsteps (which, in particular where father and son had the same name, has led to confusion as to who published what); and others seemingly appeared from nowhere.

Bohemian Fleet Street did not just encompass Fleet Street itself, which had been the centre of the newspaper industry since the late 18th century. Publishers congregated in many of the alleyways and courts which led off Fleet Street, in particular Red Lion Court, home to publishers such as George Maddick, George Howe, Alfred Ritchie, Charles Henry Clarke, William Mark Clark and Charles Perry Brown; Shoe Lane, home to publishers such as John Cleave, George Maddick, John Maxwell, Charles Fox, James Pattie and Edmund Appleyard; and Wine Office Court, home to Charles Perry Brown, Henry Hetherington and Alfred Ritchie. To the west of Fleet Street was Holywell Street, which ran parallel to the Strand and which was originally known for its secondhand clothes dealers. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries it became famous for housing many politically radical publishers and booksellers, and then, a little later, as a centre for the trade in pornography, exemplified in the activities of William Dugdale. It was estimated that in 1834 it had no fewer than 57 shops selling pornographic and indecent literature. Dugdale and his family occupied no fewer than 13 properties on Holywell Street and nearby Wych Street

between the early 1830s and the 1860s, and other publishers in this book who worked out of Holywell Street and Wych Street included George Berger, George and Henry Vickers, Henry Hetherington, Edward Lloyd, Frederick Farrah, John Limbird, Joseph Last and Samuel Yeoman Collins. Both streets were demolished in 1901 to make way for Aldwych.

A third centre of the publishing and bookselling trades was Paternoster Row and its subsidiary thoroughfares such as Ivy Lane, Queen's Head Passage, Amen Corner and Warwick Square. Just north of St. Paul's Cathedral, Paternoster Row and the neighbouring St. Paul's Churchyard had been the home to booksellers and publishers since the late 17th century, after it had been rebuilt following the Great Fire of London in 1666. Amongst the publishers in this book who had premises there were George Cowie, Benjamin Steill, William Strange, Richard Willoughby, James Pattie, John Maxwell, Charles Henry Clarke, Henry Lea, James Watson, Joseph Berger and Alfred Harmsworth. Both streets were destroyed during the Second World War.

Some of the 100 or so publishers covered by this study are comparatively well-known today—Edward Lloyd, George Stiff, John Dicks, Edward Harrison, Edwin J. Brett, the Emmett brothers and Alfred Harmsworth—are all familiar to students of Victorian literature through their penny-part serials, periodicals and newspapers. Others—such as John Duncombe, Benjamin Steill, George Berger, William Caffyn, George Maddick, George Purkess, George Cowie, William Wright Barth, William Strange and others—are little-known and rarely, if at all, mentioned in studies on 19th century literature. Their obscurity hides the fact that they were all instrumental in bringing cheap literature to a mass readership, even if their efforts were often short-lived.

This book aims to give these publishers at least some recognition, however brief. Some of them may have been unscrupulous, avaricious and reckless; several regularly fell foul of the law; but they all played a part in a literary phenomenon that shaped the Victorian era, and even if just as footnotes to that phenomenon, they deserve their place in literary history.

PUBLISHERS, PROFITS AND POVERTY: A BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORY OF PUBLISHING IN BOHEMIAN FLEET STREET

The Duncombes of Holborn

In the first half of the 19th century the name of John Duncombe was associated with the publication of dramas and one-act plays (with over 600 titles recorded as being issued between around 1821 and 1852), music and songs. The imprints of John Duncombe (or J. Duncombe) and Edward Duncombe also appeared on a number of periodicals, penny-part serials, books and pamphlets, and the name of Duncombe was also linked with several cases of libel and obscenity. Yet, despite the extent of the Duncombe family's publishing activities, and the notoriety associated with the name, very little has been written about them before. Teasing out the family history is complicated by the fact that, like several other publishers from that era, the name of John Duncombe covered both father and son.

John Duncombe senior was born around 1764. Nothing seems to be known about his background and early life, or about his wife, Sarah (born around 1767). They had six children: John (born 1791), Elizabeth (born 1795), Sarah (born 1799), Edward (born 1802), Erasmus (born 1804, died 1805), and Emily (born 1807, died 1808). Between around 1799 and 1805 the family lived at 32 Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, London, before moving to 9 & 10 Middle Row, Holborn.

In 1811, John Duncombe was listed in *Holden's Annual Directory* as a cabinet maker at 9 Middle Row. In 1819, he was listed as a bookseller and stationer at 19 Little Queen Street; in 1822 as a bookseller at 10 Little Queen Street, and in 1823 a bookseller at 19 Little Queen Street. Three years prior to this, in August 1820, he fell through a trapdoor in a linen draper's shop and suffered a compound fracture of his leg, subsequently spending six months in St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Two years later, he was still walking with crutches, and was unable to work, with his business, that of a newsvendor and bookseller, being carried on by his wife and an

assistant. Duncombe sued for damages, being awarded £50 plus costs. His son was a witness, but gave no indication as to his profession at that time.[14]

Whether or not John Duncombe the elder was ever a publisher, and if he was, what he published, is not clear. His will, drawn up on 24 February 1831, stated that he was a "bookseller and newsagent" at Middle Row, Holborn. It is, therefore, quite likely that most, if not all, of the publications carrying the J. Duncombe imprint were issued by his son.

John Duncombe the Younger

John Duncombe the younger was born on 13 September 1791 in Burnham, Buckinghamshire, and baptised at St. Clement Dane's, Westminster on 5 November 1792. Nothing is known about his early life, other than that he married Deborah Haines at the Parish Church of St. George, Bloomsbury, on 8 August 1814. He set up in business in his late teens—one of his first publications was *The Minstrel, or Songster's Miscellany*, published from Middle Row in 1811-1812. Numerous other song collections, individual songs, dramas and the occasional pamphlet followed. One of his best-known early works was *Duncombe's New Acting Dramas*, a series launched in April 1821 with Douglas Jerrold's first play, *More Frightened Than Hurt*. (Duncombe went on to publish several more plays by Jerrold). Duncombe also issued *The Miniature Caricature Magazine* in 1821-1822. But in August 1824, then operating out of 19 Little Queen Street, Holborn (where had been since 1817) he was declared bankrupt, the petitioning creditor being none other than his father.[15] This may have led to his father offering a helping hand and taking him under his wing, a possibility borne out by John Duncombe the younger's second bankruptcy, in May 1827, with the *London Gazette* describing him as "formerly of Little Queen Street, Holborn, and late of 12 Bateman's Buildings, Soho Square, foreman to John Duncombe the elder, of Little Queen Street, aforesaid, bookseller and printer."[16]

Despite this second bankruptcy, John Duncombe the younger was soon back in business, this time apparently estranged from his father. In 1826, he had launched the weekly periodical *The Portfolio of Amusement and Instruction*. In the issue dated 27 December 1828, the last page carried an advertisement for several J. Duncombe publications (including *The Adelphi Songster, The Man of Pleasure's Song Book, Secret Amours of the French Chief, The New London Rambler's Magazine*, and *The Private Life and*

[14] *Times*, 15 November 1822, p 3.
[15] *Law Advertiser*, August 1824, p 278.
[16] *London Gazette*, 8 May 1827, p1028.

Amours of Lord Byron), with a notice at the end to the effect that "J. Duncombe, at 19 Little Queen Street, Holborn, has no connection in trade with any other Publisher of the same name."

The *Post Office Directory* for 1827 lists the two John Duncombes as a Book and Music Seller at 19 Little Queen Street, and as a Bookseller, Publisher and Newsvendor at 9 Middle Row respectively. This appears to be the first appearance of a John Duncombe as a bookseller at this address. A year later, they are listed as a Bookseller and Publisher at 19 Little Queen Street and a Bookseller and Newsman at 9 Middle Row. In 1829 they are both listed simply as Booksellers at both addresses.

John Duncombe the younger also used the name of M. Metford at his Little Queen Street and Middle Row addresses, and J. Turner at 50 Holywell Street.[17] Amongst the publications carrying the Metford imprint were a number of song books and pornographic titles such as *The Mysteries of Venus, or Lessons of Love*; and *The English Rogue, or the Life, Adventures and Intrigues of Meritou Lairoon, a Fashionable Extravagant Libertine.*

John Duncombe the elder died in April 1831, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Andrew's, Holborn, on 18 April 1831. In his will he left everything to his wife Sarah (who was also an executor), with the proviso that she should not dispose of any part of her inheritance without the approval of his other executor, his son-in-law Charles Dear. He left nothing to his son John, nor to his other children.[18]

(Charles Dear had married Sarah Duncombe (born on 23 July 1799 at Cursitor Street), on 24 November 1818 at St. Pancras Parish Chapel, with her father and son (then shown as living in Little Queen Street) providing a £200 marriage bond, as Sarah was only 19 years old at the time. Charles later became a picture dealer).

If John Duncombe the younger had become estranged from his father, then any family rift had been healed by the time of his mother's death. Sarah Duncombe drew up her will on 22 August 1833 and left her estate to be divided equally between her four children—John, Edward, Sarah and Elizabeth. She died a day or so later, and was buried in St. Andrew's, Holborn, on 29 August 1833, with probate subsequently granted to John and her son-in-law Charles Dear.

In 1833, the *Post Office Directory* shows John Duncombe still operating out of 19 Little Queen Street, with S. Duncombe (i.e. Sarah) operating as a bookseller out of 9 Middle Row, having taken over her late husband's

[17] Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Bibliography of Forbidden Books* (London: privately printed, 1877), p 137.
[18] National Archives, PROB 11/1792/367.

business. Rather confusingly, though, in 1835, 1836 and 1837, this business was recorded at 10 Middle Row, with the occupier named as John Duncombe. John Duncombe the younger was listed at 19 Little Queen Street in 1835 and 1836, but not in 1837—indeed, the name of John Duncombe then vanishes from the *Post Office Directory* until 1843, when John Duncombe & Co. is listed as Bookseller etc. at 10 Middle Row. He is still there in 1847, but by 1851 his name has disappeared.

John Duncombe the younger established a thriving business as a publisher of songs, dramas etc., as well as dabbling in what turned out to be dangerous waters. In September 1819 he was the subject of a writ issued on behalf of the Prince Regent, which described Duncombe as a "malicious, seditious and ill-disposed person" and accused him of "unlawfully devising and intending to raise and excite discontent and disaffection in the minds of the liege subjects of our Lord the King….." This related to an issue (no. 5) of *The Republican*, a periodical printed by R. Carlile of 55 Fleet Street which contained *A Letter to His Royal Highness the Prince Regent.* (Carlile was also the subject of legal action, Duncombe being prosecuted for selling the periodical, and later issues of *The Republican* were referred to the Attorney and Solicitor General with a view to prosecution for blasphemy).[19]

In November 1826 Duncombe was taken to court by the actress Lucia Elizabeth Vestris for libelling her in his penny-part serial *The Adventures and Amours of Madame Vestris*. He had ignored a warning issued by her solicitors after the appearance of the first two numbers, so legal action was taken to suppress further publication.[20] A month later, Duncombe was back in court accused of pirating a song the copyright of which was owned by J. Willis, a music seller in St. James's Street, who was awarded £200 damages.[21]

In November 1829 John Duncombe (operating out of 19 Queen Street) appeared in court again, alongside his brother Edward (operating out of Middle Row, Holborn), charged with selling and publishing indecent publications, described in one newspaper as being "publications of a grossly indecent description and immoral tendency."[22] The titles of these were not read out in court or reported, but both Edward and John contended that they were simply reprints of works which had been published and sold in Britain for many years, and they were unaware that by selling them they were committing an offence. It was alleged that John Duncombe had been put on notice by the Society for Suppression of Vice in 1826, but he denied

[19] National Archives, TS 11/43.
[20] *Morning Post*, 27 November 1826, p 2.
[21] *Times*, 8 December 1826, p 3.
[22] *Morning Chronicle*, 20 November 1829, p 4.

all knowledge of this. He also told the court that he had a wife and family (in fact, as far as is known he only had one child, Sarah Anne, born in 1822), and medical evidence was submitted that he was in poor health. He also supplied several affidavits attesting to his morality, integrity and honesty. Despite all of this, he was sentenced to six months in prison (at Coldbath Fields, Clerkenwell), fined £50, and bound over with sureties totalling £400.[23]

In February 1837 John Duncombe found himself in court again, although this time as a victim. Henry Skinner, a former employee who had been sacked for "bad conduct," was charged with stealing a ream of paper, 500 copies of *The Comic Magazine*, and five sheets of stereotyped plates from *Duncombe's British Theatre* series—he was sentenced to seven years transportation. Also in the dock were James Newton and Thomas Grove, two of Duncombe's employees, charged with theft. A large quantity of books had disappeared from his Middle Row premises, and had been traced to the Drury Lane premises of a pork butcher, who had clearly been buying stolen books for some time. Newton was also charged with selling books as waste paper to a Hatton Garden trader. He was sentenced to transportation, with Grove sentenced to a term in prison.[24]

At the time of the 1841 census, John Duncombe the younger was living at 11 Middle Row, described as a bookseller, with his wife Deborah, his daughter Sarah, then aged 22 and working as his assistant, and Caroline Bartlett, a nurse, suggesting some degree of illness in the family. Deborah died six years later and was buried, on 14 February 1847, in St. Andrew's, Holborn.

A year after this, Duncombe married Ann Allen at Tottenham Parish Church. She was a widow, born Ann Drakeford in St. Pancras in 1800, and had married George Allen in 1822—his date of death is not known. In 1851, Duncombe was living at 17 Holborn Hill, this time describing himself as a music seller, living with Ann, his niece Sophia Drakeford, and a 20 year-old female servant.

He retired in 1852, his business being bought by Thomas Lacy, a former actor, playwright and theatrical manager who had turned to bookselling in the mid-1840s, operating out of Wellington Street, Covent Garden, and who became particularly well-known for his series of *Lacy's Acting Editions of Plays* (1848-1873), which comprised 1,485 individual titles.

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[23] *Times*, 20 November 1829, p 3. The Society for the Suppression of Vice was established in 1802 by William Wilberforce, with the aim of suppressing immorality, whether in the form of atheism, blasphemy, lewdness or obscenity.
[24] *London Dispatch*, 12 February 1837, p 1.

John Duncombe the younger died in October 1853 and was buried in St. Andrew's, Holborn on 30 October of that year. In his will, drawn up in April 1848,[25] he left his entire personal estate to his daughter, Sarah, who, in 1842, had married Frederick Moon. Moon, born in 1821 in Holborn, was a business partner of John Duncombe (they had joined forces at 17 Holborn Hill in 1848), with several publications—largely dramas, music and songs—appearing under the imprint of Duncombe & Moon. Moon subsequently died in 1849, although the imprint of Duncombe and Moon appears to have survived until 1854. It is not clear what happened to Duncombe's wife Ann—in the 1861 census, an Ann Duncombe, a widow, is living at an address in Bloomsbury and shown as a "Proprietor of houses." It is not known when and where she died.

Despite his brushes with the law, John Duncombe maintained a position as a major publisher of plays, melodramas, songs and music, an activity that spanned his entire publishing career from around 1811 to 1852. Amongst his drama productions were *Duncombe's New Acting Dramas* (1821-1825), *Duncombe's British Theatre* (1825-1852), and *Duncombe's Minor Theatre* (1834). Duncombe was especially notable for publishing scripts that had not been published elsewhere, buying up copyrights specifically for his collections. This proved to be an invaluable leg-up for new writers, such as Douglas Jerrold. His songs and music publications included *Duncombe's Music; Duncombe's Piano Forte Music; The Musical Casket, or Melodies for the Million; The Adelphi Songster; The Choice Songster; The Vocal Magazine; British Melodies, or Lyric Repository; The London Singers Magazine*; and *The London Vocalist.* These were supplemented by somewhat racier material such as *Duncombe's Drolleries: A Bawdy Song Book*, and *The Man of Pleasure's Song Book*.

He also issued a handful of penny-part serials and penny bloods, including *Lives and Adventures of the Most Remarkable Highwaymen, Footpads, Notorious Robbers, and Other Daring Adventurers* (1832); *Lives and Adventures of Notorious Pirates and their Crews, Gallant Sea Fights, Battles etc.* (1833); and *Perils of the Ocean, an Interesting Collection of Terrific Shipwrecks, and Other Disasters at Sea* (1833).

Amongst his more controversial works were *Details of a Demirep, or Life and Adventures of the Celebrated Lady Barrymore; The Great Illegitimate!! Public and Private Life of that Celebrated Actress Miss Bland; The Secret Memoirs of Harriet Pumpkin* (a salacious account of the life of Harriet Mellon, subsequently Mrs Coutts and the Duchess of St.

[25] National Archives, PROB 11/2180/373.

Albans—most of the copies were bought up and destroyed); *The Bower of Bliss, or The Loves of Alonzo and Angioline; The Private Life and Amours of Lord Byron; The Mysteries of Venus, or Lessons of Love;* and *Amatory Poems and Songs of the Earl of Rochester.*

In some cases it is not clear which of his publications were the subject of prosecution, although some sources say that amongst these was *Fanny Hill.*

He also published a handful of mainly short-lived periodicals, including *Comical Fits and Fancies* (1831), *Punch in London* (1832), *The Original Comic Magazine* (1832) and *Peeping Tom, or Notes of London Life* (1841).

John Duncombe was, for a brief period, associated with his brother Edward, whose experiences as a publisher were equally as controversial.

Edward Duncombe

Edward Duncombe was born on 30 January 1802 and baptised at St. Clement Dane's, Westminster, on 7 March 1802. He married Ann Harry (born in Devonport, Devon, in 1802) at St. George's Church, Hanover Square, on 22 August 1826, and went on to have three children: Edward (born 1827, died 1828), Charlotte (born 1828, died 1829), and Edward Harry (born 1831).

He appears to have set up in business as a publisher on his own around 1822, with the periodical *The Mirror of the Stage, or New Dramatic Censor* (1822-24), followed by *The New Theatrical Inquisitor* (1824). He also issued a few dramas, the earliest being *King Richard III: Travestie, a Burlesque, Operatic, Mock Terrific Tragedy in Two Acts* (1823), and the occasional song book, such as *Duncombe's New Comic Songster.* More notoriously, he published several pamphlets, such as *The Life, Amours and Intrigues of Miss Paton, commonly called Lady Lennox, now Mrs Wood; The Life and Exploits of Ikey Solomons, Swindler, Forger, Fencer, and Brothel-keeper;* and *The Trial at Full Length of Edw. Gibbon Wakefield, William Wakefield and Mrs Frances Wakefield, for a conspiracy, and the Abduction of Miss Turner, etc.*; and the occasional periodical such as *The Rambler's Magazine, or Annals of Gallantry; Amatory Tales and Adventures; Memoirs of the Most Celebrated Women of Pleasure, etc.* (1827); and *Horn Tales, or the Art of Cuckoldom Made Easy.*

His early business addresses included 165 Fleet Street (1826), 26 Fleet Market (1827-1828), 188 Fleet Street (1828), 1 Vinegar Yard, Brydges Street, Covent Garden (1828), and 18 Middle Row, Holborn (1828-1835). Like his brother John he also used another name, that of John Wilson, at 78

Long Acre.[26] In November 1829 he was sentenced, along with his brother, to six months in prison for selling obscene literature.[27] The prosecution said that Duncombe had published a catalogue containing "49 different books, with amatory titles. Some of these were sold by the defendant himself [at his shop in Middle Row] and others by a woman in the shop, around the window of which great crowds of people were frequently collected." In his defence, Duncombe claimed, like his brother, that all the publications complained of contained material that had already been published. He added that his wife was about to give birth and was dangerously ill, he had an "aged and infirm father and mother depending on him for support," and a doctor provided an affidavit to the effect that Duncombe was "of a delicate constitution."

He was back in court in June 1834, at the instigation of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, charged with selling two obscene publications, *The Rambler's Magazine* and *The Voluptuarian Pantheon*. He argued that these were not obscene, and was supported by Thomas Peckett Prest, who was at that time Duncombe's "editor, compiler and composer of songs." The jury found him not guilty.[28]

In December 1835 he was again found guilty of selling several obscene books and prints,[29] although before he was brought to the court for sentencing he found himself in a debtors' prison. The *London Gazette* revealed that he had, for a time, been in partnership with his father:

> Edward Duncombe, formerly of No. 165, Fleet Street, Bookseller, Music-Seller and Newspaper Agent, then of No. 26, Farringdon Street, both in London, Printer, Bookseller, Music-Seller, Publisher, and Newspaper Agent, then of No. 9 Middle Row, Holborn, in Co-partnership with John Duncombe the elder, as Printers, Publishers, Music-Sellers, and Newspaper Agents, trading as Duncombe and Co., then of No. 18 Middle Row aforesaid, both in Middlesex, Printer, Publisher, Bookseller, Music-Seller, and Newspaper Agent, my wife lodging at No. 4 Waterloo Terrace, Waterloo Road, Surrey, and late of No. 55 Fleet Street, London, trading under the firm of Thomas Mecklem and Co. as Booksellers, Publishers, and Music-Sellers, and of No. 18 Middle Row, Holborn aforesaid, Bookseller, Publisher, Music-Seller, and Newspaper Agent, having a Private Residence at No. 23 Cross Street, Hatton Garden, Holborn, Middlesex.[30]

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[26] Ashbee, *Bibliography of Forbidden Books,* p 137.
[27] *Times*, 20 November 1829, p 3.
[28] *Morning Advertiser*, 21 June 1834, p 3.
[29] *London Standard*, 7 December 1835, p 4.
[30] *London Gazette*, 1 March 1836, p 418.

On 8 May 1836 he was sentenced to six months imprisonment (in Newgate) for the offence for which he had been found guilty the previous December.[31] He was back in court again, charged with the same offence, in January 1843, again in a prosecution initiated by the Society for the Suppression of Vice. By this time he had moved to 78 Long Acre, having taken a weekly tenancy of a shop and living accommodation in around 1839. In 1841 he placed the name "John Wilson & Co." over the door, although both his landlord and a neighbour testified that they knew no such person. Duncombe was fortunate to escape a guilty verdict as he had only been released from a debtors' prison two hours before the sale of the offending article, and the magistrate accepted that there was no proof that Duncombe had gone direct from the prison to his shop, and no proof that he had personally sold the article or authorized its sale.[32]

In September 1843 he declared himself bankrupt, giving his address (then and for the previous five years) as 78 Long Acre.[33] He was absent from the 1851 census, possibly in hiding from his creditors. His wife was living at 119 Fetter Lane, the head of the household being her widowed mother, Ann Goldwin, a newsvendor; also present was Edward Harry Duncombe, then aged 19 and described as a Newsman.

In December 1853 Duncombe was once again trapped by the Society for the Suppression of Vice into selling one of its representatives an obscene book from his premises at 7 West Street, St. Martin's Lane—he was subsequently sentenced to two years in prison.[34]

No sooner had he been released than he was back in court charged with selling an indecent and obscene book. Again it was an agent of the Society for the Suppression of Vice who bought the offending article—he

> went to the defendant's shop in Little St. Andrew's Street, Seven Dials, and asked for a book of songs of a certain description, which the defendant sold him, and then asked if he wanted any works of an amorous character, as he had some on hand. He at once said he would purchase some books if they suited him; the defendant then produced some books, one of which he handed to the witness and asked two guineas for it. After a little parleying he agreed to take 30 shillings for it, and gave him a catalogue of works of the same nature. It was for selling that book that the defendant was indicted.[35]

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[31] *Times*, 9 May 1836, p 6.
[32] *Times*, 18 January 1843, p 7.
[33] *London Gazette*, 22 September 1843, p 3139.
[34] *Times*, 8 December 1853, p 8.
[35] *Times*, 17 April 1856, p 11.

His defence counsel told the court that "when this offence was committed the defendant was in a state of the most deplorable and abject poverty, or he would not have sold the book." Despite this, he was later sentenced to six months hard labour.

Duncombe was possibly in hiding again in 1861, as he was again absent from the census record. His wife Ann was living at 110 Fetter Lane, working as a newsagent, and their son Edward Harry was described as a Music Seller. But other than Ann appearing as a lodger, out of work, at an address in Westminster in the 1871 census, that appears to be the last we know of Edward Duncombe and his family. His date and place of death, and that of his son, is apparently unrecorded.

Thomas Tegg and Family

Thomas Tegg was arguably the greatest bookseller of his era. Between 1800 and 1840 he dominated the trade in cheap books, mainly reprints and remainders. He was also a publisher, issuing a wide range of new books, periodicals, and serials.[36]

He was born on 4 March 1776 in Wimbledon, Surrey, and baptised at St. Mary's Church, Wimbledon, on 31 March 1776, the son of Thomas Tegg (1737-1781), a grocer, and his wife Hannah, née Veargitt (1747-1785). After his father's death his mother re-married in 1782, but died in 1785, leaving Thomas a nine year-old orphan. He was sent to Scotland where he attended a boarding school in Galashiels, Selkirkshire for four years, before becoming an apprentice to Alexander Megget, an apparently tyrannical and drunken bookseller and bookbinder in Dalkeith, Midlothian. On 7 January 1792 Tegg ran away,[37] and spent a month in Berwick selling chapbooks, before moving on to Newcastle and then Sheffield, where he found employment with *The Sheffield Register*, a newspaper founded and edited by Joseph Gales. Nine months later, he moved on to Ireland, Wales and Norfolk, before arriving in London in 1796, where he began working for William Lane, the owner of the Minerva Library at 57 Leadenhall

[36] For some details of Tegg's early life, see *Memoir of the Late Thomas Tegg, abridged from his autobiography by permission of his son, William Tegg*, (Edinburgh, City Press), 1870, and Henry Curwen, *A History of Booksellers, The Old and the New* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874). See also James J. Barnes & Patience P. Barnes, "Reassessing the Reputation of Thomas Tegg, London Publisher, 1776-1846," *Book History*, Vol. 3 (2000), pp 45-60.

[37] See advertisement placed by Megget in *The Caledonian Mercury*, 11 February 1792, p 1.