

I have one criticism of this excellent book, it is that I should like to push it forcibly back a century in time. This is, of course, unreasonable, since John Cheney did not set up his press at the Unicorn in Banbury until 1767. Even without that, it is easy to understand why, in general, people tend to think of chapbook printing and publishing as an eighteenth and nineteenth century development rather than seventeenth. The specialist printer publishers were all based in London until the expiry of the Licensing Act in 1695.

Survivals are rare. Even before that, the little twopenny books were not dated in general. They have to be dated from knowledge of the dates the particular trade-partnership was functioning. A thesis, unfortunately unprinted, by Professor Robert Thomson of Miami ('The development of the Broadside ballad trade and its influence on the transmission of English folk-songs', University of Cambridge, Ph.D., 1974), shows the routes the eighteenth and nineteenth century ballad and chapbook chapmen used as they worked for the printers. We know more than the routes of the chapman John Magee down the Great North Road, but it is not surprising that Dr De Freitas did not find this evidence (pp.20-23). Anyone who edited the Thomson thesis for us would be doing us a favour.

Immediately upon the expiry of the Act, publishing of this cheap print mushroomed and exploded, and every large provincial town seemed to develop its own specialist syndicate. There are far more survivors. There is a huge collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century and a few seventeenth century chapbooks, made in the early twentieth century, called the Lauriston Castle Collection, in the National Library of Scotland. It is profoundly educational to try and distinguish the dates these little books were produced.

You begin to distinguish the trading partnerships, which often give the town. In Banbury, Cheney's chapbooks, shown on p.89 and thereafter, are quite different in 'feel' to those from the Rusher chapbooks (p.92-on). Moreover, Cheney uses what I would guess are some old seventeenth century blocks at the beginning of his endeavours (some shown, p.89, though the first example is later) and pp.90-91. You begin to distinguish the stylistic likenesses, which also give you an approximate date to a decade or more.

But here, great caution is required. Woodblocks were used over and over until they wore out. My use of the original illustrations from the Pepys Collection in *Small Books* (1981) was nearly stopped by my publisher, who refused initially to use such inferior, worn material, and then asked at least to 'touch up' the worn edges of the woodcuts. I have thought since that one of my more useful contributions to social history as a discipline has been to have insisted on printing these illustrations, for the response to them was so great that the reader sees them now very commonly illuminating different occupations or social situations, particularly on covers or jackets. They are eye-catching. But the blocks are not ever precisely dateable.

One of the great merits of this book are its illustrations, which will enlarge the range available to non-specialist readers. The demonstration of the way the work of more skilled practitioners fed into coarser workmen's productions is brilliantly shown