

THE ARCHIVE OF CHENEY & SONS

As noted briefly in our last issue, the Bodleian Library has been able to acquire the archive of Banbury printers Cheney & Sons. The following is reprinted, by kind permission, from the current Annual Report of the Friends of the Bodleian <www.bodleian.ox.uk/bodley/friends>.

Cheney & Sons were printers of Banbury in Oxfordshire from 1767 to 2001 (though by then they had ceased being an independent family firm for a few years). They were essentially jobbing printers, who also published books under their own imprint. The archive acquired from Offa's Dyke Books is a remarkable witness to their ability to adapt to the changing technology of the industry and the changing society both within and beyond Banbury.

The archive contains: chapbooks printed by Cheney and fellow Banbury printer Rusher [see *The Banbury Chapbooks*, by Leo De Freitas, Banbury H.S. vol. 28, 2004]; a vast range of jobbing work including advertisements, posters and forms, which reflect day-to-day life in and around Banbury from the 1760s to the 1920s; 45 broadside ballads, moralities, murders and executions – the majority of which are of exceptional rarity and interest, with over half apparently unrecorded. Material produced by nine other Banbury printers and seventeen others from the local area is also present.

The real distinction of the archive is its representation of the activities of Banbury printers at a time when the town was the hub of a network of chapmen distributing popular literature around the country as well as its comprehensive coverage of the commercial work of Cheney & Sons. The archive forms a single source which reveals the breadth, depth, and evolution of a good provincial printer's work within a sizeable town not far from Oxford. The importance of Banbury in the printing and publishing trade since the late eighteenth century is well known and the availability of the archive facilitates further research in this area allowing an imaginative focus for local people.

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