adding running numbers in the margin for the entries for each year and underlining names in the imprint, one can identify entries and facilitate identification of printers and booksellers. Hills is found in the imprint of nine titles, the first of which is annotated ‘Apparently the 1st ed.,’ and the source of the piracy for the others is only occasionally derived from nuc. Several entries with ‘printed, and sold by the booksellers of London and Westminster’ may be candidates for attribution to him, so the catalogue is indeed very useful for anyone working on the activities of the booktrade that led to the passing of the ‘Statute of Queen Anne.’ The wealth of bibliographical information in the catalogue, including the comments on authorship, should, however, be more readily accessible through the index.

Nevertheless, this small cavil should not detract from the observation that the catalogue is eminently readable for those interested in the political, religious, and social controversies of the England of Queen Anne, and is not ‘just a catalogue’ or reference book.

WILLIAM J. CAMERON
(William J. Cameron died on 18 April 1989. During his academic career he was a professor of English at McMaster University, Dean of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Western Ontario, and Chairman of the Department of Modern Languages at Literatures at Western.)


This new work on British publishing history is timely, as that bastion of Britain’s book trade, the Net Book Agreement, is now being challenged as a retrogressive, restrictive trade practice. As John Sutherland notes in the *Times Literary Supplement* (2–8 December, 1988), it can be defended on the grounds that it ‘set the distinctively “civilized” tone of the twentieth-century British book trade and literary world.’ Thus, the trade avoided what many consider to be the worst of American practices, epitomized by the emphasis on the best-seller list and the aggressively competitive discounting pursued by bookstore chains. By tracing earlier book trade restrictions which helped establish a climate for regulation [the granting of monopolies and patents in the sixteenth century, for example], Feather demonstrates how such an agreement became possible.

Although the author makes it clear that this work is a history of publishing, not the book trade, it is inevitable that we learn much about the latter. There are four principal themes: the organizational role of the publisher, the central importance of copyright, ‘commercial imperatives’ [markets and distribution, etc.] and the mechanisms devised to meet them, and censorship. Interestingly, two of these topics [censorship and copyright] remain contentious today.

Feather’s main objective is to trace the development of British publishing over the past five hundred years, showing the directions it has taken and the historical factors that explain the nature and functioning of the industry today. An important
thread that runs through the narrative is the evolution of the modern publisher who
stands in sharp contrast to his counterpart of Gutenberg's day.

The writing style is clear and concise, and avoids the sometimes pretentious
overwriting we find in so much scholarly publication today. It is no easy matter to
capture the essence of change over five centuries in the space of two hundred or so
pages, but Feather has managed to do just that. Part one is provocatively entitled
'The Press in Chains,' and takes the story up to 1695 when the Licensing Act of 1662
lapsed. The second part, called 'Licence and Liberty,' concludes on the threshold of
the nineteenth century, which was to be a momentous period for the trade; this is
the subject of part three, aptly entitled 'The First of the Mass Media.' The final part
covers the twentieth century. This must have been the most difficult section to
write, as the industry continues to react and respond to change. The author notes,
for example, the increasing competition for the leisure market, radically
transformed by greater affluence and new technologies, which has caused the pub-
lishing industry to scrutinize its markets more closely.

Feather also observes that, not surprisingly, British book readers, as a distinct
part of the larger reading public, come mainly from the educated middle class. Two
further facts are considered by Feather which sound notes of alarm: more than one-
third of the population never reads books, and among those who do, almost fifty per-
cent prefer borrowing from libraries to purchasing – a reflection, no doubt, of the
high price of books. The trade's response has been to produce more books and pro-
mote strongly the notion of buying and reading them.

There is a tendency, particularly noticeable in North America, to underestimate,
or misunderstand, the value of surveys and overviews of broad subjects such as this
one; that is unfortunate, as there is an important place for them in the literature.
They provide excellent baselines from which research on more specific topics may
begin. This volume, for example, should appeal to students in library science, intel-
lectual history, economics, and business studies generally, as well as to the general
reader. For historical bibliographers venturing into the British field for the first time,
this will be an invaluable introduction to an industry that, historically, has had a
significant impact upon Canadian publishing and literary endeavour. The author, a
professor of library and information studies at Loughborough University in England,
has provided ample notes and a full bibliography for those wishing to explore further
the history of publishing in Britain.

JOHN A. WISEMAN

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