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"Stokesley Books": John Slater Pratt and Early Victorian Publishing

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[Abstract] The burgeoning popular market for cheap reading material in the mid-nineteenth century offered major opportunities for the print trades. Based in the Yorkshire North Riding town of Stokesley, John Slater Pratt (1807-67) transformed a country printing shop into a major producer of cheap novels and non-fiction books. He printed over 300 titles, often in several editions, most of them in the years 1841-53. Many appeared under the imprint of his own London office (1841-50), but he also printed for, and often in partnership with, a range of London and provincial publishers. This was achieved in the intensively competitive market that accompanied the industrialisation of book production and retailing, and in spite of Stokesley not being served by the railways. The firm's origins are explored, and its output analysed. Pratt's short but energetic career offers an illuminating case study both of local industrial history and entrepreneurship, and of the interplay between the English regions and the metropolis in book production, distribution and marketing.

KEYWORDS printing, publishing, distribution, bookselling, entrepreneurship, bibliography, popular culture, Yorkshire

Introduction

Throughout the early Victorian years, Stokesley (whose population in 1851 was only 2,040) was one of England's most important centres outside London for the production of mass-reading material. As David Hey observed, like many of Yorkshire's older towns, Stokesley had been rebuilt in brick during the eighteenth century.[1] It still retains much of its Georgian character, for the North Riding linen industry, of which it had been a centre, withered rapidly in the early nineteenth century and the town was situated too far from the nearby Cleveland ironstone field to share directly in the success of neighbouring Teesside. It lacked any railway connection before 1857. These factors largely explain the enduring "country town" character of Stokesley, invariably described as "small" and "neat" in Victorian

[1] David Hey, *A History of Yorkshire: "County of Broad Acres"* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2005), 285, 379.

directories.[2] Yet John Slater Pratt (1807-67) single-handedly turned his father's small-town printing shop into a major business, producing over 300 different titles (some of them in multiple editions) between 1832 and 1853, transforming the firm into a prolific publishing house in its own right.

Historians of popular publishing pay limited attention to provincial publishers and Pratt has largely been ignored.[3] His books even evaded the attention of the obsessively acquisitive collector of nineteenth-century fiction, Michael Sadleir.[4] Happily, some local historians have engaged with John Slater Pratt. He featured in an attractive booklet published in 1984 by Stokesley and District Local History Study Group, whose research files deposited at the local library are also invaluable. The biggest single resource, however, is a collection of some 230 copies of books that Pratt printed, plus other related material. These were collected in the mid-twentieth century by D.W. Richardson, Stokesley's last printer, and are now held at Northallerton Central Library.[5]

The most compelling description of Pratt's business at its height appears in the recollections that a former Teesside printer, William Burnett, curiously contributed to a history of the Cleveland fox hunt:

> The main thing about Stokesley in the early forties is that it was then a great publishing centre. The works of John Slater Pratt at the West End of the Town were in full swing, and books were turned out at the rate of hundreds, if not thousands, a week, finding their way to Australia and other Colonial markets. Within my own recollection in 1852, Mr Pratt had two steam printing

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[2] E.g. History and Topography of the City of York; and the North Riding of Yorkshire, Volume II (Beverley: Whellan, 1859), 158, 163.

[3] Pratt is briefly mentioned in the pioneering works of Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-50 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 28, 228 and Victor Neuberg, Popular Literature: A History and Guide (London: Woburn, 1977), 153-6, 185-6. All more-recent studies ignore him.

[4] Michael Sadleir, XIX Century Fiction: A Bibliographical Record based on his own Collection, 2 volumes (London: Constable, 1951).

[5] Daphne Franks, Printing and Publishing in Stokesley (Stokesley and District Local History Study Group, 1984), 6-12; Stokesley Local History Study Group, files deposited at Stokesley Globe Community Library (hereafter SLHSG); Pratt Collection, Northallerton Central Library (hereafter Pratt Collection). I am grateful to the volunteers and staff of both libraries for their help, and also to Christine Bainbridge and Beryl Turner of the SLHSG.

> machines at work, besides a number of presses … He printed all his own works, and finished them "en suite", doing all the binding, lithographing and everything needed to finish them on his own premises. So early as this he had a stereotyping plant, the castings being made in plaster of Paris.[6]

The industrial revolution of the book

Pratt exemplifies a comment in the standard history of nineteenth-century publishing that, "book historians need to be wary about constructing a model in which the English capital produces and distributes while the rest of the nation consumes".[7] The early decades of the century had witnessed what has been aptly termed "the industrial revolution of the book".[8] "Never in the history of the earth, were there such facilities for acquiring knowledge as at the present time", one promoter of working-class self-improvement declared in 1844, "cheap publications with which the press is teeming, are among the wonders of our wonderful age".[9] Another (and in time more-renowned) author of the same stamp told an audience of Leeds workmen in 1845 that "the extreme cheapness of books now brings them within the reach of all classes"; formerly luxuries of the rich, books were "now open even to the very poor".[10]

This was the market at which Pratt's books were aimed. The cheapest of them retailed for as little as 6d (2.5p). Whereas his father had produced a handful of books from a hand-operated press, by 1840 John Slater Pratt had installed steam operated printing machinery.[11] As recently as the 1820s, paper had been an expensive commodity largely produced by a handicraft process. Pratt, however, could use paper

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[6] W.H.B[urnett]., "Middlesbrough as a Fox Cover", in J. Fairfax-Blakeborough, Cleveland and Its Hunt (Middlesbrough: Woolston, 1902), 17-23 (20).

[7] S. Colclough, "Distribution" in The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume VI, 1830-1914, ed. D. McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 244.

[8] Rob Banham, "The Industrialization of the Book, 1800-1970", in A Companion to the History of the Book, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); James Raven, "The Industrial Revolution of the Book", in The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book, ed. L. Howsam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143-61.

[9] Thomas Archer, Self-Culture, and Its Impediment in Late Hours of Business (London: Aylott, 1844), 6-7.

[10] Samuel Smiles, The Education of the Working Classes (Leeds: F. Hobson, 1845), 13.

[11] Norwich Union insurance schedule for J.S. Pratt, dated 27 April 1840, reprinted in Alec Wright and John Mawer, eds, Stokesley Selection (Great Ayton: Studio Print, 1982), 92-3.

manufactured in bulk from wood pulp, in a process that took five days compared to five weeks for handicraft paper.[12] Where once books had been printed and sold unbound, or issued in drab boards, on the assumption that purchasers could take then have them bound in the style of their choice, Pratt's books were bound in decorated calico cloth-covered boards. Until the end of the eighteenth century books had also typically been relatively bulky, reflecting both their status as luxury goods and the circumstances in which they were often read – in a private library or at a table. Stokesley books were designed to be slipped into an apron or pocket, and read as and when chance permitted.

John Slater Pratt did not develop his business from scratch. A tradition of book production in Stokesley extended back at least to 1783 and, despite its small size, two other traditional high street stationers and printers operated in Stokesley during the early Victorian years. During the early 1820s the town had been the major North Riding centre for radical and anti-radical polemics.[13] Pratt's father, William, had printed pamphlets for the most-combative of the anti-Radicals. His son, however, was aligned with moderate reformers. A Wesleyan Methodist, the arch-Tory Yorkshire Gazette labelled him a "radical dissenter" and attacked his "mean and unjustifiable insinuations" concerning church rates.[14] The right of the established church to levy rates on parish residents and collect tithes, regardless of their religious affiliation, was however an enduring issue of contention among Victorian dissenters. Pratt's stance on the issue did not prevent his election as High Constable and Inspector of Weights and Measures for West Langbaurgh (the wapentake in which Stokesley was situated).[15] More pertinent to his ability to assess popular demand for printed material, he was

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[12] Simon Eliot, "Some Trends in British Book Production, 1800-1819", in Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices, eds J.O. Jordan and R.L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Alexis Weedon, Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 64.

[13] Thomas Pierson, Roseberry-*Toppin: or the Prospect of a Summer's Day* (Stokesley: Taylerson, 1783); Malcolm Chase, "Atheists and republicans in early nineteenth-century Cleveland", Bulletin of the Cleveland and Teesside Local History Society 47 (1984): 29-36; M.L. Bush, The Friends and Following of Richard Carlile: A Study of Infidel Republicanism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain (n.p., Twopenny Press, 2016), 215-17, 308.

[14] Yorkshire Gazette, April 28, 1838 and April 20, 1844.

[15] Yorkshire Gazette, July 6, 1839.

also among the founder subscribers to the Stokesley Parish Library and on the committee of the town's Mechanics' Institute.[16]

Both John and his brother, William Fenwick Pratt, learned printing under their father. By the mid-1820s John was in partnership with the latter.[17] William Fenwick Pratt meanwhile went into business on his own account, 65 miles away in the East Riding town of Howden. However the pair co-operated closely and shared some publications. The earliest volumes issued under each brother's imprint date from 1832, the year their father died.[18] John Slater's early years in business, however, were mainly spent as a bookseller, stationer and bookbinder, with printing confined to ephemeral notices for local circulation and occasional volumes for local churchmen.[19] By May 1839, however, his letterheads proclaimed him a "wholesale bookseller and stationer". Two uniquely surviving invoices reveal that he was able to supply 20 different titles to one Hartlepool bookseller that year.[20] One of these he had definitely printed himself; three others had been printed by William in Howden but published by John in partnership with a London firm. Very probably John Slater Pratt had printed the others, as copies of each survive in a subsequent Stokesley edition. In November the same year a labourer stole eleven titles from Pratt's shop: again all had probably been printed by him as the same titles survive in later Pratt imprints.[21] The book that he definitely had printed and published by 1839 was an anonymous translation of de Bourrienne's Life of Napoleon (1837). To sell this widely, Pratt accepted as a partner the major London book wholesalers Simpkin & Marshall, whose names appeared alongside his on the title page. However, the colophon (the very last line of print on the final page of the published text) made clear that the printing was entirely Pratt's

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[16] Pratt Collection, manuscript minute book of the Stokesley Parish Library, 1845-1945.

[17] SLHSG File 24, photocopy invoice, "bought of W. Pratt & Son" (January 31, 1825).

[18] [Thomas Mease,] A Letter to Sir William Foulis Bart (Stokesley: "Printed at the office of J.S. Pratt" [1832]) and [Stephen Coulson], An Allegory, Founded on Fact, on the Rise and Fall of the Temple of Esculapius (Redcar: published and sold by the author; "W.F. Pratt, Printer, Howden", 1832).

[19] SLHSG File 24, Cholera poster (October 8, 1832) and invoice "Dr to J.S. Pratt, Bookseller, stationer and bookbinder" (January 1834); R.J. Barlow, Sermon, Preached at the Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Cleveland (Stokesley: "printed at the office of J.S. Pratt", 1833) and Leveson Vernon Harcourt, Farewell Address to the Parish of Stokesley (Stokesley: "Printed at the office of J. S. Pratt", 1835).

[20] SLHSG File 24, photocopy invoices dated May 19 and August 10, 1839.

[21] Northallerton, North Yorkshire County Record Office, QSB 1840 1/6/10: North Riding Quarter Sessions Christmas 1840, Bill of Indictment of John Bailey.

work. With the substitution of a different title page, the same book was re-issued in 1838, this time with another London firm, Scott, Webster & Geary. We may surmise that these partnerships were unsatisfactory, for no further joint publications with either appeared and by 1841 Pratt had commenced publishing as J.S. Pratt of London.

Pratt shrewdly judged popular demand. His novels were typically sensational and he aimed many of them at a female readership. A book such as Louisa Jones, Rosina: or, the village maid (which Pratt published in 1843) was likely to have been taken up and put down by readers (mothers especially) who were frequently distracted. These books were, nevertheless, challenging to read. This book is in Pratt's typical format of 12.5cm x 7.5cm, its 416 pages making a book approx 3cm thick. This convenient size was achieved by using a very small font (slightly smaller than a modern 10 point), meaning an average of 290 words on every page and an approximate total length of 120,000 words. Very little relieves the eye, new chapters do not even begin on a new page, though there is a woodcut frontispiece. (This bears little relationship to the text that follows, a common feature in these books.) Rosina ends on page 415, so Pratt added an advertisement for other books he published on the final page.

Physically the book comprises 26 gatherings, each of 16 pages, and each secured by one large stitch and then bound into boards, on the external side of which is pasted thin brown calico cloth. Both front and rear cloth covers have been tooled, i.e. decorated with a geometric design impressed into them. The title is similarly impressed into the spine (sometimes this would be gilded).[22] In bibliographical terminology Rosina is a 16mo: the text of 16 pages would be printed onto a single large sheet of paper, and 16 more on its reverse, before it was folded to make a gathering of 16 leaves (i.e. 32 pages). Steam-powered machines also meant Pratt

[22] Some of Pratt's publications can be readily viewed on the internet. For example: G.T. Buchanan Life of Henry, Lord Brougham (1841), URL: http://books.google.com/books?vid=BL:A0021891210; J.F. Cooper, Lionel Lincoln (1843), URL: http://books.google.com/books?vid=BL:A0021687930; [Maria J. MacIntosh,] Woman an Enigma: or, Life and its Revealings (1844), URL: http://books.google.co.uk/books?vid=BL:A0019840354; Hannah Glasse, The Complete Art of Cookery, Exhibited in a Plain and Easy Manner (1846), URL: http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b21533702; Clara Reeve, The Old English baron. A Gothic Story. To which is annexed the Castle of Otranto [by Horace Walpole] (1846), URL: http://books.google.co.uk/books?vid=BL:A0019710761.

could impress onto even larger sheets, speeding up printing: these would then be folded to create a 32-page gathering (64 pages). The technical term for these is 32mo but the size and appearance of both types of book are the same. Not all Pratt's output consisted of 16mo or 32mo volumes. A secondary line appeared in crown octavo format (roughly the size of a present day standard paperback). The print size in these books was larger; they boasted tooled cover decorations, usually of flowers, with a gilt title and decorated spine.

These are not matters of purely bibliographical nicety, for they closely relate to the gender division of labour within Pratt's business. Not all industrial innovations involved machinery: some simply required pliant workers prepared to undertake wearisome and repetitive tasks. Composing pages from type and printing them onto paper was a highly skilled job and it was exclusively undertaken by men. Binding, too, was a skilled task and regarded as a masculine one; but folding the printed sheets and stitching them into gatherings ready for binding was women's work. As a high-volume printer Pratt employed significant numbers of women: 5 out of a workforce of 17 in 1841, and 23 out of a workforce of 63 in 1851. Both the number and the proportion of female workers significantly increased between the two censuses, therefore, but with the exception in 1851 of one female "end paperer at a Bookbinders", all the women listed were either folders or stitchers.[23]

In a large operation like Pratt's, the last process before binding, cutting all but the left-hand side of the each gathering so that the pages can be turned, was done by machine. During the 1840s, as Burnett's recollections reveal, Pratt also bought into a further recent innovation, stereotyping, a process in which thin metal casts are made of impressions taken from sheets set in traditional metal type. The original type is then released for further production and subsequent editions of the book printed cheaply from these stereotyped plates. These plates became part of publishers' fixed capital, specified in insurance inventories and saleable items in their own right. It is likely that some books produced by Pratt were printed from stereotypes of other printers' work. Certainly, when his brother sold off parts of the firm's stock in the late

[23] Stokesley's two other printers, William Braithwaite and George Tweddle, have been excluded from the totals.

1850s he included stereotype plates, advertised in the trade press as "a capital opportunity for any printer", along with a "nearly new" cutting machine.[24]

Genre and content

The growth in the number of books manufactured in England and Wales circa 1840-60 exceeded the increase in literacy levels.[25] Some were buying more books than they had before, others were buying them for the first time. Paxton Hood, whose works featured prominently among Pratt's output, commented that "books, by millions, find their way through all the channels of our population".[26] The quality of such books was immensely variable, in terms both of content and presentation. Pratt's output was at the lower end of the market in presentational terms and much of it was sensational, escapist fiction. Copyright law meant that he published very little by living British authors. Sir Walter Scott was an important exception, to secure works by whom Pratt entered into a shared arrangement with other publishers.[27] However, living continental and American authors enjoyed no protection under British law and were very much part of Pratt's core business. He published some of the cheapest British editions of novels by Eugene Sue, the most popular French novelist before Victor Hugo.[28] And he published both Hugo's Demon Dwarf (1847) as well as his best-know novel, under the title of The Hunchback or Bell-ringer of Notre Dame. There were also editions of seven novels by the best-selling American James Fenimore Cooper.[29]

The deceased British novelists whose works Pratt published fell into three overlapping groups. The first were predictable classics such as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1841), Oliver Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield (two editions, octavo 1843 and

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[24] *Publishers' Circular*, April 15 and May 1, 1857. See also February 1, 1857, April 1 and August 1, 1859.

[25] Weedon, Victorian Publishing, 50.

[26] Edwin Paxton Hood, Self-Formation; or, Aids and Helps to Mind-Life, (Partridge & Oakey, 1851; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley), 59.

[27] For example The Lady of the Lake. A Poem in Six Cantos (1838) was published by him and Jones & Co of London, and actually printed by his brother William Fenwick Pratt in Howden.

[28] Arthur (1845); The Female Bluebeard; or, Le morne-au-diable (1845); The Engraver's Daughter; or, The Hotel Lambert: A Tale of Love and Intrigue (1847) and Matilda (1846), The Mysteries of Paris (1846) and The Wandering Jew (1845).

[29] Lionel Lincoln (1843), The Pioneers (1843), The Last of the Mohicans (1843) The Prairie (1845) and The Pilot, Red Rover and The Spy (no copies seem to survive but each appears in Pratt's advertising).

32mo 1845) and Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1843). The second were novels aimed primarily at a female readership, such as Rosina (already mentioned), Fanny Burney's Evelina (1842, 1843) and Cecilia (1844, 1846), and Fatherless Fanny: or, A young lady's first entrance into life (1842, 1843, 1845, 1847, 1849). Now identified as the work of Thomas Peckett Prest, Fatherless Fanny was initially published anonymously by Pratt; but he passed-off some editions as the work of either Fanny Burney or Ann Radcliffe (another popular female novelist) through the ruse of including an engraved frontispiece of a fashionable young woman bearing their name.

The third and largest category of Pratt's novels was gothic fiction, notably by Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823). Now mainly remembered for being parodied by Jane Austen in Northanger Abbey, Radcliffe was a major force in contemporary English fiction. Pratt published her best known work, Mysteries of Udolpho (1843, 1844) and four other novels.[30] He also artfully published a Young Woman's Companion: being a Complete Guide to Every Acquirement Essential in forming a Useful Member of Society (1843) as the work of "Mrs Ratcliffe", a misspelling also applied to the title page of Udolpho and the portrait that accompanied Fatherless Fanny. The character of other Stokesley novels can be readily inferred from their titles, for example: Charlotte Smith, Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle (1845); [William Gilmore Simms,] Count Julian, or, The Last Days of the Goth. A Historical Romance (1846); Clara Reeve, The Old English Baron. A Gothic Story (1846); and Arwed Gillenstern, or the Robber Captain's Bride ... Translated from the German of C. F. van der Velde (1846).

Identical themes of sensation and escapism are evident in much of the non-fiction published under Pratt's imprint. Travel books were almost invariably exotic, for example J. L. Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia, and Poland (1842) and James Bruce's, Travels through Part of Africa, Syria, Egypt, and Arabia, into Abyssinia to Discover the Source of the Nile (1841). So too were many of the biographies, such as Thirty Years from Home: or a Voice from the Main Deck (1845); R.H. Dana's memoir, Two Years Before the Mast (published within three years of the first American edition of 1840, presumably to the fury of two London publishers who

[30] Romance of the Forest (1846), A Sicilian Romance (1843), plus two titles known from advertisements of which copies appear not to survive, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne: A Highland Story, and The Italian.

had issued it in more expensive versions in 1841); and two compilations, The lives of notorious and daring highwaymen and robbers. Compiled from authentic sources (1843, 1844, 1846, 1850) and The Newgate calendar; containing the lives of the most notorious characters who have violated the laws of their country (1845).

These books were "page turners", clearly aimed at a popular readership who wanted books that were both cheap and portable but which also provided a vivid and colourful contrast to working lives that typically extended over six days of the week and ten or more hours a day. Not all popular literature was escapist, however, and Pratt published an extensive range of religious books. Examples include, inevitably, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1846, 1849), and works by another once widely-read sixteenth-century Puritan, Richard Baxter: Saints Everlasting Rest (1843, 1847) and his Select Works (1844). Pratt also printed the only British edition of a popular American book, The Mourner's Chaplet: An Offering of Sympathy for Bereaved Friends for the leading Edinburgh publisher John Menzies (1850). He also published a range of practical non-fiction, including Culpeper's famous herbal,[31] a reprint of a late eighteenth-century medical manual,[32] cookery books,[33] scientific texts for general readers,[34] and manuals on farriery, gardening and letter writing.[35] Finally, and mainly towards the end of his time as a printer, Pratt "printed thousands of Forget-me-Nots",

[31] Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Complete Herbal* (1841; 1845; 1846).

[32] William Buchan, Domestic Medicine: or, A Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases, by Regimen and Simple Medicine (London: Pratt, 1847).

[33] Glasse, Complete Art of Cookery (1846); [A.M. Gordon,] The New Domestic Cookery (1853).

[34] Natural History; Containing a Full and Accurate Description of All the Animated Beings in Nature (London: Barr; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, 1842), an abridgment of the classic work by Georges Buffon; The New Cabinet of Arts: A Series of Entertaining Experiments in Various Branches of Science, Numerous Valuable Recipes, and Useful Facts (1846); and Wonders of the World in Nature and Art: Comprising the Most Remarkable Curiosities and Phenomena in the Universe (1842, 1844, 1846).

[35] G. Lowson, The Modern Farrier (1845); John Abercrombie, *A New and Complete Gardener's* Calendar (1855 [sic 1845?]); [Thomas Cooke], The Universal Letter Writer, or, New Art of Polite Correspondence (1859 [sic, 1849?]).

a trade term for small collections of sentimental verse, typically produced in a superior format with gilt edges and elaborately engraved title pages.[36]

Imprints, pricing, profits

In the absence of any archive, Pratt's business relations have to be pieced together from the physical examination of books he printed and detailed bibliographical records in library catalogues. At least 312 different titles can confidently be attributed to his print works.[37] This figure is an underestimate for two reasons. Firstly cheap books do not survive well: they were used heavily, loosely constructed from low-cost materials, and historically have had little appeal to collectors. Secondly, at various times at least seventeen other firms published books printed by Pratt and it is impossible to identify all these titles.[38] When they appear, the legend, "J.S. Pratt, Printer, Stokesley, Yorkshire", is added as the colophon.

However, 203 titles (65%) of those Pratt is known to have printed were published under his own name; overwhelmingly these appeared between 1841-1850 when he operated a London office. Novels predominated (almost 80% of books he directly published). These figures do not take into account multiple editions of the same text. His practice is likely to have been to print many more sheets of a book than an edition required and warehouse them. With the addition of a new title page (bearing a new date), some or all of these could then be folded, gathered and bound-up as a fresh edition when orders indicated buoyant demand. For example the edition of Bunyan's Pilgrim*'s P*rogress which Pratt issued in 1846 is identical to his 1842 version, excepting the date on the title page. However his 1844 edition used a

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[36] Burnett, "Middlesbrough as a Fox Cover", 20; Forget Me Not: A Token of Love and Friendship (Glasgow: Griffin; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, [n.d.]; Garland of Evergreens: An Offering of Friendship (n.d.); The Keepsake (London: Kershaw; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, [1852]).

[37] Calculation based on a] Pratt imprints identified via COPAC (a search engine accessing the library catalogues of some 90 UK research institutions, see http://copac.jisc.ac.uk/about/); b] The Pratt Collection at Northallerton Central Library; c] advertisements in Pratt's own publications for other books clearly designated as published by him; d] digitised books available via Google Books; e] WorldCat library content search engine (https://www.worldcat.org/whatis/default.jsp).

[38] London firms: Barr; Gilpin; Kershaw; Jones & Co; Newman; Partridge & Oakey; Rivingtons; Scott, Webster & Geary; Simpkin & Marshall; Tweedie; and Walker & Co. Provincial firms: Burton (Ipswich), Clark (Aberdeen), Fordyce (Newcastle and Hull), M'Glashan (Dublin), Menzies (Edinburgh) and Philip (Liverpool).

different setting of the text with the addition of a crude woodcut frontispiece. Pratt used the same frontispiece, but with a third variant of the text for his fourth edition of Pilgrim's Progress in 1849, this time with an additional engraved title page incorporating a superior woodcut. Technically, therefore, Pratt produced three different versions of the same book.

The retail price of these editions of Pilgrim's Progress was a shilling (5p), the same as the greater part of his output – each of the books stolen from him in 1839 were valued thus, and in 1850 he advertised as "select works at low prices", at a wholesale price of 9d (3.75p), implying bookshop purchasers paid a shilling.[39] Larger octavo volumes generally sold for 1s 6d (7.5p) and occasionally up to 3s 6d (15.5p) for a book whose illustrations extended beyond the frontispiece and title page. In 1850 (around the time he closed his London office) Pratt also produced some 6d (2.5p) books: these were in a slightly larger format (19x9cm) but of fewer pages (132 or 148). They appeared under the imprint either of the "New Pocket Library" or the "New Popular Library". Of the former there appears to be only one surviving title, indicating the risks involved in popular publishing.[40] At least one volume in the "New Popular Library" was produced in "fancy boards": this was a very early adoption of "yellowback" binding (where boards are covered not with cloth but glazed decorated coloured paper), which would soon displace cloth binding at the lower end of the market.[41] However, this is a solitary example, published in partnership with another firm, suggesting that Pratt may only have printed the book and that his partner had it bound.

To entice booksellers' orders it would have been standard practice to reduce the wholesale price on slow-moving stock. For example in 1839 the wholesale price

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[39] North Riding Quarter Sessions Christmas 1840, Bill of Indictment of John Bailey; rear end paper advert in Lindley Murray, The Power of Religion on the Mind (London: Gilpin; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, 1850).

[40] Elizabeth Helme, The Farmer of Inglewood Forest (London: J.S. Pratt, 1850), whose rear end paper also advertises 15 books in a "New Juvenile Library". The publisher of these is not stated, and only one title is verifiably one Pratt had published.

[41] Benjamin Franklin, Essays; Humorous, Moral, and Literary (London, Stokesley: Gilpin, Pratt [printer], 1850). British Library copy accessible at https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=wThkAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=true. See C.W.Tropp, Victorian Yellowbacks and Paperbacks, 1849-1905 (Denver, CO: Hermitage, 1993).

was 7s (35p) for 13 copies of Sir Walter Scott's The Lady of the Lake (published by him and Jones & Co of London, and printed by his brother in Howden), a net income of barely 6½d (2.7p) a copy. A Life of Napoleon, probably in an octavo edition, yielded 11d (4.6p) a copy: it probably then retailed at 1s 6d (7.5p). In the mid-1840s Pratt circulated booksellers with details of 29 titles at reduced prices, the lowest of them 5d (2.08p) for a 32mo Dairyman's Daughter (a book published in the mid-1830s in partnership with his brother who printed it).[42]

At the risk of stating the obvious, however, only a fraction of the sums Pratt earned for his books would have been profit. Very broad-brush calculations of printers' costs for a thousand print-run in 1846 suggest a cost of 8d (3.33p) per volume, exclusive of warehousing and distribution.[43] This is an average covering all book sizes. Pratt clearly undercut this substantially. His overheads would have been significantly less than London-based printers and the wages he paid similarly lower. Pratt was paying skilled printers and binders 24s (£1.20) a week in 1839-40. This was roughly the rate paid by York and Edinburgh firms but considerably less than the 33s to 48s (£1.65 to £2.40) they would earn in London.[44] Small wonder that in 1855 the print trade union, the Typographical Association, described wages in the North Riding as "very deplorable".[45] On the other hand, Pratt's costs for paper and cloth board for binding would have been no less than a metropolitan printer's and quite possibly higher, given the costs of carriage from the producers. Wood pulp paper would have been brought in from some distance. (The nearest manufacturer was at Thornton, near Pickering, some 30 miles away.[46]) The significant matter of tax on paper (not abolished until 1861) has also to be factored in. At 1½d (0.63p) a pound (454gms) this

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[42] SLHSG File 24, photocopied "Select list of popular works, offered to the trade at the unprecedented low prices annexed by J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, Yorkshire" [1845?]" and invoice to Proctor [bookseller of Hartlepool] dated May 19, 1839.

[43] Weedon, Victorian Publishing, 87.

[44] *Publishers' Circular*, January 1840 – Pratt's advertisement for a printer and a binder; Ellic Howe, ed. The London Compositor (London: Bibliographical Society, 1947), 253, 306-7. The higher level London wages were generally earned by compositors paid piece rates for complex tasks such as setting foreign languages.

[45] R. Hackett, ed. *The Typographical Association: A Fifty Years' Record, 1849*-1899 (Manchester: Labour Press, 1899), 23.

[46] Hodson's Booksellers, Publishers and Stationers Directory for London and Country (London: Hodson, 1855), ed. Graham Partridge (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1972), 64.

would have put approximately a halfpenny (0.21p) on the price of a novel such as Rosina.[47]

John Slater Pratt's income therefore derived from high volumes of sales and not from substantial profit margins. How high is a matter for informed guesswork. As we have seen, in 1902 another printer put Pratt's weekly output at "hundreds, if not thousands". Nationally, a typical print-run around 1846 would have been 750 copies, but more-popular titles pushed the average run up to over 2,500.[48] In the 1850s Routledge, a leading London firm, "attuned to the economics of cheap publishing", printed non-fiction in batches of 2,000 or 3,000 and typically sold 5,000 to 6,000 copies in a year. Occasionally a title would sell astonishingly well: Routledge sold 25,000 copies of a life of the former Prime Minister Robert Peel after his unexpected death in 1850, while their rival Longman sold 32,800 copies of a life of Wellington when he died in 1852.[49] Pratt lacked the financial muscle to secure new books of this nature, just as he did the work of almost any living British author. However, given the size of his workforce it is highly unlikely that he produced only hundreds of copies of any one title and edition extents are therefore likely to have been in the low thousands.

Distribution

Stokesley was not on any navigable waterway and, given how much his business hinged on nationwide distribution, it is not surprising to find John Slater Pratt energetically involved in attempts to link the town to Britain's rapidly evolving rail network. At the inaugural meeting of the proposed Stokesley and Tees Railway in 1833 (whose minutes he printed), Pratt subscribed for £100 of shares.[50] However, the venture conflicted with the dominant interests in the region's rail network, rooted in the pioneering Stockton and Darlington Railway of 1825. In 1840 it was confidently asserted that a line was about to be built northwards to join the Stockton and Darlington.[51] Fourteen years later this had still not happened and Pratt then emerged

[47] Paper duty had been halved in 1836, another factor in the rapid expansion of publishing in which Pratt shared.

[48] Weedon, Victorian Publishing, 49.

[49] Aileen Fyfe, "The information revolution", in Cambridge History of the Book, 583-4.

[50] Minutes of the Stokesley and Tees Railway Meeting, September 28th, 1833 (Stokesley: Pratt, 1833).

[51] White, History, Gazetteer, and Directory, 708.

as one of the prime movers of a North Yorkshire and Cleveland railway, an initiative that he acerbically observed was "opposed by Stocktonians".[52] The North Yorkshire and Cleveland line finally connected Stokesley to the rail network in March 1857, but only by a spur from the Leeds and Northern railway company's route between Northallerton and Stockton. By then, however, Pratt's publishing business was being wound down: control had effectively been handed to his brother William Fenwick Pratt several years before. Within weeks of the railway's arrival in Stokesley William advertised the sale of stereotype plates, assorted printing equipment and Bourgeois type at "8d a pound … in any quantity".[53]

Changes in the postal system, phased in from 1848, permitting the cheap transit of books also came too-late to assist Pratt.[54] At its considerable peak, therefore, Pratt's enterprise depended heavily upon road transport. The sophistication of regional road haulage is often under-estimated, and it was a sector that particularly held its own against competition from canals and coastal shipping for transporting higher-value goods and shorter hauls. Measured in kilometres per capita, metalled roads in England and Wales were more than four times as extensive as in France by 1840 and road length per square kilometre was six times as great.[55] By 1838 there were 32 carrying services between Yorkshire and London each week, double the level at the turn of the century.[56] It is conceivable that much of Pratt's output was entirely entrusted to road carriers; alternatively regular Stokesley carrier services would have connected with railway stations at Northallerton and Thirsk (opened in 1841) and, especially Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland's regional capital at this time. It is also possible, though, that Pratt linked to east coast shipping services at Stockton. Steamships had cut both freight costs and the duration of voyages and in terms of

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[52] York Herald, May 20, 1854.

[53] Publishers' Circular, April 15 and May 1, 1857. Bourgeois was a small point type favoured for 16mo and 32mo volumes.

[54] S. Colclough, "Distribution", 241.

[55] D. Bogart et al. "State and Private Institutions", in Cambridge Modern Economic History of Modern Europe. Volume I: 1700-1870, eds S. Broadberry and K.H. O'Rourke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 89.

[56] D. Bogart, "The Transport Revolution in Industrialising Britain", in The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume I, 1700-1870, ed. R. Floud et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 369-72; D. Gerhold, "The Growth of the London Carrying Trade, 1681-1838", English Historical Review 41 (1988): 392-410.

market share the coastal trade peaked in the early 1840s.[57] The Edinburgh publisher-wholesaler Bell & Bradfute certainly used steamships sailing out of Leith to send bulk orders to London at this time.[58]

Reliable and rapid transport was especially important to Pratt's business since the London office he maintained was purely nominal. It does not appear, for example, in the 1846 Post Office London Directory, one of the years for which the imprint of 'London: J. S Pratt' is most common. An advertisement in a trade magazine for January that year reveals that Pratt's "Stokesley Books" could be obtained from his agent, A.L. Lewis of 125, Fleet Street. Lewis's main line of business was as a specialist print trade auctioneer, including remainders, stereotype plates and entire printing businesses. His shop was located within his house, previously occupied by a watchmaker and therefore unlikely to offer adequate space for a wholesale warehouse.[59] Warehousing Pratt's stock was therefore undertaken in Stokesley, at premises adjoining the print works and bindery located behind his home.[60] From here the firm supplied booksellers all over Britain. Booksellers' labels pasted inside the covers of "Stokesley books", seen during the course of this research, range from Penrith and Chester in the north-west, to Norwich and Hadleigh in East Anglia. To market his products effectively Pratt had to become a "publisher-wholesaler". Significantly, the other major contemporary Yorkshire publishing house (Milner of Halifax) did the same.

Publisher-wholesalers were mainly London-based firms who supplied orders from "country" booksellers (as Pratt had been until the late 1830s). The London firms were typically reluctant to supply books not published by themselves or in which they had no shares. Not only was the profit margin on supplying such books low, they were also put to the trouble and cost of locating copies from rival companies.[61] The problem for a publisher like Pratt, based 240 miles from the capital, would be acute. Few provincial imprints sold on the London market if their publisher did not enter

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[57] P.S. Bagwell and P. Lyth, Transport in Britain: From Canal Lock to Gridlock (London: Hambledon, 2002), 25.

[58] Colclough, "Distribution", 242.

[59] Bent's Literary Advertiser, January 10, 1846; Athenaeum, January 17, May 16, June 6, July 25 and November 21, 1846.

[60] Norwich Union insurance schedule, April 27, 1840.

[61] Hodson's Booksellers, Publishers and Stationers Directory, vii-viii, 58, 63.

into an agreement with a London house, either by offering advantageous terms for handling their stock or by accepting that works they printed would appear as the output of a London publisher, even if the colophon told otherwise.

The final distribution issue is colonial sales. In his reminiscences, quoted in the introduction above, a fellow printer was emphatic that Pratt's books found "their way to Australia and other Colonial markets".[62] The only firm indication in surviving British copies that Pratt targeted this market are advertisements in the endpapers of some books published in or shortly after 1849.[63] Alongside "Choice New Novels, handsomely bound in cloth", the availability of a collected four-volume edition of the People's Journal was announced as "printed expressly for the British Colonies". The Journal was one of several cheap "Magazines of Popular Progress" that operated around the margins of popular reform politics in the later 1840s.[64] Launched in 1846, it had merged with another title in 1849 and finally folded in 1851, dogged throughout by financial acrimony.[65] The proprietors had clearly sold the stereotypes of the journal. That they had been bought by Pratt is clear from their being among the assets that William Fenwick Pratt sold in 1859.[66] Clearly Pratt had some eye on the colonies but it is difficult to assess the extent to which his works penetrated foreign markets. Cheap books survived no better abroad than they did at home. Furthermore, the presence of a Stokesley book in an overseas library catalogue is no indicator of its provenance: this is especially so in the case of the USA where university libraries have extensively purchased British material. However, one indicator of overseas sales might be the appearance of books in foreign library catalogues, copies of which cannot be found in any British collection. There are just four of these.[67] Discounting

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[62] Burnett, "Middlesbrough as a Fox Cover", 20.

[63] For example The Adventures of Marmaduke Midge, the Pickwickian Legatee (London: Tweedie, Stokesley: Printed by J.S. Pratt, [1849/50?].

[64] B.E. Maidment, "Magazines of Popular Progress and the Artisans", Victorian Periodicals Review, 17: 3 (Fall, 1984): 83-94.

[65] See M. Chase, "'An Overpowering "Itch for Writing': R.K. Philp, John Denman and the Culture of Self-Improvement", English Historical Review forthcoming (2018).

[66] Publishers' Circular, April 1, 1859.

[67] Gold Fringes: The Brightest Words of the Best English Authors (London: Partridge & Oakey; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, 1853) – copy in San Francisco Public Library; William Enfield The Speaker, or, Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers (London : J.S. Pratt, 1850) - copy in Auckland War Memorial Museum Library, New Zealand; Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee, The Log-

United State libraries, the number of Pratt imprints in Anglophone catalogues is relatively slender, though the proportions may be indicative of where colonial sales were greatest: ten in New Zealand, eight in Australia and four in Canada.[68]

The end of Stokesley books

"Mr Pratt made a fortune, and about 1854 retired", his fellow printer William Burnett recalled in 1902.[69] There was a step-change in his business strategy around 1850. The legend "London: J.S. Pratt" disappeared from title pages that year.[70] It was also the year his "New Pocket Library" series appears to have foundered ignominiously and the New Popular Library (itself heavily dependent upon partnerships with other firms) began and folded. There was also a profound shift in the character of Stokesley books. Pratt published his last edition of a gothic novel in 1849 – The Mysteries of London, cashing in on the phenomenal popularity of G.W.M. Reynolds' novel of the same name which appeared in weekly parts from 1844.[71] Serialisation had become a major force in popular literature. It spread the cost of purchasing novels and their format was also significantly larger (and each instalment accompanied by a large woodcut illustration) than Pratt's little 16mo and 32mo volumes. Serials were a burgeoning market but one in which Pratt, given the relative isolation of Stokesley, could not readily compete. Meanwhile yellowbacks were increasingly displacing the small cloth-bound volumes in which Pratt specialised. He published his last novels in 1850.[72] Thereafter Pratt concentrated entirely on printing for other companies, usually Partridge & Oakey of London.

Cabin (London, J. S. Pratt, 1844) – copy in the Library of Congress, Washington DC; January Searle, Country Sketch Book of Pastoral Scenes and Memorable Places (London : Partridge & Oakey; printer J.S. Pratt, Stokesley, 1851) – copy in Brigham Young University, Utah.

[68] Figures based on a WorldCat search, July 1, 2017.

[69] Burnett, "Middlesbrough as a Fox Cover", 20.

[70] There are three exceptions, but the publication date (1859) of Universal Letter Writer is certainly a misprint for 1849, and it is likely John Abercrombie, A New and Complete Gardener's Calendar (1855) and Select Works of Lord Byron (1857) are the same.

[71] [Paul Féval,] Mysteries of London; or Revelations of the British Metropolis. Translated from the French by R. Stephenson (1847; 1849). Pratt's edition was possibly a piracy of an 1845 American translation.

[72] Elizabeth Helme's, Farmer of Inglewood Forest and St Clair of the Isles; or, the Outlaws of Barra. A Scottish Tradition.

The longer his business endured, the more anomalous its lack of direct access to the railway network must have been. Cost factors that were marginal when he started out would have assumed greater prominence and probably eroded his market share. The significance of this becomes clearer in comparison with the other great Yorkshire publisher-wholesaler, William Milner of Halifax. Milner was a small printer-stationer who began publishing in 1834. His business model was almost identical to Pratt's, but his firm survived until 1913.[73] Milner was situated amidst an immediate home market of some 60,000 people whereas Teesside, adjacent to Stokesley, was only just taking off as a major manufacturing centre. Crucially, Halifax had a railway station from 1844; it was also the location of two paper makers and a paper dealer, and much closer to the north's greatest conurbations.[74] These factors combined to permit Milner to operate largely free of partnerships with London houses, even while the hold of London firms was hardening.

Another factor that probably impacted on Pratt's commercial policy was an important change in copyright law. A court ruling in 1850 determined that the first publication of a foreign author in Britain established a copyright for the UK publisher.[75] This would have had profound implications for the fiction side of Pratt's business: he would have needed to acquire an early copy of an original foreign edition, the popularity of which was untested, pay for it to be translated if it was not American, and then rush his English edition into print. He never attempted to do so. Instead Pratt's output, both of books he published himself and those printed for others, now mainly comprised somewhat sober, self-improvement literature. This is abundantly evident in their titles: The Speaker, or, Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers ... with a View to Facilitate the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking. To which is prefixed an Essay on Elocution (1850); or Self-Reliance: a Book for Young Men; being Brief Biographic Sketches of Men, who have Risen to Independence and Usefulness by Perseverance and Energy (printed for Partridge & Oakey, 1852). These titles may seem dry to twentieth-first century taste,

[73] D. Bridge, "William Milner: Printer and Bookseller", Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society (1969): 75-83.

[74] *Hodson's Booksellers, Publishers and Stationers Directory*, 58.

[75] C. Seville, "Copyright", in Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, 224.

but self-improvement literature was a rapidly growing market. It was also, though, aggressively competitive.[76]

The commercial partnerships that sustained his later operation were also frequently complex. His books were meshed into multiple partnership arrangements, in order to shift the volume of copies required to ensure all parties – and the bookseller – made a profit.[77] Having pared-back publishing on his own account, John Slater Pratt seems to have lost his appetite for printing altogether. In the 1861 Census he was still resident at the Stokesley house that had adjoined his works, but his occupation was now "Landed Proprietor". Adjacent cottages owned by him – and which a decade before had been occupied by his workers and their families – were now homes for a variety of other trades people. As a businessman Pratt had followed the common practice of investing his income in land rather than putting it back into his business. He bought-up farms to the east of Stokesley on the northern rim of the North Yorkshire moors, anticipating that exploitable ironstone lay beneath. He was mistaken but, his entrepreneurial energies undimmed, he did initiate an extensive fire brick and pottery making business, whilst an 1859 directory identified him as a major landowner in the area where he had also established "a summer seat".[78] Family succession other than through his brother was not a consideration, for his son Charles was only 12 in 1851 and later destined, via Oxford University, for the Church.[79] However, having left Howden, his brother William Fenwick Pratt was printing on his own account in Stokesley as early as 1851. The titles of his publications clearly indicate he had no aspirations to cater for a national market and, as we have seen, he soon sold-off stereotype plates and printing equipment, including a cutting machine

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[76] See Chase, "Overpowering Itch for Writing".

[77] For example the Pratt Collection has a New Popular Library edition of [John Dix,] Pen and Ink Sketches of Eminent English Literary Personages by a Cosmopolitan, published by Pratt in London in 1850. Its end papers advertise some books published by Gilpin of London and some sold by Philip of Liverpool, while its rear cover advertises ten other 6d volumes in the New Pocket Library published by Gilpin. Among the Library volumes, J. Searle, Life, Character and Genius of Ebenezer Eliot (1850) was published (according to its title page) by Gilpin (London), Black (Aberdeen) and J. Gilpin (Dublin) and also includes adverts for books sold by Philip and Simpkin & Marshall.

[78] History and Topography (Whellan), 777; J. and J. Cockerill, "The Commondale Works and Commondale Pottery", Bulletin of the Cleveland and Teesside Local History Society, 59 (Autumn 1990): 16; Burnett, "Middlesbrough as a Fox Cover", 20.

[79] Franks, Printing and Publishing, 11.

(the implication being he printed only short runs and hand guillotined them).[80] We will never know if John Slater Pratt's entrepreneurial flair would have carried his publishing through the rapidly changing market conditions that pertained from the mid-1850s.

[80] E.g. W. Watson The Visitors Guide to the Guisbrough Alum Works (Stokesley: W.F. Pratt, 1851, reprinted 1854); The Religious Experience and Prophecies of Henry Hutchinson: of Heighington, in the County of Durham. Written by Himself (Stokesley: W.F. Pratt, 1854); J. Costillo, The Bard of the Dales: or, Poems and Miscellaneous Pieces, partly in the Yorkshire Dialect (Stokesley: W.F. Pratt, 1858); Publishers' Circular, April 15 and May 1, 1857; February 1, April 1, May 2 and August 1, 1859; Bookseller May 25, 1859.