

'A Copious Collection of Newspapers'

John Nichols and his Collection of Newspapers, Pamphlets and News Sheets, 1760–1865

Julian Pooley, University of Leicester

Introduction

John Nichols (1745–1826) was a leading London printer who inherited the business of his former master and partner, William Bowyer the Younger, in 1777, and rose to be Master of the Stationers' Company in 1804.¹ He was also a prominent literary biographer and antiquary whose publications, including biographies of Hogarth and Swift, and a county history of Leicestershire, continue to inform and inspire scholarship today.² Much of his research drew upon his vast collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century newspapers. This essay, based on my ongoing work on the surviving papers of the Nichols family, will trace the history of John Nichols' newspaper collection. It will show how he acquired his newspapers, explore their influence upon his research and discuss the changing fortunes of his collection prior to its acquisition by the Bodleian Library in 1865.

¹ For useful biographical studies of John Nichols, see Albert H. Smith, 'John Nichols, Printer and Publisher' *The Library* Fifth Series 18.3 (September 1963), pp. 169–190; James M. Kuist, *The Works of John Nichols. An Introduction* (New York, 1968), Alan Broadfield, 'John Nichols as Historian and Friend. Suum Cuique' (Unpublished, 1974–1983) and Julian Pooley and Robin Myers, 'The Nichols Family (1745–1873)' *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004–ongoing) available online at www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 2 August 2016, hereafter ODNB].

² The first edition of John Nichols' *Anecdotes of Mr Hogarth* (London, 1780) grew, with the assistance of Isaac Reed and George Steevens, into *The Works of William Hogarth from the Original Plates restored by James Heath RA to which is prefixed a biographical essay on the genius and productions of Hogarth and explanations on the subjects of the plates* (London, 1822). For Nichols' contribution to Swift studies, see Daniel Cook, 'Labor ipse voluptas: John Nichols' Swiftiana' in Matthew Day (ed.) (Delaware and London, 2012), pp. 43–60.

From Apprentice to Biographer

Nichols' interest in early newspapers was integral to his career and research. Apprenticed to Bowyer in 1757, he was taken into partnership in 1766 and inherited the business – one of the largest of its kind in London, printing for Parliament and several learned Societies – on Bowyer's death.³ Nichols' genial personality and keen business acumen rapidly steered him to the top of his trade. He shared lucrative copyrights with booksellers and was soon involved in their project to engage Samuel Johnson to prepare his magisterial *Lives of the English Poets*.⁴ In an age of biography and anecdote, John Nichols also collected, preserved and printed more biographical information about the book trade, antiquaries and writers than all of his contemporaries combined. His correspondence and publications link him to most of the significant antiquarian or biographical activities of his time.⁵ His *Literary Anecdotes* and *Literary Illustrations* are essential reading for any study of literary life and culture throughout the long eighteenth century.⁶

Nichols' Early Interest in Newspapers

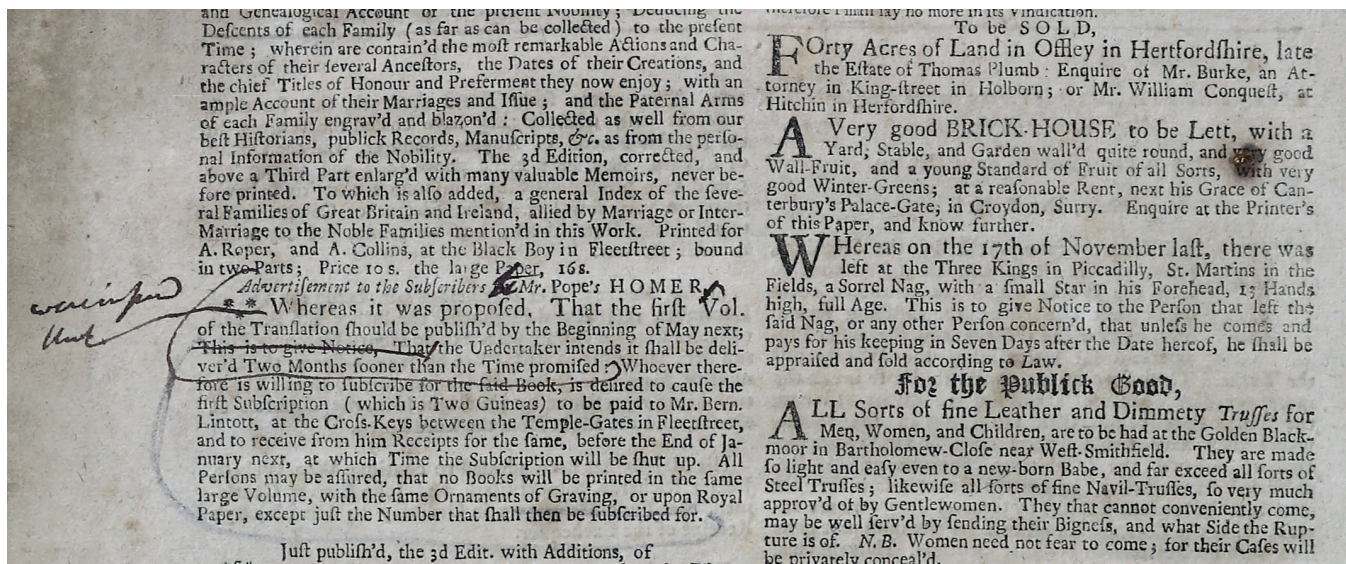
Although most of Nichols' interests were influenced by William Bowyer, his interest in newspapers was acquired independently. Bowyer did not print news sheets, but Nichols would have seen the latest papers and read older copies at many London coffee houses.⁷ As an apprentice he frequented Tom's Coffee House in Devereux Court, a narrow alley connecting the insalubrious area of Whitefriars (home of Bowyer's printing shop until 1767) to the Strand. Access to Tom's large library of news sheets and the literary conversations of Bowyer's eminent customers proved influential.⁸ He began to submit verses to newspapers, usually under the pseudonym 'The Cobbler of Alsatia', alluding to Whitefriars' reputation as a place of sanctuary for criminals. The first, when he was seventeen, was an acrostic on 'The Spanish War' in *The Gazetteer* of 1 January 1762. It was followed by some thirty more poems in over a dozen different papers, indicating a sound knowledge of the contemporary newspaper trade.⁹ As his master's assistant in editing Swift's works, he also became conversant with journals of an earlier period.¹⁰



Portrait of John Nichols from 1787. John Nichols, by Gerard van der Puyt, 1787. Oil on canvas. (Private Collection. Reproduced by permission of the owner. Photograph by Julian Pooley).

Forming the Collection

Nichols began collecting early newspapers in circa 1778, when he purchased a major share in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. This leading periodical was established in 1731 by Edward Cave (1691–1754) to provide 'Monthly, a View of all the pieces of Wit, Humour, or Intelligence, daily offer'd to the Publick in the News-papers (which are of late so multiply'd as to render it impossible, unless a man makes it a business, to consult them all)'.¹¹ Nichols had been writing for the magazine since 1765.¹² By 1782 he was both sole printer and editor, developing a successful editorial technique of using a variety of pseudonyms to encourage contributions and debate. In 1778 he attributed a pamphlet about the periodical, *The Present State of Wit* (1711) to John Gay, explaining that 'The collecting of fugitive pieces by eminent writers having for some time past been a part of my amusement, I find my stock somewhat considerable'.¹³ Many of these pieces had first appeared in newspapers and Nichols, who was printing Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*, realised their research potential. His copy of *The Post Boy* for 23–25 December 1714 still bears his annotation of an advertisement to the subscribers of Pope's translation of Homer. Such notices were vital evidence for the works of Johnson's poets.¹⁴



The Post Boy, 23-25 December 1714. No 3063. Vol.24C

The firm's ledgers went back to 1699 and preserved a daily record of Bowyer's customers, projects and shared printing with the London trade. But Nichols realised that evidence for more fugitive pieces and jobbing printing, which would provide a chronological framework for a history of the press, would be found in contemporary newspapers. His tribute to his late master, *Anecdotes, Biographical and Literary, of the Late Mr William Bowyer, Printer* (1777), ran to just 52 pages. Nichols printed a dozen copies and sent them to Bowyer's leading customers and closest friends who reciprocated with corrections, additions and promises of further material for a revised edition. His pseudonymous queries in the Gentleman's Magazine encouraged more contributions, and by 1782 he had accumulated enough new material to publish the *Biographical and Literary Anecdotes of William Bowyer, Printer*, a quarto volume of nearly 700 pages. It is this volume that Nichols always regarded as the first edition of what became the *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century and Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*. Newspapers were essential in transforming his simple memoir of his master into an encyclopaedic chronicle of the Bowyer press, providing a panoramic view of eighteenth-century literary culture.

Nichols' collection was dramatically increased in c. 1779 when John Wilkes (1727–1797) donated his own thirty-five folio volume

archive, spanning his political career from 1768 to 1779 and 'illustrated with many MS remarks by himself, detached printed papers on various subjects, and some curious caricatures'.¹⁵ These volumes were the core of the collection which Nichols added to over the next three decades. He and Wilkes forged a strong working and personal relationship that lasted until Wilkes' death in 1797. For a time, Nichols was drawn into the turbulent world of City politics. He was a councillor for the ward of Farringdon Without in 1784, but lost his seat in 1786 in what he calls 'a violent collision of parties'.¹⁶ In 1787 Wilkes made him his deputy for the south side of the Ward of Farringdon Without.

His association with Wilkes further encouraged his growing interest in newspapers and political squibs. On 6 March 1786 he bought heavily at the sale of the library of Edward Wynne who had acquired the literary collections of Narcissus Luttrell (1657–1732), annalist and book collector who compiled parliamentary diaries of the political events he witnessed from news sheets and newspapers. The annotated copy of the sale catalogue, now in the British Library, shows that Nichols' acquisitions included *The Flying Post* (1695–1732), *The Post Man and the Historical Account* (1695–1726), *The Post Boy* (1695–1727), the *Monthly Account of Occurrences* (1689 and 1692), *The Post Angel* and seven volumes of different newspapers covering the years 1679 to 1703.¹⁷

³ Keith Maslen and John Lancaster, *The Bowyer Ledgers* (London, 1991).

⁴ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford, 2006) and J. Pooley 'Conciliating His Esteem: John Nichols' Contribution to Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, to Biographies of Johnson and to later Johnsonian Scholarship'. *The Age of Johnson* 21 (2011): p. 143–192.

⁵ Edward L. Hart, (ed.) *Minor Lives. A Collection of Biographies* by John Nichols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), p. xviii.

⁶ John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* 9 vols (London, 1812–1815) and *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* 8 vols (London, 1817–1858), [hereafter cited as *Literary Anecdotes* or *Literary Illustrations*].

⁷ Michael J. Suarez and Henry Woodhuysen, in *The Book: A Global History* (Oxford, 2013) p. 21, comment on the tendency from the later seventeenth century for newspapers to accumulate in public places such as coffee houses.

⁸ See Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London' *The Library*, Seventh Series 10.1 (March 2009), p. 13 and R. Rabicoff and D. J. McKitterick 'John Nichols, William Bowyer and Cambridge University Press in 1765', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 6 (1976) pp. 328–338.

⁹ They included *The Court Magazine*, *Universal Museum*, *St James's Chronicle*, *Public Ledger*, *The Public Advertiser*, *Christian Magazine*, *London Magazine*, *The Court*, *City and County Magazine*, *Whitehall Evening Post* and *Gentleman's Diary*.

¹⁰ Nichols helped Bowyer to edit volumes 13 and 14 of John Hawkesworth's edition of *The Works of Jonathan Swift* 25 vols (London, 1755–1775).

¹¹ *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 1 (1731), Introduction.

¹² *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 35 (1765) p. 335, 'Spring'. John Nichols writing as 'J.N.'.

¹³ *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 48 (1778) pp. 312–313, 'Genuine Fragments of our best Poets'. John Nichols writing as 'Eugenio'.

¹⁴ Bodleian Library, Nichols Newspaper Collection, 24C, 19 Oct–30 Dec 1714.

¹⁵ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 9 (1815) p. 464.

¹⁶ John Nichols, *Brief Memoirs of John Nichols with a List of his Publications* (1804) p. 4.

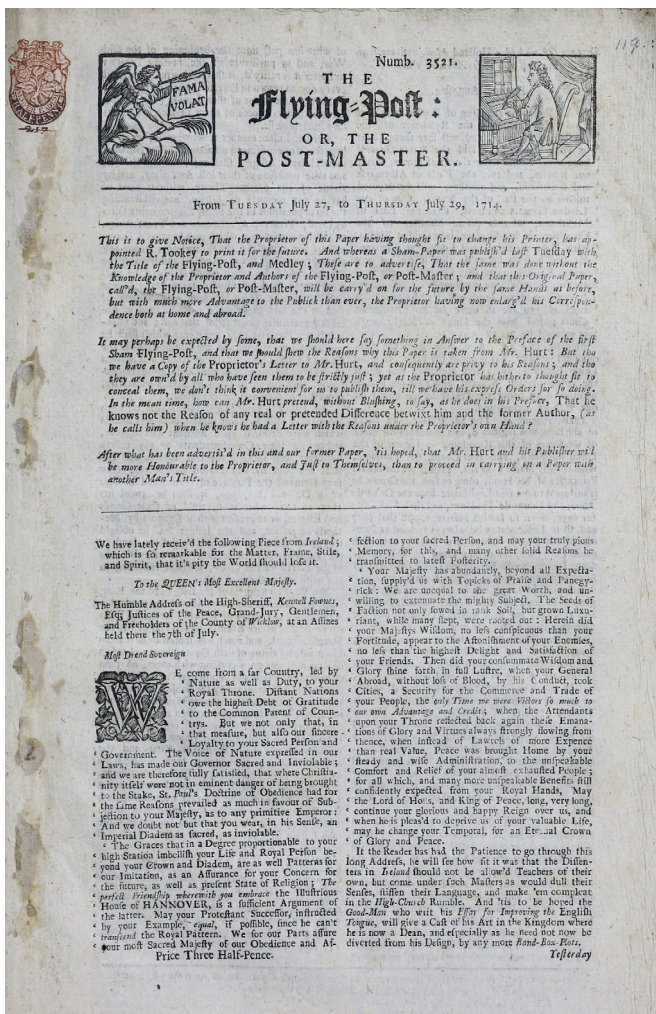
¹⁷ British Library, S. C. Sotheby(1) 6 Mar 1786 to 22 Mar 1787.

Using the Collection

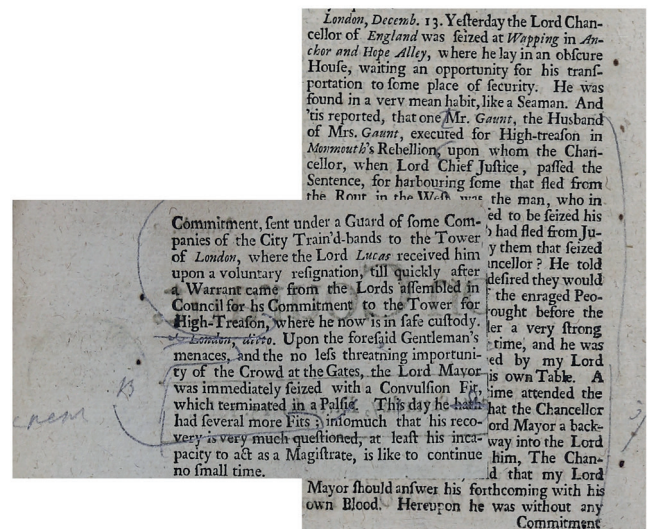
Nichols' collection of newspapers fed directly into his research. In his edition of the *Epistolary Correspondence of Richard Steele* (1787), for example, he made use of *The Weekly Packet*, *Mist's Weekly Journal*, *The London Journal*, *The Weekly Medley*, *The British Journal*, or *the Censor* and *The Post Boy* for source material, anecdotes and quotations. When newspapers failed to provide the information he was seeking, Nichols could always turn to the readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. By the 1780s, Nichols' interests were expanding into topography, which he later described as 'the dry, thorny and barbarous paths of National and Local Antiquities'.¹⁸ He became involved in a complex legal case concerning the ancestor of his first wife, Anne Cradock of Hinckley in Leicestershire, which led him into researching and writing the *History and Antiquities of Hinckley* (1782), published in his series of *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannia*. Here again newspapers were useful; in his copy of the *Loyal Protestant and True Domestic Intelligence* (1682), he found information about the Quakers in Hinckley, while his friend, the antiquary William Cole (1714–1782), gave him information about John Cleiveland of Hinckley from *The Kingdom's Weekly Intelligencer*, 27 May 1645.

The success of the history of Hinckley led Nichols to embark upon his monumental *History and Antiquities of Leicestershire* (1795–1815), which contains many references to newspapers and pamphlets.¹⁹ His copies of the *Mercurius Aulicus*, *Mercurius Anglicus*, *Mercurius Veridicus* and *Mercurius Civicus* provided vivid reports of skirmishes, sieges and alliances throughout the county that he could weave into his chronological narrative, enriching his text with an overview of Leicestershire's involvement in the national conflict. His account of the desecration of Chichester Cathedral in 1642 was based on the *Mercurius Rusticus* which described Haselrig as having danced and skipped for joy. Nichols used nine editions of the *London Gazette* to illustrate the brutal career of Sir George [Judge] Jeffreys (1648–1689) and the *London Mercury* and *London Courant* for accounts of Jeffreys' final capture in Wapping.²⁰

Just as Nichols was always ready to share his knowledge through the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, so he made his newspapers freely available to fellow scholars. Among them were Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who in 1795 asked to borrow *The Craftsman* for 1728²¹ and Samuel Pipe Wolferstan of Staffordshire, who thanked him in 1806 for extracts from a 1737 newspaper concerning his family history.²² The topographer, James Peller Malcolm (1765–1815), also used his 'invaluable collection of newspapers' for material on 'the habits, customs, manners, amusements &c of the Londoners for the last 100 years' in his *Londinium Redivivum* (1803–1807).²³



The Flying Post, 27 July 1714. No 3521. Vol. 24C



The London Courant, Wednesday December 12-Saturday December 15. 1688. No 2. Vol. 7A

Nichols as Historian of Newspapers

Nichols charted the history of the newspapers he collected. Using his own collection and a variety of other sources, he compiled a catalogue of 913 titles for the period 1588–1804, a hundred of them previously unrecorded. This he published in the *Literary Anecdotes* under the title ‘Of Public News and Weekly Papers; when they first began; their progress, increase, and uses and abuses to the people’.²⁴ He later added an appendix giving an overview of the newspaper trade in September 1808 in which he listed the eleven daily papers, nine evening papers, a Sunday paper and other titles appearing twice a week.²⁵ In 1814 he added another 208 titles spanning 1642–1800.²⁶

Nichols’ commentary about these newspapers is highly valuable. He noted that *The Impartial Intelligencer* (No. 7 March 1649) included the first regular ‘Advertisement’ he had seen, placed by a Suffolk gentleman whose two horses had been stolen,²⁷ and that *The Kingdom’s Intelligencer* was useful for advertisements for books.²⁸ Of *The Intelligencer, published for the Satisfaction of the People, with Privilege*, by Roger L’Estrange Esq. (1663), Nichols observed that ‘... these papers contained more information, more entertainment and more advertisements of importance, than any succeeding paper whatever, previous to the golden age of letters, which may be said to have commenced in the reign of Queen Anne’.²⁹ He also charted name changes, noting that *The Evening Post* which began 6 Sep 1709, and *The General Post*, which commenced 19 July 1711, united to form *The General Evening Post*, and that *The St James’s Post* and *The James’s Evening Post*, both begun in 1715, were amalgamated by Henry Baldwin into *The St James’s Chronicle*.³⁰

Nichols was fascinated by the little-known figures who printed and published early newspapers. Spotting that *The London Gazette* for 14–18 February 1706 was the last to be printed by Edward Jones because the next was printed by his widow, Nichols printed John Dunton’s description of him as ‘very charitable, remarkably kind in trade and deservedly famous for printing the *True News* and publishing *The London Gazette*’, adding that his death was marked by *The Mercury Hawkers in Mourning; an Elegy on the much-lamented Death of Edward Jones, the famous Gazette-printer of the Savoy*.³¹ John Dunton (1659–1732), printer of the *Athenian Mercury* and *Athenian Gazette*, or *Casuistical Mercury* intrigued Nichols.³² In 1818 he helped his son, John Bowyer Nichols (1779–1863), to edit *The Life and Errors of John Dunton, Citizen of London; with the lives and characters of more than a thousand contemporary divines and other persons of literary eminence*.³³ They were assisted by Philip Bliss (1787–1857), who transcribed Dunton’s papers in the Bodleian Library.³⁴ Nichols remarked that Dunton ‘was an extremely eccentric Character, certainly not sane’³⁵ and was delighted with Bliss’s extracts, noting that the work was ‘now so full and satisfactory that if the volumes of manuscripts remain for ever sealed the world will have little less’.³⁶



Cover page of the first issue of *The Evening Post*, 6 September 1709. No 1. Vol. 15B

¹⁸ Nichols’ description of himself was quoted by Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges in a letter to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* Dec. 1823 pp. 484–85. See Bodleian MS. Eng. b. 2071 fols. 45–47.

¹⁹ John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* 4 vols in 8 parts (London, 1795–1815), [hereafter, *History of Leicestershire*].

²⁰ *History of Leicestershire* vol. 2 part 1 pp. 115–118, citing the *London Gazette* for 25 Nov 1682, 8 Oct 1683, 1 May, 20 Nov, 24 Nov and 1 Dec 1684, 5 Mar, 11 May, 18 May and 1 Oct 1685; the *London Mercury* 15 Dec 1688 and *London Courant* 15 Dec 1688.

²¹ Sir Joseph Banks to John Nichols, 19 July 1795, *Literary Illustrations* vol. 5 p. 698, NAD11010.

²² Samuel Pipe Wolferstan to John Nichols, 24 Dec 1806, The Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Temp 196, NAD5246.

²³ James Peller Malcolm, *Londinium Redivivum, or an Ancient History and Modern Description of London* (1803–1807). See James Peller Malcolm to John Nichols, c. 1807, Bodl. MS. Eng. lett. c. 358 fo. 19, NAD15251 and 13 Feb 1808, Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. c. 372 fo. 148, NAD8572.

²⁴ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 4 (1812), pp. 33–97.

²⁵ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 4 (1812), p. 111.

²⁶ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 8 (1814), pp. 495–9.

²⁷ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 4 (1812), p. 47.

²⁸ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 4 (1812), p. 54.

²⁹ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 4 (1812), pp. 54–8.

³⁰ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 8 (1814), p. 494.

³¹ *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 4 (1812), p. 81.

³² *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 5 (1812) pp. 59–83.

³³ See also Hart, *Minor Lives* 197–220 and Helen Berry, ‘John Dunton’ *ODNB*.

³⁴ John Nichols to Philip Bliss, 18 Jul 1817, British Library Add. MS. 34568 fos 133–4, NAD13787; Philip Bliss to John Nichols, 1 Aug 1817, Yale University Library, Osborne MS 154: Nichols Family Correspondence Box 2, NAD479 and Philip Bliss to John Nichols, 19 Aug 1817, Yale University Library Osborne MS 154: Nichols Family Correspondence Box 2, NAD479. Items on the Nichols Archive Database, which I am using to provide an analytical guide to the papers of John Nichols and his family between 1745 and 1873, are given two reference numbers. One is the call number of the repository holding the manuscript, the other, with the prefix NAD, is a unique number allocated to each record by the database. For further information about the Nichols Archive Project, see <http://www2.le.ac.uk/centres/elh/research/project/nichols/the-nichols-archive-project>.

³⁵ John Nichols to Philip Bliss, 12 Aug 1817, British Library Add. MS. 34568 fos 220–1, NAD13791.

³⁶ John Nichols to Philip Bliss, 23 Aug 1817, British Library Add. MS. 34568 fos 135–6, NAD13788. Nichols’ annotated copy of his edition of *Dunton’s Life and Errors* was sold in the sale of the library of John Bowyer Nichols in 1864 and is now in private hands. It includes inserted notes and reviews from the *Gentleman’s Magazine* by the Rev Dr E. Berwick, as well as annotation by John Nichols and additional details of Dunton’s life in the hand of John Bowyer Nichols, PC1/Library/C2, NAD12388.

Nichols and Contemporary Newspapers

Newspapers were part of John Nichols' daily life. They were included in parcels of business letters and papers despatched to him when he was away from London. On 18 October 1800 he asked for the *General Evening Post* to await him at Dr Richard Pultney's at Blandford in Dorset³⁷, and in 1801 The *St James's Chronicle* was sent to him at Earl Ferrers, Staunton Harold in Leicestershire.³⁸ Keeping up with news was important throughout the troubled years of war with France. In September 1808, Nichols was 'agog' for news from Portugal, impatient to see the *General Evening Post* the following morning.³⁹ In the tense days before Waterloo in June 1815, Nichols was in Hastings, 'scrambling' for the *Morning Post*, *Star and Pilot* in the town's library.⁴⁰ Daily papers also provided copy for the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In September 1818 he blended two accounts of James Bindley (1737–1818), from *The Times* and *General Evening Post*, with what he already had in manuscript for that month's leading article.⁴¹

Along with his brother-in-law, Edward Bentley (1753–1838), and his friend and publisher of the *Monthly Review*, Ralph Griffiths (1720–1803), Nichols was also a joint proprietor of the *General Evening Post*. As well as using it to advertise his own works, he was also involved socially with the proprietors, recording that he and Griffiths 'were partners, with several others, men of superior abilities, in an Evening Paper; and for 16 or 17 years successively we dined together at least eight or ten times a year'.⁴²

Fire, Theft and Sale

The *General Evening Post* was one of the first to report the fire that destroyed Nichols' business premises on 8 February 1808.⁴³ Nichols had moved to Islington in 1805, making over the house adjoining the printing works to his son, John Bowyer. On the night of the fire, John Bowyer was with his father in Islington; it was a compositor, working late in the shop, who raised the alarm.⁴⁴ The fire was catastrophic, destroying the printing office and warehouse. Nichols told a friend that 'all the Works that I ever published, of my own and of others are entirely gone'.⁴⁵ Miraculously, the dwelling house escaped, and with it the garret where Nichols stored the business ledgers he had inherited from William Bowyer, along with his newspapers. He told Richard Gough (1735–1809), that 'My large Collection of old Newspapers is, I hope, nearly, if not quite preserved'.⁴⁶

No-one was more delighted by this news than his fellow collector, Charles Burney (1757–1817). 'Heavy as these losses have been', he wrote, 'the preservation of your Newspapers and private library must be a subject of rejoicing. Shall we meet on Saturday? I hope you will feel well enough in health, and stout enough in spirits to support the noise of those laughs, which you are in general so instrumental in occasioning'.⁴⁷

Further peril awaited. Nichols later described how, after escaping the fire, the greater part of his newspapers 'were stolen by a faithless servant, to whom the care of my warehouse had been considerably confided; and never afterwards could be traced, having probably been consigned, as waste paper, to the shop of some distant cheesemonger'.⁴⁸ How much this tarnished Nichols' interest in newspapers is hard to say but, by 1812, he was reviewing the future of his collection. His county history of Leicestershire and first six volumes of the *Literary Anecdotes* were nearing completion. In May he offered his 'Copious Collection of Newspapers', dating from 1640, to the Trustees of the British Museum for £500.⁴⁹ They instructed sub-librarian Henry Hervey Baber (1775–1869), to visit Nichols and see what he had.

Baber found that, despite the theft, Nichols' collection was still extensive, including five volumes of newspapers dated between 1640 and 1660, two volumes for 1660 to 1679, and eleven 'bulky volumes' for 1679 to 1700. In particular, Nichols' collection through to 1811 was 'very perfect', comprising 'for the most part Papers under different titles from those already deposited in the Library'. He noted that the first seven volumes were half bound with Russia back, the following ninety-six were in boards, and of the remainder, eighty-six were half bound and thirty-nine tied up in bundles.⁵⁰

Although the Trustees were willing to buy the *London Gazette* to complete their existing holdings, Nichols decided against splitting his collection.⁵¹ When he died in 1826, his daughters prepared a catalogue of his library prior to its sale by Sotheby's in 1828. Although they focused on his topographical collections, their catalogue lists 65 volumes of the *British Critic*, 81 volumes of the old series of the *Monthly Review*, and 96 volumes of the new series, 41 volumes of the *Annual Register*, and 25 volumes of the *Historical Register*.⁵² It is likely that John Bowyer Nichols purchased the rest in 1827 when he bought his father's manuscripts from his sisters for £100.⁵³ Although he, too, invited Baber to have 'further conversation' with him about the newspapers in July 1831,⁵⁴ they remained part of the Nichols family library for another thirty-three years. In 1834, Nichols' grandson, John Gough Nichols (1806–1873), checked them for references to Lacock during the Civil War on behalf of Sir William Henry Fox Talbot.⁵⁵

Later Sales and Acquisition by the Bodleian

The first sale of John Nichols' newspapers was on 24 May 1864, when Sotheby's sold part of John Bowyer Nichols' library.⁵⁶ Lots 1042 to 1057 comprised the *London Gazette*, *Athenian Gazette* or *Casuistical Mercury*, *The Post Boy*, *The Post Man*, *The Daily Courant*, *The True Briton*, *Common Sense*, *The Weekly Miscellany*, *The London Evening Post* and 103 volumes of *The London Chronicle* or *Universal Evening Post*. There were also odd numbers of *The Whitehall Evening Post* from c. 1761, papers relating to John Wilkes and his elections, *The Craftsman*, or *Say's Weekly Journal*, *Public Advertiser*, *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, *The Oracle or Bell's New World*, and the *True Briton*, including its name changes to the *Daily Advertiser* and *Oracle and General Evening Post* to Dec 1808 in 47 volumes. Other titles included *The Tomahawk*, or *Censor General*, *Drakard's Stamford Paper*, *The Champion*, *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, and *John Bull*, edited by Theodore Hook between 1820 and 1840 (suggesting that John Bowyer had added to the collection after his father's death). Lot 262 in the second part of the sale, in December 1864, included 'various old newspapers printed between 1640 and 1664, many of them rare and curious in 8 vols'.⁵⁷

Though many of John Nichols' newspapers were sold in these two sales, John Bowyer's executors sold a further ninety-five volumes, covering 1672 to 1737, to the Bodleian Library for £200 on 4 March 1865. In December 1874, the library purchased a hand list to the collection at Sotheby's sale of the library of John Gough Nichols.⁵⁸ This provides important information about the collection and its changing fortunes since 1800. We find that volume 90, covering October 1735 to April 1736, 'was unluckily burnt, in Mr Nichols Fire Feby 1808', that 'Vol. 14 has been lost – it is believed in removing the Collection from Mr [John Bowyer] Nichols house at Hanger Hill Ealing to Parliament Street in June 1864'. The ninety-five volumes sold in the sale of 24 May 1864 are listed, with a further note that of these, the forty-seven volumes of *The Oracle*, 1789–1808, had not been acquired by the Bodleian, suggesting that some of the volumes which sold in the first sale of the collection had subsequently been acquired by the library.

Conclusion

According to Patrick Studer, the Nichols newspapers purchased in 1865 were intended to supplement a previous gift to the Bodleian by the Rev. F. W. Hope, consisting of his father's collection of 1300 volumes of eighteenth-century periodicals.⁵⁹ Today, the two collections account for the largest part of the library's pre-nineteenth century newspaper holdings. The 296 volumes that make up the Nichols Newspaper Collection continue to provide a rich seam of research material for diverse topics. Their value for the study of England's tumultuous political history between the reign of Charles II and the Age of Walpole has long been recognised; they have informed research ranging from commodity prices to coronation music, and from the history of advertising to the rise of serial publication in England.⁶⁰ Two centuries ago John Nichols mined them for literary biography and local history; today the availability of the more than 150 000 pages of printed text that made up his collection in a searchable, digital format will enable a new generation of scholars to unlock the potential of this encyclopaedic primary resource.

⁵⁷ John Nichols to John Bowyer Nichols, 18 Oct 1800, Private Collection 4, PC4/2/fo. 47, NAD3651.

⁵⁸ John Nichols to John Bowyer Nichols, 14 Jul 1801, Private Collection 2, PC2/2/fo. 172, NAD7614.

⁵⁹ John Nichols to John Bowyer Nichols, 17 Sep 1808, Private Collection 4 PC4/1/fo. 46, NAD2097.

⁶⁰ John Nichols to John Bowyer Nichols, 14 Jun 1815, Private Collection 4 PC4/3/fo. 326–7, NAD5100.

⁶¹ John Nichols to John Bowyer Nichols, 17 Sep 1818, Private Collection 2 PC2/3/fo. 61, NAD2793.

⁶² Martha Sadelbia Nichols to Miss Nichols, 14 Jun 1814, Private Collection 4 PC4/3/fo. 172–3, NAD5001; *Literary Anecdotes* vol. 9 (1815) p. 665 and Michael Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole* (London, 1987), p. 75.

⁶³ *General Evening Post* 11 Feb 1808.

⁶⁴ Henry Dench to John Nichols, Mar 1808, Bodleian. MS. Eng. lett. c. 372 fos 73–6, NAD8519.

⁶⁵ John Nichols to James Bindley, 12 Feb 1808, Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. c. 372 fos 30–31, NAD271.

⁶⁶ John Nichols to Richard Gough, Feb 1808, Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. c. 372 fo. 106, NAD8545.

⁶⁷ Charles Burney junior to John Nichols, 17 Mar 1808, Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. c. 372 fo. 58, NAD8021.

⁶⁸ Theft of 'waste paper' was a constant problem for the Nichols. Although no references have been found to legal action taken by the family as a result of this particular incident, a later theft in 1822 by Nichols' employee, James Thatcher, of forty quires of printed paper, valued at 20s; one hundred quires of other printed paper, valued at 50s., and 200 lbs of waste paper, valued at £4.0.0 did result in prosecution. Old Bailey Online: <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18220220-91-victim951&div=t18220220-91#highlight> [accessed 8 Jul 2016].

⁶⁹ British Museum, Trustees' Minutes, 9 May 1812 and Officers' Reports, 1812 p. 441.

⁵⁰ British Museum Officers' Report, 11 Jul 1812 pp. 466 and 469.

⁵¹ British Museum Trustees Minutes, 11 July 1812.

⁵² Private Collection 1, John Nichols' Library Catalogue, 1826–1828, NAD8851.

⁵³ John Bowyer Nichols to Sarah Nichols, 18 Oct 1827, Bodleian MS. Eng. Lett. c. 6165/1/fo.20, NAD6647.

⁵⁴ Henry Baber to John Bowyer Nichols, 26 Jul 1831, Private Collection 1, PC1/41/3, NAD5725.

⁵⁵ John Gough Nichols to Sir William Henry Fox Talbot, 19 Dec 1834, British Library LA34–049, Talbot Correspondence Project 3024, NAD11904.

⁵⁶ *The First Portion of the Very Important, Extensive and Valuable Library of the Late John Bowyer Nichols*, 24 May 1864.

⁵⁷ *The Concluding Portion of the Library of the late John Bowyer Nichols*, 19 Dec 1864.

⁵⁸ *The Extensive and Valuable Library of the Late John Gough Nichols*, 4 Dec 1874, lot 1424, sold to Wilson for 1s. It is now Bodl. MS. Eng. misc. c. 138 NAD15527. This may have been compiled by John Bowyer Nichols shortly after taking possession of the newspapers after his father's death, because the paper used throughout the volume is dated by watermark 1829 and 1830 and much of the annotation is in his hand.

⁵⁹ Patrick Studer, *Historical Corpus Stylistics. Technology and Change* (London, 2014).

⁶⁰ See Jacob M. Price, 'Notes on Some London Price Currents, 1667–1715', *Economic History Review* 2nd series, 7 (Dec 1954), pp. 242–3; Mattias Range, *Music and Ceremonial at British Coronations. From James I to Elizabeth II* (Cambridge, 2012); James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources* (Cambridge, 2016) and R. M. Wiles, *Serial Publication in England Before 1750* (Cambridge, 1957).

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the owners of private collections of Nichols papers for their continuing interest in and support for my work and to Robin Myers MBE for reading an earlier version of this paper.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Bodleian Library, Nichols Newspaper Collection
Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. b. 2071
Bodleian Library MS. Eng. lett. c. 372
Bodleian Library MS. Eng. lett. c. 6165
British Library, S. C. Sotheby (1)
British Library, Add. MS. 34568
British Library, LA34–049
British Museum, Trustees Minutes and Officers' Reports, 1812
New College, Oxford, Alan Broadfield, 'John Nichols as Historian and Friend. Suum Cuique' (Unpublished, 1974–1983)
Nichols Archive Project, Private Collections 1, 2 and 4.
- Old Bailey Online: The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, London's Central Criminal Court, 1674–1913 <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>
The Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, Temp 196
Yale University Library, Osborne MS 154: Nichols Family Correspondence
Christian Magazine
Court City and County Magazine
Court Magazine
General Evening Post
Gentleman's Diary
Gentleman's Magazine
London Courant
- London Gazette*
London Magazine
London Mercury
Mercurius Aulicus
Mercurius Anglicus
Mercurius Civicus
Mercurius Rusticus
Mercurius Veridicus
Public Advertiser
Public Ledger
St James's Chronicle
Universal Museum
Whitehall Evening Post

Secondary Sources

- Helen Berry, 'John Dunton' *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004– ongoing)
James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources* (Cambridge, 2016)
Daniel Cook, 'Labor ipse voluptas: John Nichols' Swiftiana' in Matthew Day (ed.) *Authors and the Book Trade* (Delaware and London, 2012)
Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-House Libraries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London' *The Library*, Seventh Series 10.1 (March 2009)
Michael Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole* (London, 1987)
Edward L. Hart, (ed.) *Minor Lives. A Collection of Biographies by John Nichols* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971)
John Hawkesworth, *The Works of Jonathan Swift* 25 vols (London, 1755–1775)
Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford, 2006)
James M. Kuist, *The Works of John Nichols. An Introduction* (New York, 1968)
James Peller Malcolm, *Londinium Redivivam, or an Ancient History and Modern Description of London* (1803–1807)
Keith Maslen and John Lancaster, *The Bowyer Ledgers* (London, 1991)
John Nichols, *Anecdotes, Biographical and Literary, of the Late Mr William Bowyer, Printer* (1777)
John Nichols, *Anecdotes of Mr Hogarth* (London, 1780)
John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Hinckley* (1782)
John Nichols, *Biographical and Literary Anecdotes of William Bowyer, Printer* (1782)
John Nichols, *Epistolary Correspondence of Richard Steele* (1787)
John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* 4 vols in 8 parts (London, 1795–1815)
John Nichols, *Brief Memoirs of John Nichols with a List of his Publications* (1804)
John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* 9 vols (London, 1812–1815)
John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* 8 vols (London, 1817–1858)
John Nichols, *The Works of William Hogarth from the Original Plates restored by James Heath RA to which is prefixed a biographical essay on the genius and productions of Hogarth and explanations on the subjects of the plates* (London, 1822)
John Bowyer Nichols, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton, Citizen of London; with the lives and characters of more than a thousand contemporary divines and other persons of literary eminence* (1818)
Julian Pooley and Robin Myers, 'The Nichols Family (1745–1873)' *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004– ongoing)
Julian Pooley, 'Conciliating His Esteem: John Nichols' Contribution to Johnson's *Lives of the Poets, to Biographies of Johnson and to later Johnsonian Scholarship*'. *The Age of Johnson* 21 (2011)
Jacob M. Price, 'Notes on Some London Price Currents, 1667–1715', *Economic History Review* 2nd series, 7 (Dec. 1954)
R. Rabicoff and D. J. McKitterick, 'John Nichols, William Bowyer and Cambridge University Press in 1765' *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 6 (1976)
Mattias Range, *Music and Ceremonial at British Coronations. From James I to Elizabeth II* (Cambridge, 2012)
Albert H. Smith, 'John Nichols, Printer and Publisher' *The Library* Fifth Series 18.3 (September 1963)
Patrick Studer, *Historical Corpus Stylistics. Technology and Change* (London, 2014)
Michael J Suarez and Henry Woodhuysen, in *The Book: A Global History* (Oxford, 2013)
R. M. Wiles, *Serial Publication in England Before 1750* (Cambridge, 1957)