Information, please

Posted At : October 2, 2008 7:43 PM | Posted By : Helen Vincent
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In our exhibition we were keen to show the many ways in which print has influenced people's everyday lives. For hundreds of years, people turned to printed items for information about times, places and dates. Nowadays we increasingly look online for this information, but whether we buy a printed diary or print out an online calendar, we still find uses for the hard copy.

Here are some printed books to which Scots have turned over the centuries to find out what they needed to know.

Getting from A to B

During the period of the industrial revolution, print, new technology and transport improvements all worked together to bring about the standardisation of travel times. An early **Edinburgh to Portpatrick time-bill** (Edinburgh, 1796) would have been used by the guard on the official Mail Coach between Edinburgh and Portpatrick on the southwest coast (where the coach connected with a mail packet to Ireland). He would have been issued with a watch to record his journey times, to see if they matched the official time allowed for each stage. In the 20th century, the firm of MacBrayne's produced both colourful brochures for tourists and simple timetables for local travellers using the same steamers and ferries around the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

The Commuter's Companion

The late Victorian era saw the beginnings of the urban public transport system. Tiny booklets like ***Murray's Edinburgh Diary and Alphabetical Time Table*** and ***The Edinburgh District Time Table and Monthly Diary***, printed in Edinburgh throughout the 1890s, gave Edinburgh commuters all the information they needed about train, bus, tram and boat times for the month for one penny, at a time when a train journey from the suburbs to Waverley station cost sevenpence return. Today's commuters are more likely to look to satnav, the internet, radio and SMS for up-to-the-minute information.

A Country Man's Chapbook

All but the poorest farm labourers could have afforded to buy a chapbook like ***The Little Book of Knowledge, or The Country Man's Choice Companion*** (Dunbar, 1799). This chapbook, containing information such as weather lore, helpful hints about planting crops and remedies for sick animals. Cheaply and poorly printed, it would have been used and then discarded: the book on display is the only known surviving copy.

Almanacs from the 18th Century

Almanacs, the forerunners of today's diaries, contained factual information as well as calendars and prognostications for the future. On display are two almanacs produced by James Chalmers in Aberdeen in the 1770s, the centre of Scotland's almanac trade. The ***Aberdeen Almanac***, later the *Northern Year Book*, was published until the mid-1950s.

A Gaelic Almanac

Through its dry factual content, the Victorian almanac ***Am Feillire: the Gaelic Almanac and Highland Directory for 1875*** (Glasgow, 1875) illustrates how emigration was a fact of life for many Highlanders in the 19th century. The lists of Gaelic-speaking churches include Canada as well as Scotland; addresses are given for Gaelic associations in the colonies and at home; advertisements offer assisted passage for emigrants to Manitoba. You can read more about *Am Feillire* by searching for it on Scran.

Eminent Pharmacists

The Chemists' and Druggists' Year Book and Directory for Scotland (Glasgow, 1914) gave Scottish pharmacists a place to celebrate their own profession, with handsomely-illustrated articles about eminent men in the profession. It also provided practical information such as the laws governing the sale of poisons. However the major issue revealed by this edition was the effect on chemists of the recently-introduced National Insurance Acts, by which insured workers could get free medical treatment.

You can see an enlarged image of this advertisement here.