Of whom may be had Land Tax Receipts, Assessor's Warrants, Funeral Affidavits, &c. Likewise all manner of Stationery Wares, as Shop-books, Pocket-books, Paper, Pens, Ink, Wax, &c. Likewise Dr. Bateman's Pectoral Drops, and Radcliffe's Purging Elixir: The first fam'd for the Colic, Pains in the Limbs and Joints, Agues, and all Ailments of the Breast and Bowels. The second is the very best of purging Medicines; witness the many Certificates we daily receive from our Readers and their Friends. These Medicines are sold at 12 d. the Bottle, with printed Directions how to take them, and Certificates of their Cures.

(Price of the Mercury Three Half Pence.)
Wilkins Micawber might find happiness in a favorable difference of sixpence between annual income and annual expenditure, but no printer of newspapers could sleep at night with so narrow a margin between solvency and misery. One of the most puzzling things about the early weekly newspapers is this: how could a newspaper selling for three halfpence a copy yield a livelihood to those who produced it and a profit to those whose investment and enterprise got it started? The investment must have run into many pounds. Even at its barest minimum, the publishing of a newspaper in any eighteenth-century English country town required space in a building, a printing press with fonts of type and a few cuts, supplies of paper and ink, and enough practised hands to attend to all operations in the process of producing a paper once a week or oftener—gathering the news and other matter to fill the columns, setting the type, making up the forms, running the paper twice through the manually operated press, folding the sheets, carrying the printed copies to those wishing to buy them, and sorting the type for use in printing the next issue. It is conceivable that in a small

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Fig. 4.—Title page with list of commodities sold by the printers of the Northampton Mercury. (By permission of the Northampton Public Libraries Committee.)
shop one man with a boy to help him could do all these things, but what profit could there be unless he sold thousands? Did both E. Verral and W. Lee make money week by week from their *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*? What income from the *Salisbury Journal* reached the unnamed members of the firm of Benjamin Collins and Company? What profits reached the pockets of Mr. Akenhead and "the rest of the Partners" who controlled the *New-Castle Weekly Mercury*? The *Newcastle Journal* was printed by John Gooding from November, 1742; the four proprietors of that paper were identified in the issue of 24 September 1743 as Isaac Thompson, Jonathan Walker, Peregrine Tyzack, and Robert Thorp. Did all five of these men make enough to live on from the paper? Unless the proprietor of a country newspaper was a perennial granter of subsidies to a losing enterprise, most of the papers enumerated in the Register at the end of this volume must have sold at the rate of many hundreds, probably thousands, weekly.

There is little evidence to indicate how many copies of any one issue of a provincial newspaper were printed in the period 1700-1760. The Rev. Thomas Tanner, who later became Bishop of St. Asaph, observed to a correspondent in 1706 that Francis Burges, printer of the *Norwich Post*, cleared nearly fifty shillings every week, selling "vast numbers to the country people." In 1715, Joseph Bliss, printer of the *Protestant Mercury* in Exeter, made the confident assertion in the twelfth issue (dated 10 February) that his paper "circulated Forty Miles round, and several hundreds dispers’d every Week." At the end of the *Northampton Mercury*’s first year, the printers asked their readers to excuse a delay of an hour or two in the publishing of that particular issue (number 52 of volume I, 24 April 1721), "since the prodigious Increase thereof demands a longer time than usual for the Press." It was the same two printers, Raikes and Dicey, who at precisely the same stage in their next
paper—the *Gloucester Journal*, number 53 (8 April 1723)—thanked their readers for enabling them “in the Space of Twelve Months, to print some Hundreds (Weekly) more . . . than the paper printed at *Worcester.*” In 1732, William Cooke declared in a note under the date line of his *Chester Weekly Journal* that the paper, by then over ten years old, was carried through nine counties and that “some Thousands” were sold each week. A firmer figure stands in number 15 (14 July 1739) of the *Newcastle Journal*, in which Isaac Thompson and William Cuthbert declared that they were by then selling “nearly 2000 of these Papers weekly”; and in *Whitworth's Manchester Magazine*, number 3136 (13 June 1755), the statement was made that eleven hundred copies of the preceding week's issue of that paper had been printed (“a larger Number than is printed of any other News Paper published near this Place . . . ”).

These figures and such terms as “vast numbers” and “some Thousands” would be more convincing if paper-stock ledgers or other business records of the printers survived to confirm or elucidate them. If Tanner's figure is trustworthy, the *Norwich Post* must have sold very well to clear nearly £2 10s. from the sale of each issue. If the *Norwich Post* sold for a penny, the gross return from the sale of one thousand copies would amount to only £4 3s. 4d. Out of that would have to come the paper-maker's charge for five hundred whole sheets of paper, the wages of all who had a hand in the printing and distributing of the *Post*, and a proper share of the annual payments for rent, candles, heat (if any), and depreciation of equipment. Could Burges have managed to realize a profit of £2 10s. unless he sold many more than a thousand copies?

Several early papers give no indication of their selling price, but generally speaking the country newspapers sold for three halfpence up to 1725, for twopence from 1725 to 1757, and for twopence halfpenny from 1757 until the
next increase in the stamp tax. There were exceptions, for some early papers are known to have sold for a penny, and at least six papers in the 1725-57 period sold for three halfpence. As late as 1748, Ward’s Bristol Mercury was marked “Price ONE PENNEY.” A few printers thought it expedient to offer the first issue or two gratis, so that people might be lured into taking it regularly. Even after eight months of publication, the Doncaster Flying-Post in 1755 carried at the foot of its first page the note: “This Paper is given Gratis.” Possibly the proprietor was receiving financial support from a political party, but in any case he escaped the halfpenny tax by not charging for the paper.

When Henry Cross-grove announced in January, 1707, that any postmen or letter carriers who were willing to sell his Norwich Gazette in the towns and villages along their regular routes would be supplied with copies at threepence a dozen, he did so presumably in order that the papers might be sold for a halfpenny instead of a penny, for two months later he said that “the Ingenious and Generous Encouragers” of the Gazette had advised him to “raise it to its former Price.” At the end of that year, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, Cross-grove again reduced the price to a halfpenny, but this time he and the proprietor, Samuel Hasbart, suffered the loss of income because they were determined to squeeze the proprietor of another Norwich paper into bankruptcy or enforced partnership. Perhaps here again there was financial backing by a political party, for Cross-grove wrote with vigor and tenacity in support of the Tories. When the Stamp Tax was firmly imposed in 1725, the price became three halfpence, and it remained so for the next quarter-century. Perhaps it was assistance from the same party that enabled Cross-grove’s successor, R. Davy, to charge the same low price for his Norwich Journal, of which only one issue, dated 2 June 1753, remains.

With or without the aid of subventions provided by a
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political party, the printer’s income rose as circulation increased and fell if anything caused the circulation to shrink. Buyers’ resistance to the newspaper stamp tax affected adversely the circulation of most papers both in 1725 and in 1757, as the printers’ complaints testify. Andrew Brice, of Exeter, may not have been the greatest sufferer, but he was certainly the most eloquent in expressing his dissatisfaction over the tax and its effects on his income. In number 23 (15 October 1725) of his *Weekly Journal*, established in April, 1725, to replace the former Post-master, he tried to put a touch of whimsicality into his observations about the “wide Sweep of the fatal Besom,” but it is clear that his sales and therefore his profits had been considerably reduced by the tax. Brice could not evade the tax; he resolved to make greater efforts than ever to please the customers he still had, though he had been relieved of “above Half the Burthen of former Profit” and no longer had “the Fatigue of serving so many Customers.” It was a plain and disturbing fact that a vast number would not pay “the imposed What-d’ye-call-it; as perhaps not seeing the great Necessity thereof in time of profound Peace.” Brice had warned his readers in advance that the price would be increased by sixpence a quarter, and declared that “according to a moderate Computation” the amount he would have to pay in duty to the King would be “above 100£ per Annum more than ordinary.” The figure is only approximate, but it gives a hint about the normal circulation of the Post-master. Brice had presumably been registering his Post-master as a sheet-and-a-half pamphlet, paying three shillings for each week’s whole issue, or nearly eight pounds per annum. If his “moderate Computation” was at all realistic, he expected to have to transmit to the Commissioners of the Stamp Office more than £108 a year, or well over two pounds a week. At a halfpenny per copy that round figure implies an average weekly edition of nearly a thousand copies. If there were a thou-
sand customers, an increase in the selling price of sixpence a quarter—two shillings per annum—would wipe out the expected deficit of £100.

The tax could not, of course, be absorbed by the printer; it had to be added to the price charged, not because the law required it, but because no margin of profit could absorb a tax amounting to one third or one quarter of the selling price. It was simple arithmetic, exasperating but inescapable. The shift of price resulting from the tax is seen in the Newcastle Weekly Courant, which sold for three halfpence while it was an untaxed twelve-page paper, and for two pence when it changed to a four-page paper bearing a halfpenny stamp. In 1757, the extra halfpenny of tax raised the price again by just that much. Some printers tried to keep to a basic price of one penny plus tax, but few could continue long at that rate. The price of the earlier Stamford Mercury, unlike that of most other pre-1725 papers, remained at three halfpence in spite of the 1725 tax, and that was the selling price set by Francis Howgrave when he started his own Mercury in the same town in 1732; but after four years, Howgrave found that he had to increase the price to twopence. Adams's Weekly Courant likewise sold for three halfpence, and this price was raised only in 1757, when Elizabeth Adams, the proprietor, apologetically informed her readers, in number 1263 (5 July 1757), that the price would thereafter have to be twopence. From that date onward, one whole penny had to be paid in advance for the stamp on each half sheet. The paper itself cost one farthing, she said, and the newsmen were allowed one halfpenny for each copy they disposed of. It plainly appeared from these figures that there was "no more than One Farthing to defray the great Expence of Printing, procuring Intelligence, &c. &c." Behind that double ampersand lurked also Elizabeth Adams's profits, which can hardly have paid for her cups of tea. How could anyone run a newspaper on a farthing?
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This same question must have caused Thomas Aris of Birmingham many a sleepless night. For nearly a year and a half after starting his Birmingham Gazette in 1741, Aris had struggled to overcome his persistent and resourceful rival, Robert Walker, who from the first had irritated him by printing his Warwick and Staffordshire Journal in Birmingham before Aris's shop was ready for occupancy and annoyed him still more by selling his paper for three halfpence. Believing that the local people would not pay more than that for his Gazette but hoping that eventually they would recognize the superiority of his paper, Aris set his price at three halfpence and lost money week after week. By the end of June, 1743, it was clear to both Aris and Walker that their contest was profitable to no one except the buyers of their newspapers. The price had to be raised. In Aris's Birmingham Gazette, number 86 (4 July 1743), Aris assured his customers that he had already lost a considerable sum by selling the paper for three halfpence. Then came his summary analysis of the costs of producing and distributing it:

That a great deal of Money may be sunk in a very little Time by a Publication of this Nature, cannot seem strange to anyone who considers, that out of every Paper one Half-penny goes to the Stamp-Office, and another to the Person who sells it; that the Paper it is printed on costs a Farthing; and that consequently no more than a Farthing remains to defray the Charges of Composing, Printing, London News Papers, and meeting, as far as Daventry, the Post; which last Article is very expensive; not to mention the Expence of our London Correspondence.

Once again, how could a newspaper be profitably produced for a farthing?

Aris's margin of profit was minute. So, for that matter, was Walker's; but at this time Walker was making a good income from the sale of books in weekly fascicules, often using these in combination with his various newspapers. The two rivals agreed that one paper in Birmingham was
enough, and that three halfpence was not enough to charge for it. "The Truth is," wrote Aris, "I had no Design originally of attempting the printing a Newspaper for Three Half-pence; but another Paper being publish'd at that Price by Mr. Walker, obliged me to submit to the same Terms; tho' now we are both sufficiently convinced that we were in the wrong, and think it high Time to drop the Opposition, and unite both Papers in one." Thereafter, for many years, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* was the only Birmingham newspaper, the imprint no longer reading "Printed by T. Aris . . ." but "Printed by T. Aris and Comp. . . ." The price was two pence.

Set forth in tabulated form, the inescapable out-of-pocket expenditures for producing a thousand copies of *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* or any other four-page newspaper of the time would be these:

1. A due proportion of the annual "overhead" for premises and equipment.
2. The wages of the type-setter, pressman, and helpers.
3. The cost of 1,000 half-sheets of paper.
4. £2 1s. 8d. for the stamps impressed on these half-sheets.
5. The carriage charges for bringing the stamped paper from London.
6. The cost of procuring news (subscriptions to London and other newspapers, fees paid to special correspondents in London and perhaps elsewhere, charges for riding to meet the post).
7. The fees or allowances to distributors.

From the sale of one thousand copies of *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* at three halfpence, there would be a gross return of only £6 5s. 0d. For the stamped paper alone, exactly half of this sum had already been paid before a single piece had been put into the press.
This paying in advance for stamped paper was required of all printers of newspapers, whether their printing shops were in London or in the country. It undoubtedly caused special hardship to Aris and other printers living many miles from the only source of supply, the London warehouse of the Commissioners of Stamps. A London printer of newspapers had only to send a boy with a barrow to the warehouse in Serle Court, Lincoln's Inn, and he did not need to buy more than he expected to use in a week or a fortnight. A provincial printer would not only have to pay higher carriage charges than the Londoner; he waited longer for his shipments and had to lay in a much larger stock or run the risk of finding himself without paper when press time came. For country printers of newspapers there was the additional embarrassment of having to ship back to London any unsold copies in order to claim a rebate on the stamps. The London printer could easily and immediately and at negligible cost get a credit for the stamps on his left-over copies by having one of his boys take them back to the Stamp Office in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Whether the fault was the printer's in not ordering the paper soon enough, or the London warehouseman's in not having adequate stocks on hand, or the carrier's in not traveling swiftly enough, it happened repeatedly that the printer's paper cupboard was bare when press time came. What was he to do? Postpone or cancel the issue? Pay the tax in a lump sum? Brief postponement seemed reasonable to William Norris of Taunton, whose Journal in its fifty-first week came out on Saturday, 7 May 1726, one day later than usual. In the Leeds Mercury, number 726 (8 January 1740), the printer, James Lister, explained that "being disappointed of a Parcel of Stampt Paper for the News, which should have come to hand by Samuel Fenton, the London Carrier, on Saturday the 29th past," he had printed the Mercury on unstamped paper, and that since it was illegal to sell unstamped newspapers he
was giving the paper *gratis*. Thomas Aris announced in number 16 (1 March 1742) of his *Birmingham Gazette* that, having been disappointed in the receipt of stamped paper from London, he was using unstamped stock and added that he had informed the distributor of stamps, “to whom an Oath will be taken of the Quantity sold and the Duty paid accordingly.” This practice was followed in other towns.

It is greatly to be regretted that not one of these sworn statements about the “quantity sold” has as yet come to light, for there could be no more convincing evidence of the circulation of the papers concerned. It is probable that copies of such statements, with exact figures—certainly they would not be exaggerated—are hidden among the papers in various local solicitors’ offices, for it was undoubtedly to the local officer, not to the Commissioners in London, that payments and affidavits were sent. It is reasonable to assume that Aris paid the due amount to John Smith, the distributor of stamps in the Birmingham area in 1742. A reference in the *Norwich Mercury*, on 9 April 1757, clears up any doubt, for in that issue William Chase, Jr., stated that instead of waiting for a supply of paper with the extra stamp impressed on it, he would be permitted to make use of what “Half-Penny Stamps” he had in stock, “on making Affidavit of the Number, and paying the additional Duty to the Distributor of the Stamps in this City.”

Probably not many London printers of newspapers filed such affidavits, for they would undoubtedly be able to procure stamped paper if they wished to use it. On this supposition the Audit Office figure showing the gross produce from the duty on unstamped newspapers for the year ending 2 August 1742 may be taken to cover only Thomas Aris’s payment and similar payments from a few other provincial printers who during the fiscal year from 2 August 1741 to 2 August 1742 had filed statements that they had on one or more occasions used unstamped paper.
The amount recorded for the whole year was only £16 6s., representing payment in lieu of halfpenny stamps on 7,824 copies. It is impossible to conjecture how many of these were Aris’s. The figures for the year ending 2 August 1758 are no more helpful, though they show that the new additional halfpenny tax had brought in £25 3s. 1/2d. (representing 12,073 copies) and that the former halfpenny tax had brought in £19 7s. 8d. (representing 9,304 copies) from printers who either had no stamped paper at all or had to use paper with only the original halfpenny stamp. Again there is no way of discovering which particular papers are represented in these figures, though on at least two occasions within this period (on 11 November 1757 and on 10 February 1758) the Liverpool Chronicle was published on unstamped paper.

Among the provincial printers caught unprovided with paper bearing the double stamp in July, 1757, was William Craighton, of Ipswich, who had on hand “near 10,000 Half-penny Stamps”—over thirty pounds’ worth, if the cost of the paper is included—a figure which probably shows the normal stock of stamped paper in a flourishing provincial newspaper office. Craighton had been advised by a friend in London to use up these ten thousand half-sheets bearing halfpenny stamps; but he said in number 965 (9 July 1757) that the officer in the country had received no instructions about the matter. He said that with some difficulty and extraordinary expense he had procured a parcel of paper with double stamps for that week’s issue of the paper, but was “several Hundreds” short of the number he would have been willing to print in spite of expected shrinkage in circulation because of the increased price. In the same issue Craighton reprinted with approval one sentence from a letter signed “Britannicus” in the London Evening Post of 19 May foretelling that because of the increased tax “many of the Newspapers in Town, and most, if not all, in the Country, would be dropp’d.” “Britannicus” and Craighton were
both wrong. While circulation was undoubtedly affected, not a single country newspaper known to have been appearing regularly in June, 1757, ceased publication within the next six months; thirty-seven of those which were being issued in 1757 were still appearing three years later, and most of them continued from many years after that.\(^7\)

Craighton's anxiety about not having enough paper with double stamps to supply his regular subscribers was experienced by other printers of newspapers, but several of them did not hesitate to go on using their stocks of single-stamped paper, paying the difference in a lump sum. Joseph Harrop raised the price of his *Manchester Mercury* to twopence with number 278 (12 July 1757), but he did not begin using paper with the double stamp until number 281 (2 August 1757). On that same date the *Gloucester Journal* carried at the foot of its front page the note that, "This Journal being printed with the Old Stamp," the additional duty would be paid "on Oath."

Naturally there were strong objections to the paying of the additional duty. Hervey Berrow in his *Worcester Journal*, number 2446 (30 June 1757), requested all readers to pay the new price, \(2\frac{1}{2}d.\), regularly every week, adding that the "great Loss and Inconvenience" caused by the additional duty would not permit him to continue the practice of making some allowance to those who paid for the newspaper by the quarter. Berrow made a strong point of his having to pay in advance:

And it may be necessary to observe, as a material Argument for its being paid for Weekly, that the Stamp'd Paper (which will come to near Three Fifths of the Money the Newspaper is to be sold for) must be purchased in a Quantity sufficient for several Weeks' Sale, and the whole of it paid for before any Part of it will be deliver'd from the Stamp Office in London.

This probably represents the special anxiety of most of
the provincial printers whose papers nevertheless sur-
vived the extra burden of tax in 1757.

Many a printer in towns far distant from London must
have felt tempted to use plain paper for at least part of
each issue, running the risk of detection and a heavy
fine. In earlier years unstamped papers were sold in
defiance of the law both in London and in the country.
Those who sold them ran great risks, and there were
many arrests, as notices in the newspapers testify. This
particular illegal traffic became so extensive that in 1743
an act was passed (16 George 2, c. 26) imposing a penalty
of three months' imprisonment and offering twenty shil-
lings reward to informers.

In spite of the risk, provincial printers themselves were
occasionally guilty of evading the tax by using unstamped
paper for all or part of the weekly issues. Samuel Wor-
rall, the distributor of stamps in Gloucestershire, must
have had a particular reason for publishing in the Bristol
Oracle of 27 June 1747 a warning against the selling of
unstamped newspapers. According to a statement by
Frederick Leary in an article entitled "Manchester Jour-
nalism in the Eighteenth Century," Robert Whitworth,
printer of an important Manchester newspaper, "pleaded
guilty at Lancaster assizes in 1735 to an indictment for
uttering counterfeit stamped paper." This may not have
had anything to do with Whitworth's newspaper, for it
is difficult to see how he could counterfeit the newspaper
tax stamp on hundreds of copies, unless he went to the
trouble of copying the design on copper or wood.

The original records of Whitworth's case remain hidden;
but the search for them led to the discovery of official
records concerning earlier charges against William Cooke
of Chester, not for uttering counterfeit stamped paper,
but for selling two different newspapers, neither of them
bearing stamps. The several charges were laid by Roger
Adams and his son John. Roger had been the founder
and printer of Manchester's first newspaper, and, from

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1732 onward, was the printer of *Adams's Weekly Courant* in Chester. The details of the charges against the well-established Cooke are set forth with the utmost clarity in documents now in the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane and among the archives at the Town Clerk’s Office in Chester.

Because these records of conviction reveal the existence of two hitherto unknown provincial newspapers, and because they probably represent the kind of tax dodging that was tried in other places, it is worth noting the developments of the two cases. The files of the Portmote Court at Chester for the year 1733-34 contain a declaration signed by Roger Adams on 18 February 1734 that on 28 November 1733 Cooke had sold or exposed to sale number 17 of a newspaper contained in two unstamped half-sheets of paper and entitled *The Industrious Bee, or Weekly Entertainer. Containing Something to hit every Man's Taste and Principles Being more in Quantity than any Thing of the Kind Published at the Price*. Number 17 was dated “From Wednesday November 21 to Wednesday November 28, 1733.” Citing the earlier of the two Stamp Acts (10 Anne, c. 19), Adams petitioned the mayor and the recorder of Chester, who were justices of the peace, to issue a summons to Cooke and warrants for the calling in of witnesses. A note dated “23rd ffeby. 1733” at the foot of the page indicates that the defendant was acquitted. But Roger Adams persisted, guided perhaps only by an honest desire to have Cooke’s dishonesty halted, perhaps by a determination to make his rival obedient to the same law as bound himself, perhaps by a yearning to receive half the fine, as the Act promised. On 30 March 1734, he renewed the charge, citing two later issues of the *Industrious Bee*—numbers 22 (2 January 1734) and 23 (9 January 1734)—and declaring that Cooke should be made to pay ten pounds for each offense, as the Act provided, plus the costs of suit. Accordingly the summons was issued, and Cooke appeared on 20 April 1734. The
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court found him not guilty of printing, selling, or exposing to sale the issue numbered 22, but did find him guilty of exposing to sale number 23. They reduced the fine to fifty shillings, half to go to the King, half to Adams as informer, together with costs amounting to £4 2s. 2d. Cooke, not satisfied with this unaccountable leniency, appealed to the next sitting of the court, but the original judgment was confirmed, Cooke being required to pay as well a second bill of costs amounting to £4 7s. 7d.

The other unstamped newspaper which William Cooke was accused of selling was entitled The Chester Weekly Tatler. Containing the Freshest Advices foreign and Domestick, with a New Voyage round the world. This time the charge was laid by Roger Adams's eldest son, John, who asserted that on 18 September 1734 Cooke had sold a paper with this title. The record of the indictment, now in the Public Record Office, indicates that the summons was issued and was served on Cooke by Elias Williams on Wednesday, 12 February 1735. The justices heard the charge and Cooke's defense on the following Saturday and declared that in their judgment Cooke was guilty. He was ordered to pay a fine of £10 and costs of twenty shillings. These shady efforts can hardly be excused on the ground that the saving was to be passed on to the customers; Cooke apparently found his margin of profit too small and in a quiet effort to make a dishonest pound he lost many times the amount he hoped to gain.

More honorable and usually more successful methods of increasing the net income from the sale of a newspaper were aimed at extending its circulation by making it easier for people to get the paper or by making it more worth the getting. The substance of a newspaper naturally had a good deal to do with its success or failure; if the news was both fresh and accurate, if there was information about prices, books, bankrupts, births, deaths, marriages, preferments, shipping, public health, entertainments, if
there were special features such as serialized matter or anagrams or problems in trigonometry, if there were contributed essays in prose and verse, if there were controversial exchanges and editorial observations, if the paid advertisements were numerous and diverting, the paper would have good reason to succeed. Either because the quality of the regular elements left something to be desired or because competition made it imperative to seek extraneous means of keeping the circulation from dropping, some proprietors offered their regular customers a “premium” or else supplied a detachable supplement which could be kept, week by week, and bound into a book. 17

These inducements or rewards were sometimes offered at a reduced charge or were limited to enrolled subscribers, much as subscribers to a modern newspaper may purchase life insurance for a few extra pennies per week. In February, 1744, William Dicey of the Northampton Mercury offered “to constant Readers only” a map of Dunkirk at the low price of threepence. Sometimes the “premium” was supplied gratis. William Carnan advertised in the London Evening Post, number 1370 (28 August 1736), that his Reading Mercury; Or, the London Spy would regularly have a portion of Ned Ward’s popular work on its front page, and that along with each issue would be delivered a sheet containing an account of the history and antiquities of Berkshire, “printed on a superfine Paper, and in such manner as to be fit to bind up.” In 1749, R. Davy gave readers of the Norwich Gazette a cumulative gift of music and drama, announcing in number 2222 (23 September 1749),

Next Saturday, to oblige my Friends, [I] shall give with this Paper half a Sheet of Songs, and to continue weekly ’till Christmas, at which Time will be deliver’d an Act of a Play, weekly, ’till compleated, then half a Sheet of Songs, ’till Lady [Day], the whole Collection being of the newest and celebrated Songs now extant, and sung at the Play-houses and publick Gardens in London.
That sort of thing was done by printers in other towns. These special offers undoubtedly cost the printers something, at least for paper; the expense was probably justified as a means of extending the circulation or maintaining it in the face of competition.

The issuing of detachable supplements was a device used frequently by Robert Walker to make his customers think they were getting wonderfully good value for their pennies each week. Some of Walker's supplements were nominally free; others had a price on them. When Walker and T. James established the first newspaper in Cambridge in 1744, they delivered portions of *The Life and Reign of her late Majesty Queen Anne*, "given Gratis," charging twopence for the newspaper. With issues of their *Oxford Flying Weekly Journal* (1746-49), Walker and William Jackson delivered free of charge octavo half-sheet portions of Francis Midon's *History of . . . Masaniello*, of Lillo's *London Merchant*, of Fielding's *The Mock Doctor*, and of J. Nalson's *Trial of King Charles the First*. As usual, Walker gave in order to gain. His most widely issued supplement was Laurence Clarke's *History of the Holy Bible*, which was attached to the *London and Country Journal* and to at least five other papers, practically identical except in title, intended for circulation in Shropshire, Derbyshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Lancashire, and Northamptonshire. With one exception, all of these "provincial" papers were printed in Walker's London shop, and the cost of production was thereby kept to a minimum, since the supplements, like the works issued independently in fascicules, could be run off in large quantities at times when the press was not being used for printing news.

In an earlier venture than the papers printed by Walker in Oxford and Cambridge, this enterprising man quite frankly used his newspapers as bait to lure people to buy the weekly numbers of the many books he published in that form. Notices in the *Warwick and Staffordshire Journal* show that at one period, if not throughout its
existence, this paper was issued merely as a wrapper for the weekly quarto sheet of a work named in the subtitle. In number 148 of the Thursday series (1 June 1740), for example, the initial weekly numbers of the Works of Josephus and of Laurence Clarke's Complet and Full History of . . . Jesus Christ were announced as to appear the following week. Then came this statement: “These Works will be separately publish'd, in Numbers, Weekly, At the Price of Two Pence. . . . Each Number will be stitch'd in Paper, on which will be printed the Whole Week's News, Foreign and Domestick, of the [latest?] Date; stamped in the same manner as has been done.

Three years earlier, Walker had clung to the hope that the Commissioners of Stamps would look upon these printed covers as not subject to the regular newspaper tax because they were not sold separately as newspapers. For a time he issued his free half-sheet of news without stamps. The issue of the Warwick and Staffordshire Journal dated Saturday, 29 October 1737, had a note addressed “To the Customers of this Work [The History of the Holy Bible]”:

There having been some Talk made by Persons as that this Work would not be finish'd, and that it would be obligh'd to be dropt on Account of its not being stamp'd on the News Part. This is therefore to assure my Customers, that the said Report is scandalous, and without Foundation; and farther to assure them, that it is publish'd in London in the like Manner; and in no ways molested by the Commissioners of the Stamp Duties. . . .

It was not until ten months later that the Commissioners of the Stamp Office succeeded in compelling Walker to use stamped paper for his news-covers.

Survival in business depends on many things; in newspapers the sine qua non is circulation. Competition was serious in eighteenth-century London where, as the century advanced, dozens of different papers were offered for
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sale on the streets and in the shops every week. In the country the competition was less keen, but only because the area was so much greater, and this gave country printers a specific item of expense which did not trouble the London printer of newspapers. As Craighton of Ipswich said in 1757, the London printers sent no hawkers to distant places. It is important to remember that. Without wide distribution, regional rather than purely local, few provincial newspapers could carry on, and no one’s territory was exclusive.

Yet lists of towns and counties served can hardly be accepted as convincing evidence of large circulation, for bluffing and window-dressing are normal resources of competitors, no matter what their trade and no matter in what century they practice it. One need not take too literally the good-natured exchange of boasting by the proprietors of the Stamford Mercury and the Northampton Mercury shortly after the latter was established in 1720. In their fourth issue, dated 24 May 1720, Robert Raikes and William Dicey, who had given over their newspaper ventures at St. Ives, announced to readers of their new Northampton paper that they were not in the least disturbed to hear of the neighboring editor’s enmity over their having spoiled his circulation: “... as for Mr. Stamford, we fear him not. ... And we must let him know that our Paper will serve for the end, after Reading, which his is scarce fit for before since his Sense is so little, and the Paper so bad.” In their next issue Raikes and Dicey bluntly declared,


“But,” they added, “we will not say it goes into Cheshire, Lancashire, Somersetshire, and Yorkshire, for fear we
should romance, like our Stamford Neighbour, who gives out that no other Country Paper extends itself into half the Counties that his does, tho' our one touches all that he has nam'd, except the four last mention'd, which, by the bye, his two Papers 18 never reach.”

On this point it is worth noting that there is more than one opinion about the propriety of arguing that the localities from which a newspaper's advertisements come will indicate with certainty the areas in which the paper regularly circulates. “The Stamford Mercurist has lately given himself an Air of notifying to the Publick how far his Paper circulates, by the remote Places from whence he sometimes (by chance) receives an Advertisement.” So wrote Raikes and Dicey in their Northampton Mercury of 25 July 1720. “But,” they continued, “he might with as much Truth have exemplify'd this, by the different Parts, from whence his foreign Advices come. For his News as often goes to Constantinople, as to many Places from whence he receives Advertisements. And this may easily be prov'd. We ourselves have had Advertisements from within a Mile of London, and Towns equally distant another way: But are not so much Masters of the Faculty as to assert that our Mercury goes thither.”

Whatever truth there may have been in the rival claims by the Northampton and Stamford printers, there is no doubt that they and the printers of newspapers in other towns could succeed only if they induced large numbers of people to become regular subscribers. One of the most effective ways of inducing people to become regular customers was certainly that of maintaining prompt and uninterrupted delivery, both in the town of publication and in the surrounding area. What the reader wished was to get his copy of the paper as soon as possible after it was printed; what the printer wished was to have a standing arrangement for the prompt dispersal of a large proportion of the copies printed, together with a little band of lively hawkers working hard to sell the copies
not regularly subscribed for. Grace White and Thomas Hammond, founders of York’s earliest newspaper, obviously hoped to enlarge the solid body of regular subscribers to the York Mercury by pointing to early delivery as a clear advantage over casual buying of the paper. In the ninth issue of their second volume (18 April 1720), they invited all who were willing to take the paper quarterly to send in their names, “and they shall have ’em deliver’d every Monday Morning, before they are Cry’d about the City by the Hawkers.” They also took care to indicate to possible buyers and subscribers that they had agents in twenty-seven other towns and villages in the surrounding district. All their agents are named, as are the agents of many other newspapers throughout the period.

There should have been no difficulty in providing prompt distribution of a weekly paper within the limits of the town in which it was printed. The least aggressive printers could simply let it be known that interested persons could call in at the printing shop on press day and buy copies for themselves, paying cash over the counter, as is still done in many local newspaper offices. Or the printer could send bundles of each week’s papers to two or three booksellers’ shops in the same town; there the people who wished to take the paper regularly would soon discover that they could pick up their papers on publication day.

But it would be a very stupid and inert printer, indeed, who did not engage a corps of “mercuries” and hawkers to carry the papers through the town streets and into the public houses, bawling out the name and thrusting a copy into every outstretched hand, strictly for cash. On the faithful service of these hawkers depended to a large extent the commercial success of a local paper, and it must have been exasperating to printer and customer alike when the vendors proved inefficient or untrustworthy. In the issue of his Protestant Mercury for 3 May 1717,
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Joseph Bliss of Exeter printed some harsh words about one of his vendors, whom he had had to discharge:

One Dame Bedford (a Hawker that used to sell my News) being a very sottish and profane Person, and being weary of her continual Abuses, this is to give Notice that she sells the same no longer; and those that used to take it of her, may be supplied therewith for the future either by some other of my Hawkers, or by my Order.

Henry Cross-grove printed a similar notice in his *Norwich Gazette*, number 598 (22 March 1718): “Note, that the Fellow with the Crutches sells my News no longer, I having turn’d him out for several Abuses; therefore pray take Care of being deceiv’d.” To find honest and reliable vendors must have been difficult for the printers of most country newspapers.

The problem was much larger and certainly more difficult as the distribution extended along the roads outside the town and to other towns in the region. Here, as in the town of publication, there were two classes of buyer, the “customer,” who had a standing order for the paper to be delivered at his house or left for him at a designated place, and the casual buyer, who was not a subscriber but walked to a shop for a copy of the paper or else bought it from a hawker on the street. Printers of newspapers were presumably eager to induce readers to become regular subscribers, but they would certainly wish also to dispose of many copies to casual buyers, who may in fact have been more numerous than those who paid for the paper quarterly. How did subscribers and casual buyers living six or sixteen or forty-six miles from Gloucester get their copies of the *Gloucester Journal*? This question, which may also be asked in respect of fifty other towns in which papers were printed, resolves itself into these alternatives: did the printer make use of delivery services already available, or did he entrust the distribution to his own employees? “Such Persons as
think proper to take in the *York Courant* Quarterly,” said Ward and Chandler in their number 692 (16 January 1739), “may have it sent, every Tuesday, to their Homes, at Two Shillings a Quarter.” Whose hands actually carried the *York Courant* to the homes of the regular subscribers and sold copies to those who preferred to pay cash?

The answer to this question is often to be found in the imprints of the newspapers themselves, where agents are named. These names and addresses, placed in the imprint for the guidance of possible purchasers, now prove to be most valuable sources of information about distribution. Once the bundles of papers reached outlying towns, men and women of various trades acted as distributors. In 1723, the sellers of the *Leeds Mercury* included a grocer in Otley, a clockmaker in Skipton, a barber in Halifax, and a livery lace maker in Manchester. In 1743, the Sheffield agent of the *Derby Mercury* was Nicholas Hick, a schoolmaster. It titillates the fancy to imagine Master Hick operating a paper “route,” as many schoolboys—but not schoolmasters—do in North America. But how were bundles of papers conveyed from Leeds to the Halifax barber and the Manchester lace maker?

Undoubtedly some country newspapers were sent to distant subscribers by post, and there is evidence that local postmasters assisted in the distribution. Even the earliest issues of the *Newcastle Journal* list eleven postmasters as distributors in a wide area: “Mr. Pattinson, Postmaster, in Carlisle, who also distributes to Brampton, Wigton, Annan, and Dumfries; . . . Mr. Fisher, Postmaster, in Cockermouth; . . . Mr. Birket, Postmaster, in Whitehaven, who also distributes to Workington; . . . Mr. Richardson, Postmaster, in Penrith, who also distributes to Hesket and Keswick; . . . Mr. Parkin, Postmaster, in Appleby; . . . Mr. Dalton, Postmaster, in Kirby-Steven; . . . Mr. Lamb, Postmaster, in Brough; . . . Mr. Holmes, Postmaster, in Bedale, who also distributes to Midlam, Askrigg, and Masham; . . . Mr. Grieve, Postmaster, in
Berwick, who distributes to Eymouth; ... Mr. James Hunter, in Duns; ... Mr. Maben, Postmaster, in Kelsoe."

The arrangements made with these postmasters in 1739 for the distribution of the *Newcastle Journal* were probably unofficial; an enterprising proprietor in Bristol was apparently able to make a firm arrangement with a man of considerable authority in the Post Office. In Andrew Hooke's *Bristol Oracle, and Country Intelligencer*, number 10 (14 May 1743), is a long statement announcing that in order to make the paper "the most extensive Country News-Paper in the three Kingdoms" Hooke had induced Ralph Allen, the proprietor of the cross-posts, to let him enjoy "the free Use of his Mails." Under Allen's patronage, said Hooke, the *Bristol Oracle* was being distributed "thro' all the Towns Westward and Northward from Exeter to Liverpool." By the following March the paper was "circulated Weekly by Post from Manchester in Lancashire to Leskard [sic] in Cornwall, throughout the Counties of Wilts, Hereford, Monmouth, and all South Wales." Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century the post was much less used for the conveyance of country newspapers than it was for the carrying of London newspapers (through the Clerks of the Roads), and much less than came to be the practice after low postal rates for all newspapers were granted in 1870.

There was one other established means of conveyance available to news publishers whose circulation was extensive. This was the local or the long distance "carrier," who on his regular trips transported goods of all sorts to people living along his route. Carriers were slow, but they were certainly numerous; the network of services in and out of the larger towns was really quite remarkable. For example, one whole page of Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal*, dated 17 August 1754, is given over to "A List of the Carriers that come into, and set out from, the City of Bristol. With the Days they keep, the Places they come from, and the Inns they put up at." The alphabetical
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index of places includes 162 cities, towns, and villages served by the hundred men and women who are named as operating carrier services from one or another of the twenty-five Bristol inns enumerated. In St. Thomas Street alone there were four inns—the Three Queens, the Three Kings, the White Lion, and the Bell—which served as calling stations for a total of twenty-nine services. A similar listing of the carriers serving Bristol in 1760 (in early issues of John Grabham’s Bristol Chronicle) shows that many of the same men were still operating over the same routes and using the same inns as headquarters.

It is difficult to suppose that these carriers could have undertaken the delivery of newspapers one by one to houses along the way, since to do that would have caused intolerable delays, with no great financial gain to themselves. Carriers, nevertheless, are often mentioned in newspaper imprints. Three of the twenty persons listed in the York Journal on 19 April 1748 as sellers of the paper outside of York are specifically called carriers: “Mr. Bainbridge, Carrier, at Easingwold, Northallerton, Thirsk, &c., Mr. Jonathan Sweeting, Carrier, at Stoxley, Yarm, Guisbrough, Stockton, Sedgefield, Hartlepool, and other Places adjacent, and . . . Mr. John Newby, Carrier, at Halmsly.” The printer concluded the list of venders with the statement that these twenty persons “and the other Carriers of this Paper” would accept advertisements and letters directed to him.

Evidently those “other Carriers” of the York Journal were men sent out expressly to deliver bundles of papers, and perhaps even single papers, to designated places. That inns or public houses served as local distributing stations is seen in the September and October, 1745, issues of Whitworth’s Manchester Magazine, which have at the bottom of the fourth page the statement that “for the greater Expedition” the paper was carried to a large number of towns “by Men on Purpose,” who called at twenty-eight places named, as well as many other small
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towns. Ten of the calling places were inns or public houses, among them the Black Bear at Chester, the Talbot at Ormskirk, and the Green Lattice at Warrington. In that same year Robert Walker and Thomas James regularly printed at the head of the first column in their Cambridge Journal a statement that they would make every effort to deliver the paper to all who sent their names and addresses. “All Persons living at a Distance from such Places as our Newsmen go thro’,” they said, “may have them sent to Market Towns, or other Places where they shall appoint.” The Bath Advertiser had been running for only a few months when the printer, Stephen Martin, explained in number 39 (10 July 1756) and following issues that country gentlemen who had asked him to send them his paper would have to let him know “how to have it directed, and where left for them, by the News-men, it being improper for the News-men to quit their regular Circuits, by turning out of their settled Paths.”

At least one printer, Robert Goadby in Sherborne, tried to meet the demands of would-be customers “lying out of the Circuit of the News Carriers” by suggesting that they could be served regularly if one of their own number would pick up a supply at a nearby point:

. . . This is to inform all such in the Counties of Wilts, Dorset, Somerset, Devonshire, and Cornwall, That the PROPRIETOR is ever willing to oblige even every single Person; but that it is impossible so to contrive the Circuits of the News Carriers, as to take in every House or Place: But if the Inhabitants of any such Parishes where this Paper is not at present carried, will be so kind as to send a Messenger to any Place where it is brought in its usual Circuit, for as many Papers as are wanted in the Parish, the PROPRIETOR will allow the Person who comes for them a Halfpenny on each Paper he takes, besides a further Allowance upon all the Pamphlets, Books, &c. which he can sell in the said Parishes.

Whether such do-it-yourself arrangements were found to be acceptable is not known, but that the printers them-
selves engaged "Men on Purpose" is made certain by numerous and unmistakable references in the newspapers themselves and in the printed proposals in which new papers were announced.

As early as 1721, John White, of Newcastle, had on the title page of his *Weekly Courant* a long list of regular vendors in fifteen towns, and he announced that several persons had been appointed to "call the News" at Shields, Sunderland, Durham, Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle, and some other places, where thenceforward no quarterly subscriptions would be accepted. Isaac Thompson and William Cuthbert, proprietors of another Newcastle paper, used every means of having their *Journal* conveyed to regular subscribers and to chance purchasers scattered over a large area. In addition to the eleven postmasters mentioned above (page 117), they had agents in Hexham, Kendal ("Mr. Robert Wharton, . . . who also distributes to Ambleside, Hawkshead, Ulverstone, Cartmell, Mitthrop, and Burton"), Lancaster ("Mr. Isaac Rawlinson, . . . who also distributes to Hornby, Garstang, and Preston"), Kirby-Lonsdale, Sedbergh, Whitby, Morpeth, Felton, Alnwick, Belford, Wooler, Duns, Jedburgh ("Mr. Robert Winterup, . . . who distributes to Hawick"); their paper was sold by Mr. Andrew Spottiswood, bookbinder in Durham; it was handled by Mr. Emmleton, the Warkworth carrier; it was delivered by "the News-Carrier to Sunderland and Shields," by "the News-Carrier to Bishop Auckland, Raby, Staindrop, and Bernardcastle," and by "the News-Carriers to Darlington, Richmond, Rippon, Thirsk, Northallerton, Stoxley, Gisbrough, Yarm, Stockton, Norton, and Sedgefield"; it was, of course, also sold by the booksellers in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and by the publishers at the new printing office on the Head of the Side.

The prospectus announcing the *Union Journal: or, Halifax Advertiser* in December, 1758, included the statement that the new paper would be published every Tuesday morning and "dispatch'd immediately by proper
Messengers, with all Expedition, to a great number of
Towns, and country Places for many Miles round.” Forty
other printers were doing that in 1759, and “proper Mes
sengers” had been used for many years before that time.
In the second issue of the *Ludlow Post-Man* (16 October
1719), the printer, William Parks, announced that he
needed an honest man who could “walk well, and be
constant 2 or 3 days in the Week.” Speedier distribution
seems indicated in *Farley’s Bristol News-Paper*, for the
aggressive Samuel, insisting that “After all Ignorant and
Fruitless Attempts of Pretenders,” no other News-Paper
is Printed in this City; This Circulates above 50 Miles
round,” announced that every Saturday morning, soon
after the London post came in, he would regularly send
the paper abroad “by Two or Three Running Footmen
. . . For Conveniency of People in the Country.” These
newsmen, said Farley, would take the paper as far as
Devizes, Westbury, Sherborne, Shafton, Taunton, Bridg
water, “and most other Towns and large Villages between
those Places and Bristol. They’ll be at Bath every Satur
day about Twelve or One o’Clock.” Twenty years later,
another Farley, in number 1590 of *F. Farley’s Bristol
Journal* (21 November 1747), commended with great
cordiality his man Christopher Wilkinson, who had been
engaged as the constant vender of the paper in Bath
(“every Saturday, as soon as possible in the Afternoon”) and
along the Bristol-Bath road. He was, said Farley,
“a Man of a sober, honest Character, no way given to
Drinking or Idleness.” During the next forty years, the
numbers of honest walkers and agile runners increased
steadily all over England, though many of the newsmen
working outside the towns went on horseback rather
than on foot, at a considerable increase of speed.
There was no better mode of delivering the papers
and of collecting the quarterly charges than by sending
one’s own “proper Messengers.” John Rawson, printer of
the *Hull Courant* for many years, for a time thought to
save money for some of his Lincolnshire readers by agreeing to let their helpful neighbors carry the papers to them; but these volunteers proved most unsatisfactory. Almost incoherent with indignation, Rawson denounced this carelessness in large italic type at the top of his first column in the issue for 20 March 1759:

As several Country People, who have been desired to call for this Paper, to carry home for their Neighbors, has frequently, and does still continue to break open the same, particularly in our Lincolnshire Circuit, who reads and dirty it, and afterwards keeping it the best part of a Week by them, before the Delivery of the same, to the great Prejudice of the Printer hereof; Therefore, it is requested, that such ill Practice be laid aside for the future, without any further Notice.

Rawson, who might have sold more copies of his Hull Courant if he had sent his own carrier on the Lincolnshire circuit, no doubt echoed the annoyance of his customers in that area; but it was surely a wonderful recommendation for the Hull Courant that, once the obliging men of Lincolnshire had it in their hands, they would not surrender it to the subscribers who would be paying for it at the end of the quarter!

Accidents and bad weather sometimes delayed even the experienced and trustworthy newsmen. On one occasion a regular distributor simply disappeared, the printers of the Sherborne Mercury, number 16 (7 June 1737), spreading the sensational announcement right across the front page above the date line, not quite in the manner of a modern headline but none the less eye-catching:

Whereas JAMES ARNOLD, one of the Hawkers of this Mercury, set out last Week from Sherborne for Taunton as usual, with his Number of Papers for that Walk, and has not since been heard of, 'tis fear'd he is either dead, or come to some Misfortune: 'Tis therefore hoped, that such of our kind Readers as have been disappointed thereby, will excuse the Proprietors for an Accident against which no one can
guard. And whoever shall give Intelligence what is become of the said James Arnold, to the Printers of this Paper, shall be gratefully rewarded for their Trouble.

If hawker Arnold ever did return, all readers of the Sherborne Mercury along his “Walk” must have welcomed him with more than usual cordiality and have demanded an account of his temporary disappearance.

The unexpected disappearance of a hawker of newspapers was, as the printers of the Sherborne Mercury said, an accident against which no one could guard, but when two Northampton newsmen and a quantity of goods disappeared at the same time, the incident clearly had in it less of accident than of design.

Whereas John Chambers, a Tall, Thin, Black Man, about 6 Foot high, or better, who used to Travel with the Northampton Mercury to Leicester; and Thomas Moss, a short well sett Fellow, very much Freckled in the Face, and Limps with his right Leg, who also travelled the Road with the aforesaid Mercury from Northampton to Witney, are run away from their Masters Service, with a considerable Quantity of Goods....

So begins an advertisement in the Northampton Mercury, number 40 (30 January 1721); and the printers offered a reward of ten shillings for the arrest of the two decamping newsmen. Their absconding must have interfered with the delivery of many copies of the Northampton paper; for between them, the six-foot Chambers and the limping, freckle-faced Moss traversed an extensive strip of country, and it would be difficult to replace them on short notice in midwinter.

Foul weather and a hawker’s occasional disappearance being beyond control, it can be said that most printers made excellent arrangements to maintain and to increase circulation both among casual buyers and among those who could be prevailed on to take the paper weekly by subscription. A statement in number 86 (5 February...
1746) of William Cuthbert's *Newcastle Gazette* shows that the network of distribution was being extended in the south:

"... This Paper may, for the future, be had of Mr. Relph in Sedgefield, from which Place it will be distributed by John Hart, to Bishop-Auckland, Barnardcastle, Darlington, and all the Market-Towns adjacent to those Places; Also by John Robson, to Stockton, Yarm, Stokesly, Gisborough, and Places adjacent.

Cuthbert's announcement reveals unmistakably the actual steps taken to extend the circulation of a newspaper in its second year of publication. The details of the process deserve careful examination. A man living in a town twenty-seven miles away was put in charge of a distributing base, from which two other men were to carry the *Gazette* into areas still farther away from Newcastle. Hart had a long road to ride: a dozen miles through Rushyford to Bishop Auckland, fourteen more through Staindrop to Barnard Castle, sixteen from there to Darlington—unless he went by Watling Street to Scotch Corner—and a devious route back to Sedgefield through scattered Durham hamlets. Robson's circuit lay more to the east, for after his ten-mile journey to Stockton and six miles more to Yarm he worked his way along one side of the River Leven to Stokesley, then to Guisborough and "Places adjacent" before leaving Yorkshire, re-crossing the Tees, and going back to Sedgefield.

Such notices as the one just examined lift the matter of distribution out of the realm of surmise and settle at least some of the questions one asks about the methods of opening up new areas and about the extent of the separate circuits. Office records, if they were still extant, would clarify these matters further. Fortunately the newspapers themselves are often quite explicit in providing information about efforts to extend their circulation. When Robert Raikes and William Dicey had for many
months been developing the circulation of their *Gloucester Journal*, they were very much concerned lest the change in size and the increase in price from three halfpence to twopence because of the Stamp Tax would cause a shrinkage in their sales. In their final six-page issue, published on Saturday, 24 April 1725, instead of on the regular day, Monday, they made a highly illuminating statement about distribution. They informed all subscribers, advertisers, and others who might be interested in the continuance of the *Gloucester Journal* that it was distributed regularly in a very extensive area divided into thirteen divisions, in each of which a named agent had the responsibility of delivering the required copies. The First Division was Gloucester itself, where John Chapman was in charge. The city of Bristol, thirty-five miles away, was the Second Division, the distributor being John Wilson, a bookseller in Horse Street, who had his own agents to carry the papers to various parts of that city. The eleven other divisions comprised 120 named towns, "besides Villages" in each division. Typical of the local areas thus designated as "Divisions" is the Ninth Division, embracing Newent in Gloucestershire, Ledbury and Leominster in Herefordshire, Bromyard and Tenbury in Worcestershire, Ludlow in Shropshire, "and several Villages." Taken together, the network of distributors in these thirteen divisions is impressive.

That the printers sent bundles of papers to their main local agents in nearby towns can safely be assumed, then, as a regular practice. Illuminating particulars of the practice are recorded in a communication from one of those agents, expressing his dissatisfaction at irregularities in the number of papers sent. The date is 1770, but the standing arrangements and the occasional difficulties alike were doubtless much the same in the earlier decades of the century. The agent’s message to the printer was in the form of four short notes written in the lower margins of the four pages in a copy of the *Leicester and Notting-
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Ham Journal, number 908 (Saturday, 28 July 1770), now at the Nottingham Central Library. The last two of these notes have to do with advertisements and mistakes in the prices charged for them. The others give illuminating evidence concerning the distribution of John Gregory’s paper. The signature of the writer is no longer legible, because the lower edge of the fourth page is frayed; it was doubtless one of the agents named in Gregory’s list under the date line of the paper, perhaps Mr. Saunders, who had shops in Derby and Ashbourne. “I rec’d an Additional Subscriber yesterday at Ashbourne,” he wrote to the Leicester printer, “& promise of another soon so that my Quarterly Customers are now increas’d to 25.” He complained that there had been an error in the invoice of the bundle received the day before: instead of the usual twenty-five papers and two “blanks,”[28] plus “Mr. Bladon’s 16 & 1 Blank,” he had received “45 Stamp’d Papers & only one blank.” This sort of error had occurred before, and he was annoyed: “I must again earnestly caution ag. the carelessness of your Servants,” he added. He had a suggestion to make concerning the seventeen papers usually shipped along with his but sent on by him to James Bladon in Carter Street, Uttoxeter:

I wish you would direct that Mr. Bladon’s Papers be always sent open with mine as it is less trouble to me to take account of them so then [i.e., than] when separately packed. Please to observe this.

The agent’s note also confirms the conjecture that the quarterly subscription charges were collected by the local agent: “You will not advise me about unsettled Customers,” he wrote. “Why will you not?”

It is understandable that here and there in the earliest stages of newspaper publishing and selling in the country a bookseller should find the handling of papers printed in other towns either troublesome or unremunerative and have refused to act as agent. A well-established bookseller
in Daventry noted in the third volume of his daybook, “Aug. 11th 1746 began to sell ye Newspapers at 1st . . . left of Nov. 10.” Some years later this same bookseller—his name was John Clay and his account books are now at Delapré Abbey, Northampton—may have resumed the selling of newspapers, for he entered on 1 July 1758 that one Mr. Knightly had paid him two shillings eightpence halfpenny for one quarter’s news, and on 31 July recorded payments received from two customers for advertisements which he had sent on their behalf to the Northampton Mercury and Jopson’s Coventry Mercury.

Out of the foregoing discussion of distribution emerges one insistent question, a question which surely must have given deep concern to the provincial printers: how was it possible to pay for the distribution of country papers outside the towns in which they were printed? In those towns and near by, according to statements made in 1743 by Thomas Aris, of Birmingham, and in 1757 by Elizabeth Adams, of Chester, the hawkers charged a halfpenny for every copy they disposed of. What was the cost of sending papers to customers living far away? If the subscribers received the paper by post or by the commercial carriers, they would, of course, pay the charges. If obliging neighbours brought the paper from town, the only cost would perhaps be a delay of four or five days while the conveyers perused it. Back in 1715, when the competition between Philip Bishop and Jos. Bliss was becoming heated and both men were publishing twice a week instead of once a week as they should have been doing, Bliss said the subscription rate for his Protestant Mercury; or, the Exeter Post-Boy was ten shillings per annum, “seal’d for the Country.” Bishop’s rates were thirteen shillings per annum, delivered to city subscribers, fifteen shillings “Seal’d and Deliver’d to Country Subscribers . . . they paying Carriage.”

Ordinarily a paper literally did not “pay its own way”; someone, either the proprietor or the purchaser who lived
at a distance, had to pay for the delivery of the paper, whether by post, by commercial carrier, or by special newsmen, mounted or on foot. Presumably the greater the distance the higher the charges, particularly if more than one carrier was involved. Probably no country papers traveled farther than those received by the Rev. William Borlase, the distinguished Cornwall antiquary, naturalist, and historian, while he was rector of Ludgvan, three miles from Penzance. His account book, recording disbursements during the years between 1734 and 1772, is now at the Royal Institution of Cornwall in Truro. It shows numerous payments for the newspapers regularly supplied to him by Jabez Harris and (from 1741) Mr. Dickerson. The entries clearly indicate that Borlase did not pay in advance, that payments were usually made for a half year ending at midsummer, at Michaelmas, or at Christmas, and that his average weekly expenditure for newspapers was ninepence. The money was paid over to Mrs. Fudge, or to her successor in 1758, Mrs. Clies, invariably in settlement of Mr. Harris's or Mr. Dickerson's bill. These two women may have been the persons who actually carried the papers to the Ludgvan rectory, Harris and later Dickerson being the newspaper printer's appointed agents for Cornwall. Most of the half-yearly payments from 1738 to the end of 1751 ranged from 18/3d. to 19/0d.; from 1752 onward, the amounts were larger, from £1 1s. 7d. to £1 12s. 5d. for two quarters. How much of the sums paid went for delivery charges cannot be determined, for there is no way of knowing what papers Borlase got, or how many. They probably came from Exeter or Sherborne, though the payment on 9 October 1735 to Jabez Harris "for news paper etc. in full to Mies. [Michaelmas] 1735 by bill on Mr. Smith" cannot have been for the Sherborne Mercury (subsequently the most popular paper in the West) for the good reason that its publication did not begin until February, 1737. It is clear from some of the later entries that the newsmen known as
the Sherborne riders\textsuperscript{27} came all the way to the Ludgvan rectory; but payments for newspapers continued to be paid to Mrs. Clies until the end of the account book in 1772.

Typical entries in the Borlase manuscript account book are these:\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{align*}
11 \text{ Nov} \ 1738 & \quad \text{Pd Mrs Fudge for Jabez Harris Esq in full for news papers to Mics} \quad 1. 18. 4. \\
25 \text{ Jan} \ 1740/1 & \quad \text{Pd Mrs Fudge for J. E. and selfe } \frac{1}{2} \text{ a year's newspapers to Xstmas} \quad 18. 9. \\
1 \text{ Aug} \ 1741 & \quad \text{Pd Mrs Sybi. Fudge for Dickerson, news papers for J. E. and selfe to Midsummer 1741} \quad 19. 0. \\
16 \text{ Jul} \ 1752 & \quad \text{Pd Mrs Fudge for news by Mr. Dickerson's order to Midsr 1752} \quad 1. 1. 7. \\
9 \text{ Feb} \ 1760 & \quad \text{to Mr Dickerson's acct of news to Xstmas 1759 to Mrs Clies} \quad 1. 11. 6.
\end{align*}

These figures in the account book at the Royal Institution of Cornwall suggest that, like thousands of other subscribers to country newspapers all over England, the Rev. William Borlase paid the usual twopence or twopence halfpenny for each paper he received, plus something for delivery in a place far away from the town in which the papers were printed. Part of that delivery charge paid by the rector of Ludgvan went to Mrs. Fudge, part to Jabez Harris, and part to the man who carried the papers over the long miles from the printing shop in Exeter or Sherborne to Mr. Harris in Cornwall.

There is no escaping the question, nevertheless, of how it could possibly pay a man to ride 115 or 165 miles once a week to deliver a bundle of papers. To this question there is a good answer: The printer's own "proper Messengers" carried more than newspapers on their rounds. The printers saw to it that the men who started off with bundles of Journals or Mercuries carried a profit-making load of other things as well. It cost no more in time and
shoe leather. The result was that the net returns from each trip paid both newsman and printer much more than if only newspapers were carried. It is not going too far to suggest that without this second string to their bows the printers of country newspapers could not have shot their arrows much beyond the limits of their own towns; provincial journalism developed rapidly because men on horseback or on foot could easily carry more than the weekly budget of news so joyously received by Cowper in his rural retreat later in the century and by ten thousand other country dwellers in every year of Cowper's lifetime.

There were three distinct kinds of “payload”: (1) parcels and letters brought to the newspaper office for delivery in other places by the newsmen; (2) various commodities from the shelves of local merchants who advertised in the paper that the newsmen would take orders and deliver goods in places along the regular paper routes; (3) printed forms, pamphlets, books, medicines, and an astoundingly varied assortment of merchandise sold by the printers at their own shops. For all three types of messenger work there is plenty of evidence, though it cannot be proved that all newsmen were parcel carriers and traveling salesmen as well. Certainly the newsmen employed by James Abree of Canterbury to deliver his twice-weekly *Kentish Post* carried parcels as well; for in the issue of 3 December 1726, it was announced that “Thomas Low goes every Saturday and Wednesday, with News or any Parcels, &c. to Barham, Elham, Folkstone, Hyth, Dimchurch, Romney, and Lydd.” The request was made that the “Parcels, &c.” be left at Low's house in St. Mildred’s Church Gate or at Mr. Randall's at the White Hart in Castle Street by eight o'clock on Friday and Tuesday nights. Abree's announcement concluded with a special note pointing out that “Parcels, &c.” for his other newsmen were also taken in at the said Mr. Randall’s. A note in *Jopson's Coventry Mercury*, number
FRESHEST ADVICES

1000 (1 September 1760), makes one other point clear: the carrier actually took the papers, number books, the Gentleman’s Magazine, and the parcels to the houses of subscribers:

Thomas Clarke now carries this Paper to Lutterworth, Market-Harborough, Uppingham, and Stamford. My Customers are desired to give him Orders to leave it, as well as the Magazines, Numbers, &c. at their Houses. He also carries small Parcels to or from any Place on the Road: They are taken in for him at Coventry by Mr. Miller, Hackel-Maker, at Jordan-Well.

It should be remembered that Clarke was not the only delivery boy Elizabeth Jopson had.

The financial importance of this collateral business is indicated by Francis Howgrave’s remarks in the first issue of Howgrave’s Stamford Mercury (15 June 1732). In a front-page salute to the public, he outlined his plans and mentioned certain benefits which he said would ensue from the publication of his paper. In addition to the reading which it would provide, there would be wider advantages affecting the nation’s economy: he mentioned the great quantity of paper required for each issue, the revenue paid to the Crown, and “the large Quantity of Goods which will be weekly carried out by the Persons which distribute this Mercury.” This last, he said, would be “no small Advantage to the Trading Part of Mankind.” It also gave Howgrave great satisfaction to think that many persons were profitably employed in the complex process of manufacturing paper from rags, printing the news, and distributing the finished product in many areas along with other goods.

In short, when I trace in my Mind a Bundle of Rags, to a Quire of these Mercuries, I find so many Hands employ’d in every Step they take thro’ their whole Progress, that while I am compiling a Mercury, I fancy my self providing Bread for a Multitude.
Howgrave was not performing a miracle of feeding five thousand when he sent his paper into the surrounding country; yet it is undeniable that in the process of distributing it much money changed hands, for the distributors conducted an extensive trade in various commodities and services in addition to their primary duty of delivering the newspapers to subscribers and casual buyers. That Howgrave's observations about the newsman's contribution to general trading were not the product of daydreaming is confirmed by statements in other newspapers, the most explicit being a lengthy note in the head of the first issue of the Oxford Flying Weekly Journal (6 September 1746), concerning the advantages which its establishment would bring to the people of the region. Among the expected benefits was one which would appeal to "the Tradesman and even the meanest Mechanic": "for as we propose to employ Men to carry this paper round the Country, a weekly opportunity will be thereby afforded to extend Trade and Commerce, and dispatch all sorts of Business..." The extent of that expansion of trade is suggested in William Dicey's request, in many issues of his Northampton Mercury in 1750, that orders for goods to be delivered by his news carriers should be in writing, "as it cannot possibly be expected that the News-Carriers should remember the many different Persons, Places, and particular Goods that are Weekly desired to be brought to the several Towns they pass through and send to."

Readers as well as printers of news had business to dispatch. Once a subscriber to a country newspaper came to know personally the man who delivered the newspaper every week it was natural that the newsman should be asked occasionally to perform errands en route, and equally natural that the newsman should perform those errands for a small gratuity or a gift at the year's end, provided that the errands were not too numerous nor too costly in time or effort. Among the entries in the Rev.
William Borlase’s account book, mentioned above, are references to just such transactions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transaction</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To the Sherborn for 6 pds of coffee</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pd Lobb the Sherborn man for a cheese salver from Mr Halse of Truro</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent a present to Dr. B. of St Mewan by the Sherborne</td>
<td>5.5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent money to son John by his order by Lobb the Sherborn</td>
<td>10.0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 3 handkerchiefs to the Sherborn</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Frank the Sherborn. New Year’s Gift</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These and many similar transactions were all recorded by Borlase between 1763 and 1769, but manuscripts from other parts of England show that such services were rendered by country newsmen earlier in the century. Two instances will serve. A letter sent on 10 May 1727 by J. Wallace to Madame Whichcot at the home of John Maddison in Ketton, near Stamford in Lincolnshire, ends with the thoughtful observation, “I am sure You’ll want Money, & therefore I must venture twenty Pounds again by the Newsman. . . .” The sending of money by a distributor of the *Stamford Mercury* was perhaps a “venture,” but it was not the first time a considerable sum had been sent in that way by J. Wallace. A quarter of a century later, on 26 November 1752, Lawrence Dawes at Kibworth—that is to say, Kibworth Beauchamp, six miles or so northwest of Market Harborough in Leicestershire—wrote a letter to Sir John Heathcote of Normanton Park, between Stamford (Lincolnshire) and Oakham in Rutland, and added a postscript which shows that even letters were sometimes carried by newsmen.

Once again it was one of the men who carried the *Stamford Mercury* whose services were engaged as conveyor of a private message:

if at any time yo’ve Ocation to write your Leters will
come safe if sent to Mr. Bunning of Upingham directed to be sent by the Stamford News Man who comes to this place Every Friday morning.

It appears that the Stamford newsmen, like the later Sherborne riders, had among their customers a reputation for dependability.

That dependability is doubtless one reason why merchants who advertised their wares in the local newspaper often said that orders would be taken and goods delivered by the newsmen. Joseph Cooke, at the “Ball” on Pease Hill, Cambridge, advertised in the Cambridge Journal, number 29 (6 April 1745), for example, that the carriers of that paper would take orders for his fine cider (at a shilling per gallon), oysters, lobsters, pickled salmon, and other delectable foods. Somewhat different fare was available to readers of Jopson's Coventry Mercury, who saw in the issue dated Christmas Day, 1758, an advertisement of Dr. Waldron’s worm-destroying cake, or “sugar plumb,” sold constantly at Mr. Jones’s shop opposite the Golden Horse in Bailey Lane, Coventry. Mr. Jones added, “Persons in the Country may be supply’d with these Genuine Worm-destroying Cakes, by giving their Orders to the Men who carry this Paper.”

It was the sale of the wares on their own shelves, however, that kept the printers in business, no matter how slender the profits from the sale of their newspapers were. It is, of course, only natural that the printer of a weekly newspaper should keep his helpers employed all the time by having them run off all sorts of standard printed forms and do job printing whenever they were not busy with the newspaper. There is abundant evidence that this was commonly done. Roger Adams, printer of the earliest Manchester newspaper, indicated in the imprint of his Manchester News-Letter in 1724 that at his printing shop “at the lower End of the Smiby-door . . . Summons, Citations, Warrants, Commitments, Passes, Certificates
both relating to Settlements and Burials, are printed and sold at reasonable rates. Benjamin Collins of Salisbury inserted a prominently displayed notice in number 736 (Monday, 24 February 1752) of both his Salisbury Journal and its twin the Portsmouth and Gosport Gazette:

Gentlemen and others living in the Country may be supplied by the Newsmen, with all sorts of New Books, Pamphlets, Maps, and Prints, as cheap as in London, from the Printing Office and Bookseller's Shop on the New Canal in Sarum, where Books are bound either plain, or Gilt and Letter'd, at reasonable rates.

Other printers of country newspapers both listed the latest publications in London and printed the advertisements which London booksellers sent to them for insertion at the usual rates.

It is not here suggested that books were available in the provinces only through the printers of newspapers. Most towns had booksellers' shops, and townspeople or visitors from outside could see a good stock of books on the shelves or order from the bookseller any works in print. The extent of such ordering in even a small town is apparent in the day books, ledgers, and miscellaneous memoranda of John Clay, a bookseller in Daventry who did an extensive trade in stationery and reading matter. These records show that, from 1717 onward, Clay sold all sorts of books, including works issued in weekly fascicules, regularly disposed of twenty-five or more copies of the Gentleman's Magazine, did a good deal of book binding for William Dicey and others, and procured from London booksellers many books ordered singly by his customers, among them "Odes by Wm Collings" and "Instruction for ye Hautboy wth a Reed for the same." Country people had opportunity to buy books every time they went to a market town; but even villagers who stayed at home could get books if they read the newspaper advertisements and placed their orders with the
newsmen. Most of the publications so advertised were books printed in London; some were modest little threepenny or sixpenny pamphlets printed at the local newspaper office.

It would require considerable space to catalogue all the pamphlets printed in the shops from which came the early Georgian provincial newspapers, and the works themselves would prove to be for the most part an unimpressive lot. A few should be mentioned. Raikes and Dicey in 1722 printed a threepenny Collection of... Amusements, which they advertised as sold by themselves, by James Hunt of Hereford, Mr. Rogers in Ross, Mr. Wilde in Ludlow, and by “the Men that carry the Gloucester JOURNAL and the Northampton MERCURY.” Many publications came from the same presses as printed these two newspapers. Robert Williamson, of Liverpool, was another news printer who ventured to publish other things. In May, 1757, he announced that a half-crown octavo pamphlet entitled Secrets in Art and Nature, by Thomas Lawrenson, engraver, was in the press and that orders would be taken by various agents at Chester, Manchester, Preston, Wigan, Warrington, Ormskirk, Prescot, Lancaster, Kendal, and by the distributors of the paper. Dozens of other titles could be cited if proof were needed that pamphlets were printed at newspaper offices and that they were sold by the newsmen.

One particular sort of publication, works issued in weekly or monthly “numbers” or fascicules, could very easily be distributed with desirable regularity all over England by men who, all told, traversed thousands of miles in all weathers and seasons, calling at weekly intervals at the houses of people who habitually read newspapers. The market was large and growing all the time; the means of contact were perfect. “Number books” are not likely to have been sold by itinerant peddlers whose calls were irregular and uncertain, but there is plenty of evidence that these fascicules, stitched in blue paper
covers to protect them, were not only procurable at local book shops but were carried to subscribers by the newsmen from the offices of the provincial newspapers.

Most of the works published in weekly or monthly fascicules before the middle of the century were printed in London, though it appears that a few provincial printers of newspapers—notably Benjamin Collins of Salisbury—had a financial interest in such publications. It is understandable that Caesar Ward and Richard Chandler, who were partners in several of the most successful “number” books published in London, should have continued to handle the weekly parts after they took over the York Courant in 1739. In their issue of that paper dated 4 May 1742, they gave a prominent place to this announcement, using plenty of capital letters and italic type:

SUBSCRIPTIONS for CHAMBERS'S Dictionary; STACKHOUSE'S History of the Bible; TILLOTSON'S Works, &c. as publish'd Weekly, are taken in by WARD and CHANDLER, Booksellers in Coney-street, YORK. Such Gentlemen as please to subscribe to them for the same, may have the Numbers sent to them (free of Carriage) by the several News-Carriers in their respective Circuits.

A similar offer to deliver without extra charge the weekly numbers of another work published in parts, Astley’s New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, appeared in Benjamin Collins’s Salisbury Journal, number 304 (22 November 1743): “Note, The Numbers will punctually be delivered Weekly, at any Distance, clean and free of any Expence by the Distributers of this Paper.” Robert Walker, whose weekly publications were sold all over England, promised in the Warwick and Staffordshire Journal, number 52 (10 August 1738), that three sheets of Jacob Hooper’s True and Impartial History of the Rebellion . . . During the Reign of King Charles the First would be delivered once a week for threepence, stitched up in covers, and that country farmers or others...
living at a distance could "have 'em left for them" so that they might take them home with them on market days.

The traffic in "number" books in the rural areas was heavy, and although not every country news-printer handled these fascicules, there was not a year from 1727 onward which did not see these weekly or monthly parts, covered with blue paper, carried by newsmen from Norwich, Reading, and Worcester, and later from Sherborne, Liverpool, Preston, and several other towns. This is not the place for enumerating the titles of these works published in "numbers," but it can be said that they included books of many kinds, among them Nicholas Tindal's translation and continuation of Rapin's *Histoire d'Angleterre,* Smollett's *History of England,* Dr. John Hill's *British Herbal,* the autobiography of Hannah Snell, Milton's *Paradise Lost,* *A Description of the Maritime Parts of France,* Dr. Doddridge's *Family Expositor,* William Ryder's *New Universal English Dictionary,* John Torbuck's *Compleat Collection of Debates in the Parliament of England,* and various narratives, surely not authentic, of the "Young Chevalier."

Some of these works printed and distributed in "the new-fashion'd Weekly Way" were run off on the local printers’ own presses. David Henry, printer of the *Reading Journal* and its twin *Henry's Winchester Journal,* published Samuel Boyse's *Historical View of the Transactions of Europe* in twopenny numbers in 1746 and 1747. No more convincing evidence of success in this sort of publishing by a provincial printer can be found than the notices inserted by R. Goadby in his *Western Flying-Post; or, Sherborne and Yeovil Mercury* in 1751. Number 119 of the paper (6 May) announced that on the following Monday would be published the first twopenny number of *The unhappy Voyage and long Captivity of Thomas Pellow, Of the Borough of Penryn, in the County of Cornwall.* It was Goadby’s own publication, and he told his readers they could get it from his usual representatives.
(whom he named) in Weymouth, Somerton, Taunton, Exeter, Plymouth, St. Austell, and Penzance, as well as from his newsmen. Small wonder that the work took well; all red-blooded Englishmen in the south and west would naturally be interested in the Cornish sailor’s twenty-three years’ captivity in a strange land. Within a few weeks Goadby reported that the weekly numbers were being completely sold out and that in response to continuing demand they had been reprinted.

There is nothing incongruous in a printer’s selling of books, pamphlets, “numbers,” ink, pens, writing paper, lead pencils, sealing wax, music paper, printed forms, maps, and other articles for which one would now go to a stationer’s shop. What seems surprising is that at a printing shop in any English town in the eighteenth century one could get a great variety of articles not very closely connected with newspapers. It would be convenient, perhaps, to buy spectacles at Verral’s shop in Lewes in 1755, though it was not until later in the century that newspaper print became cruelly small, but why did he also sell fiddle strings, a “curious Hair-colouring Water,” and an extract of lavender for beautifying the skin? These, with Bibles, prayer books, and a variety of stationery wares, were on Verral’s shelves; and according to his advertisements, people living in the country might be supplied with any of these articles at their own houses by the men who carried the **Advertiser**. Griffith Wright, printer of the **Leedes Intelligencer**, on 11 July 1758 filled two columns of his paper with a descriptive list of thirty-six articles available at his “Wholesale Medicinal Warehouse at New-Street-End” in Leeds, adding, “Any of the above Articles may be had of the Persons who sell the Intelligencer.” The list concluded with “Fine Spermacoeti CANDLES and TAPERS”; and if one looks eagerly over the list again to see whether Wright wholesaled sweetness as well as light, the list is found to include also “the much celebrated Volatile Essence, call’d Eau de Luce.”

Spermacoeti candles and eau de luce were not the only
unexpected articles sold in newspaper offices two centuries ago. William Dicey, printer of the Northampton Mercury, announced in his paper on 2 November 1730 that he had purchased "a Choice and large Quantity of Violins," which he proposed to retail at the London wholesale price. Other printers advertised that they sold lemons, chocolate, lottery tickets, corn salve, snuff, wash balls, tooth powder, itch ointment, and forty other plasters, pills, ointments, powders, oils and elixirs, the very names of which are fantastic: Dr. Griffith's Tincture Asthmatica, Robert Twilington's Balsam of Life, Sydenham's Anti-Convulsive Powder, Bateman's Golden Spirits of Scurvy Grass, the Litholytick Drops of Paracelsus, the Transcendent Restrictive Electuary, and the Incomparable Cordial for the Gripes. What rattling of pills in packets, what gurgling of bottled elixirs there must have been as the newsmen galloped along country by-roads with their hundred papers and all.

Many papers have long lists of articles sold by the proprietors and their newsmen, and the variety is beyond belief. To reproduce in full even one of these lists would be unconscionably tiresome; it is enough to say that if, to choose a single example, the newsmen who distributed Keating's Stratford and Warwick Mercury carried a sample of every article—from mathematical instruments to hungary water—enumerated after the imprint in number 116 (23 March 1753), they would need broad-backed horses and ample saddlebags. These jacks-of-all-trades would have put Autolycus to shame. How much profit they made and how much clear gain their efforts brought to the printers whom they served cannot now be ascertained or even conjectured, since the business records have not been preserved. It is to be supposed that these transactions, like job printing, were profitable to the scores of men and women who printed newspapers in the period here considered; if not, the trade in commodities and services would not have continued.

There was, however, one source of direct profit to the
printers which can be measured with some exactitude—the printing of advertisements in the columns of the newspapers. For each of these advertisements the printer charged two shillings or more; and as the rates are usually indicated, it is possible to calculate what income they brought each week simply by counting the formal notices in the paper. There were three or four newspapers in which there were no advertisements, or only very few; most papers had anything from a dozen to forty or more in each issue, and although the printer's charge for each insertion had to include one shilling in duty payable immediately to the Crown—two shillings from 5 July 1757—the remainder of the fee was almost all clear gain.

On the basis of the figures given by Thomas Aris when he said he was losing money by selling his *Birmingham Gazette* at three halfpence, the profit on the sale of one copy of a twopenny newspaper must have been less than one halfpenny, if one leaves out of account the income from advertisements. At that rate the shilling and sixpence left to the printer after he had subtracted the tax on a half-crown advertisement exceeded the profit on the sale of thirty-six copies; the net income from ten advertisements amounted to more than the sale of 360 copies would bring. It is worth looking at a specific example. Number 396 (27 September 1756) of the *Western Flying Post* has fourteen advertisements on its second page, fourteen on its third page, and fifteen on the fourth. At two shillings and sixpence each, the minimum charge in this paper, these forty-three notices brought in £5 7s. 6d., out of which Goadby the printer had to pay £2 3s. Od. in duty; the remainder, £3 4s. 6d., exceeded what he could expect to clear from the sale of 1,550 copies, if it is fair to estimate that apart from advertisements each copy brought him a net profit of not more than a halfpenny; if the net profit per copy was only a farthing, the profit on Goadby's forty-three advertisements would equal the net gain from the sale of nearly 3,100 copies. Advertising paid.
Some aspects of this strong sustainer of journalism will be considered in the next chapter.


2. In the Birmingham Gazette on 16 November 1741, Aris declared, “Mr. Walker . . . came here and printed a News-Paper. . . .”

3. On 23 October 1738, it was announced in the Lancashire Journal: With the History of the Holy Bible that the Journal itself would be sold at a penny, the supplement at three halfpence, “or together at the usual Price, at Two-pence Half-penny.” The earliest issues of this paper bear Walker’s London imprint; by number 11 (11 September 1738), the imprint was “Manchester: Printed by John Berry, at the Dial near the Cross . . .,” but the supplement was still printed by Walker in London. Perhaps Walker retained full control of the Lancashire Journal and Berry was merely Walker’s printer and local agent in Manchester.

4. Aris’s communication “To the Readers of this Paper” in number 86 concluded with the statement that the books published by Walker in weekly fascicules would thereafter be sold “by the Men who carry this Paper; so that those Gentlemen who at present take in Mr. Walker’s Numbers, may be assured of having their Books completed.”

5. The Grub-Street Journal, number 148 (26 October 1732), refers to a group of printers’ devils who were returning to their shops after having taken unsold papers to the Stamp Office to have the stamps cut off.


7. The chronological chart in Appendix B shows at a glance which papers were in existence before and after 1757.

8. Copies printed for use in the newspaper office and not offered for sale could be printed on unstamped paper. Office copies of the Leeds Mercury now at the Reference Library in Leeds were printed on stock not only unstamped but quite different in size and quality from that used for the copies sold to the public.

9. The Daily Advertiser for 27 October 1741 reported that “Last Saturday Robert Beaumont was committed to the House of Correction in Bury, by Thomas Discipline Esq; Alderman of Bury, for hawking unstamped News-Papers.” The Reading Mercury of 25 January 1742 reported as news received in Reading on that date that Mr. Woodman, “Distributor of the Stamps for the County of Hants,” had taken up a person for hawking unstamped newspapers in Portsmouth and that the offender had been committed to Winchester jail.

10. Occasionally a printer found that he had not quite enough stamped paper for all the copies he wished to print and with complete honesty paid duty on those he printed on plain paper. In the Western Flying-Post; or, Sherborne and Yeovil Mercury, number 125 (10 June 1751), for
example, the printer inserted this notice at the foot of the first page: "As we being disappointed of Stamps, are oblig'd to print a small Number without them, the Duty of which shall be duly paid."

11. One of several articles in a manuscript volume at the Manchester Local History Library.

12. I am indebted to Miss Josephine L. Reid in the Archivist’s office at Chester for her transcribing of the two documents in the Mayor’s Files for 1733-34 and 1734-35.

13. Cooke was not directly charged with printing either paper, but it is reasonable to assume that they came from his press.

14. It is irrelevant but curious that by the terms of his will, dated 9 September 1741 and proved 22 February 1749, Roger Adams left his son John "One Shilling and no more for his abuse and Unmindfulness in cursing both me and his Mother in my life time."

15. KB 11/32/4.

16. I can find no record of payment or appeal; but the presence of the record of conviction among the King’s Bench papers at the Public Record Office suggests that Cooke engaged a solicitor to appeal in hopes of having the decision quashed.


18. William Thompson and Thomas Baily were joint proprietors of both the Stamford Mercury and the Suffolk Mercury: or, St. Edmund’s-Bury Post.

19. Representative lists of distributors are given in the Register of Newspapers in Appendix C.

20. His reference is probably to Henry Greep, proprietor of the Bristol Weekly Mercury, which may have come to an end shortly before Farley began, on 29 April 1727, to print after the subtitle of his paper the statement quoted above.

21. Publication on Monday was resumed in number 161 (3 May 1725), but the regular day of publication was changed from Monday to Tuesday with number 191 (31 November 1725), a few weeks after Dicey’s name was dropped from the imprint.

22. The complete list of divisions and places served (in Appendix A) shows how widely the Gloucester Journal was distributed in 1725.

23. It is possible that a “blank” paper was one with no subscriber’s name on it and therefore saleable to a casual purchaser. Yet the distinction made later in the passage quoted above between “45 Stamp’d Papers” and “one blank” seems to imply that an agent usually received one or two copies on unstamped paper. Did Gregory use unstamped paper for copies intended as free gifts for his agents? In this case it is hard to understand why any agent would wish to have more than one such free copy, since he could not sell it without breaking the law.

25. "Any Person who will take a Quantity, at Taunton, to serve another Town shall have them at an Whole-sale Price." So stated Jos. Bliss, of Exeter, in his Protestant Mercury on 27 January 1716; and on 4 May 1716, he announced: "Carriers, as all others, that take 3, 4, or more Papers, buying them at my House, shall have a Reasonable Allowance." Similar allowances were probably made to those who arranged to have several copies sent to them at distant places.

26. Borlase sometimes wrote "Dickenson," but the usual form is "Dickerson."

27. Because the Sherborne Mercury sold more widely in Cornwall than any other newspaper, the term "Sherborne rider" was apparently used throughout the West Country to designate the men who brought newspapers, wherever published, much as in the fifteenth century any mystery play, no matter where performed, came to be known as a "Coventry" play. For Borlase's references to "the Sherborn man" and "the Sherborn," see above, p. 134.

28. I am indebted to Mr. H. L. Douch, Curator of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Truro, for his kindness in transcribing these and many other entries in the Borlase account book pertaining to newspapers.

29. It was a postman, however, not a newsman, whose twanging horn Cowper mentioned in The Task, Book IV.

30. Transcribed by a contemporary reader in a manuscript now at the Bodleian, M.S. Top. Oxon. d. 247.

31. See p. 129.

32. This letter (Asw. 10/24/6) and the next one referred to (Anc. 7/15/12) are both in the Lincolnshire Archives Office.

33. There is more evidence on this point. As late as 1755, when the postmaster-general announced that the delivery of mail in a considerable area of England north and west of London would be extended from thrice weekly to six times a week, particular emphasis was laid on the complaint that "great Numbers of Letters" had hitherto been privately collected and delivered, "as well in these as in other Parts of the Kingdom, contrary to Law, to the great Prejudice of the Revenue of the Post-Office." According to the text of the announcement dated at Warrington on 13 September 1755 and printed in Whitworth's Manchester Magazine, number 3151 (23 September 1755), all persons detected in the illegal collecting, conveying, or delivering of letters would, after Friday, 10 October 1755, be prosecuted with the utmost severity, the penalty being five pounds for every letter collected or delivered contrary to law, and one hundred pounds for every week the practice was continued. Particular warning was given to several groups of past offenders, among them carriers, coachmen, watermen, wherrymen, and "dispensers of Country News Papers."

34. The address was "Smithy-Door"; the form "Smiby" continued to appear in Adams's imprint for many weeks; it may have been a jocose representation of local bi-labial pronunciation of the third consonant sound in "Smithy."
35. These manuscripts, mentioned above, page 129, are in the Willoughby (Daventry) collection in the Northamptonshire Record Office, Delapré Abbey, Northampton.


37. Many of the careful ink drawings made by the Rev. William Borlase in his work as a naturalist and antiquarian in Cornwall were mounted by him on the blue-paper covers of the successive weekly numbers of this popular work in its third edition, to which obviously Borlase was a subscriber in 1743 and 1744. The volumes containing these blue covers are at the Penzance Library in the Morrab Gardens, Penzance.

38. For example, Elizabeth Kent, who after the death of her husband printed the Plymouth Weekly Journal, inserted a notice in number 26 (30 March 1722) that at her printing house in Southside Street, near the new quay, interested persons would get “Lemons very Good, at Four Shillings a Hundred.” At Ipswich, T. Norris included in the imprint of his Ipswich Weekly Mercury the statement that at his office in the Cross Key Street, near the Great White Horse corner, might be had “Lemons by Wholesale and Retail.”

39. John Collyer, printer of the Nottingham Mercury, advertised on 31 October 1723 that “the Best Tobacco Snuff, commonly called Killycrankey; or scotch Snuff, ... approv'd of by Gentlemen and Ladies of the Greatest Quality and Figure” was sold at his shop, “and by the Men that carry the News Northwards.”