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17th and 18th Century Nichols Newspapers Collection



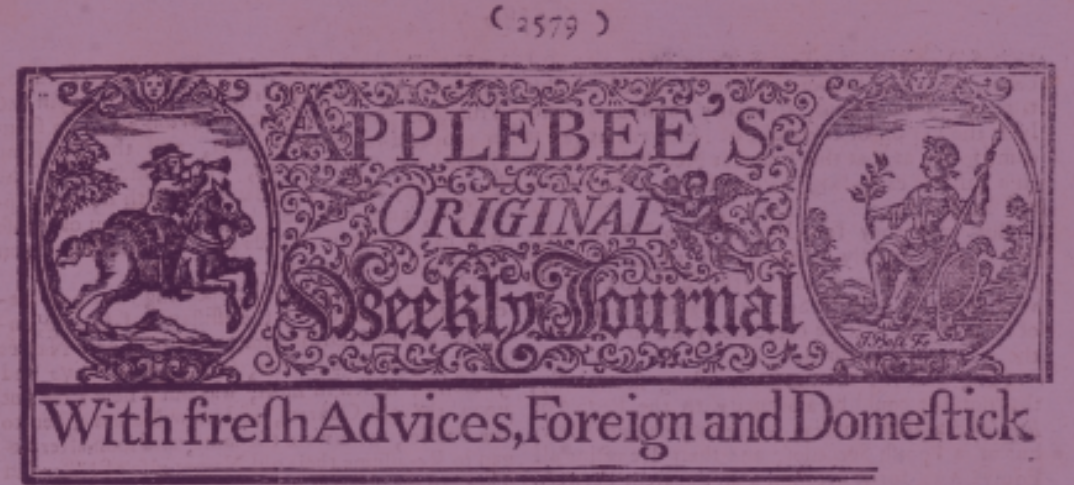
Various images from the Nichols Collection

Interview with the Digital Product Editor at Gale

Véronique Kerguelen



Who was John Nichols?



SATURDAY, April 27, 1723.

To the Author of the Original Journal.

S I R,



HAVE been often reflecting in my own Thoughts upon the miserable Condition of this Nation, upon its being so wretchedly divided among ourselves, and have as often Thought to write to you upon this Subject, which I thought indeed a very melancholly Thing;

but I found it so Copious and Extensive a Subject, that I thought it was fit rather for a Book in Folio, than a Paper in Quarto; and therefore I have now sent you one, and particularly, even before you could get into it.

quer'd, and all the Parties either fully, and cheerfully acquiesc'd, and joyn'd in the Restoration, or departing of any way to restore the Ruinous Fabrick they had been before engag'd in, pretended to do so: *Richard Cromwell* was so far from offering to set up the Usurpation, he was once cloth'd with, that he seem'd really to disapprove of it, withdrew, and went Abroad to Travel, resolving neither to Head any Tumults, or encourage others to do so; in a Word all Faction was laid asleep in the Restoration; Peace and good Neighbourhood was to the Astonishment of the World restor'd, and my Lord *Clarendon* then Lord High Chancellor of *England*, in his Speech to the Parliament, by his Majesties express Command exhorted the two Houses, and by them the whole Nation to lay aside all their Feuds, bury

Front cover from *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, April 27 1723

Who was John Nichols?

John Nichols was a leading London printer of the second half of the 18th century. He printed many significant books and also printed, edited and wrote for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, itself a landmark periodical publication.

As an author, his main interests were literature and history, and he is still acclaimed today for his *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* and his *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, among other works.

How did he come to own such a large quantity of newspapers?

(2579)



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How did he come to own such a large quantity of newspapers?

Nichols actively collected newspapers as research material for his writing. The newspapers in today's Nichols collection are not contemporary papers that Nichols saved after reading them: the oldest paper in the collection pre-dates Nichols's birth. Instead, these are earlier newspapers that were purchased from other people, for example at the liquidation of someone's estate. Early on, his friend John Wilkes also donated his collection to him.

The Nichols newspaper collection that we see now in the Bodleian Library is in fact only a fraction of the collection Nichols assembled. Some newspapers were lost in a fire, others were stolen by a servant and after Nichols's death, still others were sold by his heirs.

Where have they been kept until they ended up in the Bodleian?

How were they acquired by the Bodleian?

The TATLER.

By Isaac Bickerstaff Esq;

Quicquid agunt Homines nostri Farrago Libelli.

From Saturday June 4. to Tuesday June 7. 1709.

White's Chocolate-house, June 6.

A Letter from a young Lady, written in the most passionate Terms, (wherein she laments the Misfortune of a Gentleman, her Lover, who was lately wounded in a Duel) has turn'd my Thoughts to that Subject, and enclin'd me to examine into the Causes which precipitate Men into so fatal a Folly; a Folly fatal generally to the best Men, and noblest Spirits amongst us, the Grofs of Mankind being never liable to such Resentments. Therefore as it has been propos'd to treat of Subjects of Gallantry in the Article from hence, and no one Point in Nature is more proper to be consider'd by the Company who frequent this Place, than that of Duels, it is worth our Consideration to examine into this Chimerical, Groundless Humour, and to lay every other Thought aside, till we have strip'd it of all its false Pretences to Credit and Reputation amongst Men. But I must confess, when I consider what I am going about, and run over in my Imagination all the endless Crowd of Men of Honour who will be offended at such a Discourse; I am undertaking, methinks, a Work worthy an invulnerable Heroe in Romance, rather than a private Gentleman with a single Rapier: But as I am pretty well acquainted by great Experience with the Nature of Man, and know of a Truth, that if Men be not taught to be wiser by the Danger

known, have proceeded from some valiant Corcomb's persisting in the Wrong, to defend some prevailing Folly, and preserve himself from the Ingenerosity of owning a Mistake.

By this Means it is call'd, *Giving a Man Satisfaction*, to urge your Offence against him with your Sword; which puts me in Mind of *Pear's* Order to the Keeper, in *The Tale of a Tub*: *If you neglect to do all this, damn you and all your Generation for ever; and so he bid you heartily farewell.* If the Contradiction in the very Terms of one of our Challenges were as well explain'd, and turn'd into plain English, would it not run thus this Manner?

Sir,

Your extraordinary Behaviour last Night, and the Liberty you were pleas'd to take with me, makes me this Morning give you this, to tell you, because you are an ill-bred Puppy, I will meet you in Hyde-Park on Thursday hence; and because you want both Breeding and Humanity, I desire you would come with a Pistol in your Hand, on Horseback, and endeavour to shove me through the Head, to teach you more Manners. If you feel of doing me this Pleasure, I shall say, You are a Radical on every Post in Town: And so, Sir, if you will not injure me more, I shall leave you what you have done already. Pray if getting every Thing ready, and you will infinitely oblige,

The Tatler, June 4-7 1709

Where have they been kept until they ended up in the Bodleian? How were they acquired by the Bodleian?

The remainder of the Nichols collection was with his son, John Bowyer Nichols, and after his death this collection was sold to the Bodleian Library in 1865. It is interesting to note that John Nichols himself had offered to sell his collection of newspapers to the British Museum in 1812. Unfortunately, at the time they were only interested in some papers, and Nichols chose to keep the large collection intact rather than sell it off in pieces.

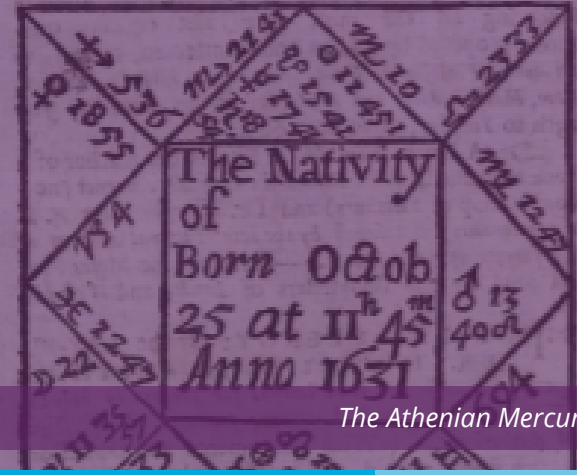
In what condition are the papers in now?

Vol. 19. Num. 13.
The Athenian Mercury.

Tuesday, December 10. 1695.

Quest. 1. **I** Desire your Advice in these few things; first whether it be allowed me to have a Wife? What manner of woman she will be? Where she shall live, how I may be acquainted with her, and how long first. I am a piece of an Artist, and have gotten some Learning, tho I am but a poor Tradesman. and have here sent you the Scheme of my Nativity, desiring your better Judgments upon it, and whether I shall have a Wife in 4 or what else, which would solige, &c.

The scheme follows.



“ And not long after a vast quantity of Quail
“ which sort of Birds the Arabian Gulph breeds more
“ than any other place, came flying cross the Sea, and
“ being weary’d in their flight, fell on the midst of
“ the Camp. This he seems to speak of the first
“ flight of these Quails, which we read of Exod. 16. and
“ 17. At the same time that the Manna was given, that
“ they came up and cover’d the Camp, tho this first
“ flight fell ’em but one day, and was a small number
“ in Comparison to the second. in the Text, mention’d
“ by the querrist as also by Josephus, Lib. 3. Cap. 12. Tho
“ much after the same cold manner that he related the
“ former. “ All the Camp, says he, was fill’d with
“ Quails: of which every one took as many as they
“ would. “ But tho they were fed with ’em the first
“ time, as it appears, no longer than one Meal, or one
“ Day; in this second Miracle, God tells ’em that they
“ should not eat ’em only one or two days, or even Ten
“ or Twenty days, but a whole month together, whence
“ no wonder that the Jews could not believe such a thing
“ possible, when Moses himself did seem to doubt whether
“ God could, or would provide sufficient for such a
“ multitude. And indeed a Prodigious Company there
“ must be, to feed six hundred thousand Men, besides
“ women and children, and a vast multitude, perhaps
“ no fewer in the whole than 4 Millions, after a most
“ Comparatives, and this for 2 months time together, and
“ that with such light hollow meat as Quails, but their
“ not taking a days journey but
“ the Camp, they must have taken the force of

The Athenian Mercury, December 10 1695

What condition are the papers in now?

They are in excellent condition overall. The newspapers are collected in 296 volumes where they are bound chronologically. They are not arranged by publication title, but strictly by date. The excellent state of preservation of the collection means that the digital images are also of excellent quality, which provides a good reading experience as well as good Optical Character Recognition (OCR) results.

What sort of material is included in this collection?

The Wonderful Machine; being a great Amusement for the Curious.



AT the Crown Coffee-House by the Royal Exchange is to be seen a most surprising *Astronomical and Musical Clock.*

Its chief Performances are as follows, viz.

It shews the Rising and Setting of the Sun, the Lengthning and Shortning of the Days, even as Nature it self performs them.

Likewise it shews the Sun's place in the Ecliptick, with the Southing of Sixteen of the most noted fixed Stars.

It likewise shews the Increase, Decrease, Full and Change of the Moon, with the Aspects she makes to the Sun, and her Distance both in Signs and Degrees from

It also shews the time

From *The Flying Post*, October 18 1716

What sort of material is included in this collection?

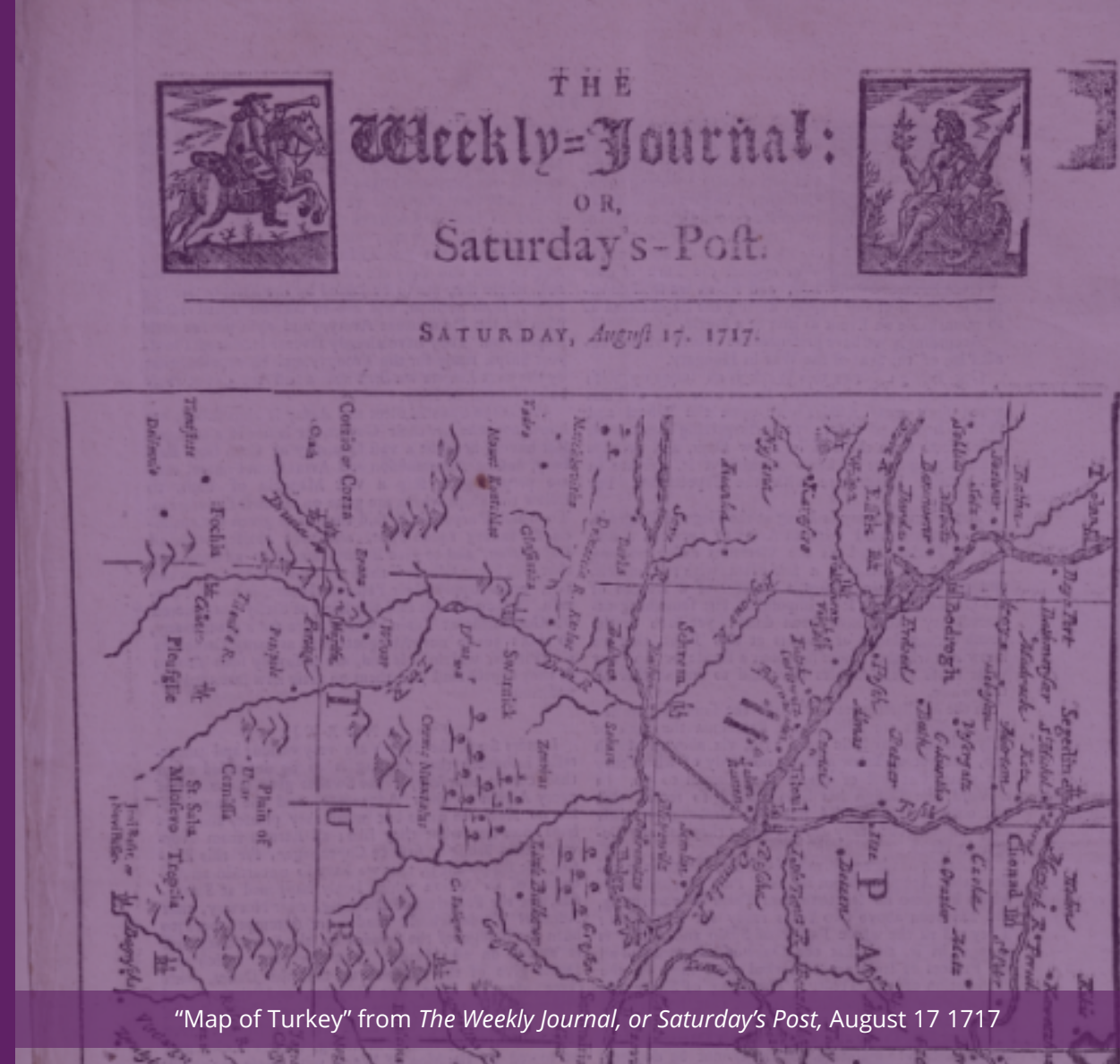
The collection mainly contains newspapers printed in London between 1672 and January 1738. There are also a handful of provincial publications, so in total there are over 250 publications represented. Added to that, we have a number of pamphlets and broadsheets, especially in the earlier period covered by the collection.

Of course, when we talk about newspapers here, we are talking about a different type of publication from today's newspapers. For one thing, some publications are better described as magazine-like: they included little or no news and addressed a variety of subjects such as religion, philosophy, the arts or trigonometry, among others. Other papers were really opinion papers, produced to publicise the political opinions of their writers.

What sort of material is included in this collection?

Vigorous debates and arguments were fought between opposing newspapers, polarized along political and/or religious lines. But for the most part, the papers in this collection did report news, especially foreign news, as this was usually not subject to so much censorship. Over time, one can see the news diversify and expand to more domestic matters, in particular branching into commercial and financial topics. Daily news was still not common however, and most newspapers were either weekly, bi-weekly or tri-weekly publications.

What was the publishing scene at the time they were produced?



"Map of Turkey" from *The Weekly Journal, or Saturday's Post*, August 17 1717

What was the publishing scene at the time they were produced?

The date span covered in the Nichols newspaper collection coincides with the height in popularity of coffeehouses in London. Men used to gather in coffeehouses to enjoy the newly available drink and to socialize, debate and gossip. Coffeehouses provided the newspapers that fuelled those conversations and thereby secured a stable customer base for the newspapers, alongside individual subscribers.

The backdrop for this period was the thirst for knowledge already stimulated by the active book trade and the battle for freedom of speech. The period covered by the collection includes the time of the Licensing Act when printing was under tight Parliamentary supervision (see *City Mercury* #3 "With allowance. Roger L'Estrange", who was the appointed Licenser at that time) until 1695. With the lapsing of the Licensing Act and the relative new freedom came a great number of new publications, for example *The Flying Post* and *The Post Boy*.

What was the publishing scene at the time they were produced?

Later limitations on the press came via taxation. The Stamp Duty on newspapers appeared in 1712, pushing up prices and leading to the disappearance of many publications. Newspaper sheets had to be stamped at the Head Office at Somerset House before printing. These stamps can be seen on newspapers of that period in the collection.

Of course, with tax came “tax avoidance”, and newspaper formats evolved in a bid to escape or minimize taxation, which was dependent on paper size and the number of pages. For example, the Stamp Act was passed on 1 August 1712 and the first stamp in this collection is found on *The Post Boy*, August 2, 1712. However, *The British Mercury* of 9 August has no stamp, and this is because the paper is eight pages long and therefore qualified as a pamphlet, incurring a different, lower tax. Before the Stamp Act *The British Mercury* issues were two pages long (see 30th July 1712 issue, for example).

What was the publishing scene at the time they were produced?

A side effect of expanding newspaper size was the proliferation of large, ornate mastheads that helped fill space, as can be seen in *Weekly Remarks*, 2 March 1716, and many others. Finally, in 1725, the Stamp Act was revised to cover the longer newspapers, and these subsequently returned to pre-tax formats. Heavier tax, of course put a strain on the commercial viability of newspapers so that they became more dependent upon subsidies from political parties.

What are some of the
flagship titles and why
are they important?



"Meditations on the Royal Oak", *The London Mercury*, May 20 1721

What are some of the flagship titles and why are they important?

In chronological order we start with *The London Gazette*, a twice-weekly, government publication that was first named the *Oxford Gazette*, as this is where the government was based at the time of its launch in 1665. The first issue in this collection is dated 1678. This publication can be seen as the first English newspaper as we think of them now, both in terms of contents and format. It is also the oldest continuously-published newspaper in the United Kingdom, and still publishes government notices every day.

We can also mention *The Athenian Mercury*, a precursor of the modern magazine. It was established in 1691 and was published twice a week, with the intention of answering “the most nice and curious questions propos'd by the ingenious”. It provided miscellaneous information on a wide variety of subjects, in a question-and-answer format.

What are some of the flagship titles and why are they important?

Later on in the collection we can also find *The Post Boy*, *The Post Man or the Historical Account* and *The Flying Post or Postmaster*. These are publications born out of the lapsing of the Licensing Act and were to dominate the news press for many years. They were published three times a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. When the Stamp Act came into place in 1712 and made newspapers more expensive, this frequency was ideal to provide current news to an avid audience but was easier to sustain than daily publication.

Finally, we should mention *The Tatler*, later followed by *The Spectator*. Started in 1709, *The Tatler* developed the format of essays to relate and discuss current affairs. This style was subsequently adopted by many more newspapers, typically polarized politically, such as *The Examiner*, *The Whig Examiner*, *The Medley*, *The Original Weekly Journal*, the *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*, etc.

What's the most significant thing about the collection?



To the Author of the British Journal.

On the CONSPIRACY.

No. II.

S I R,



H A V E in my last considered the Spirit of the Conspirators in general: I will in this address myself to those of the Clergy, who have joined with them, or are well affected to them. That there are some such, no Body doubts; and our Enemies

have not forgot to mention them as a Capital Foe. The Religion of one's Country, to any Man who dislikes it, is Contempt, and no more than the Religion of England. Besides, would your own Pride suffer any of you, to comply with the Religion of Scotland, or Geneva, if you were there? On the contrary, do you not constantly encourage there, what you constantly exclaim against as Schism here; a Separation from the establish'd Communion?

The State which makes you what you are, and gives you what you have, may by the same Right and Power confer what Favours, Privileges, and Bounties, it pleases upon any other different Bodies of Men: Nor could you in Modesty, or common Sense, complain, that a Legislature dispos'd of its Gifts and Graces according to its own Pleasure, should prefer you to any other Body, if you have not even had the same Preference. It has been prefer'd to the Preferments of the Church, or any other, and shall be so prefer'd to you.

Front cover from *The British Journal*, 27 April 1722

What's the most significant thing about the collection?

In my opinion, the most significant thing is that they exist at all. Most of these early English newspapers have otherwise been lost, so the Nichols collection, alongside that of Charles Burney, represents a unique resource for studying the news and print culture of the period.

How does this digitised version compare to the existing microfilm collections currently available?



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Front cover from *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, April 27 1723

How does this digitised version compare to the existing microfilm collections currently available?

There is no microfilm archive of the Nichols collection as such. Whilst the *Early English Newspapers* microfilm collection released in 1978 did include publications from the Nichols collection, it did not include the entire collection. Content from the Nichols collection was used to fill gaps in runs of newspapers in the Burney collection. The *17th and 18th Century Nichols Newspaper Collection* contains, for the first time, the full Nichols collection archive in digitised format.

I hear there are annotations on some of the documents, of what sort?

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These newspapers were clearly collected for the information they hold, not just as collectable items. Nichols used them for his own research and also lent them to others. Earlier owners had done the same, as the archives were always intended as a usable resource. So, throughout the collection we find various marks, underlining and hand-written annotations. The inside covers of some of the volumes have written lists of items of interest to be found inside.

What have been some of the challenges of digitising the archive?

The TATLER.

By Isaac Bickerstaff Esq;

Quicquid agunt Homines nostri Farrago Libelli.

From Saturday June 4. to Tuesday June 7. 1709.

White's Chocolate-house, June 6.

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The Tatler, June 4-7 1709

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The biggest difficulty was the absence of a detailed catalogue. There have been attempts at cataloguing the collection before of course, but it appears that there was no definitive detailed record of all the items included.

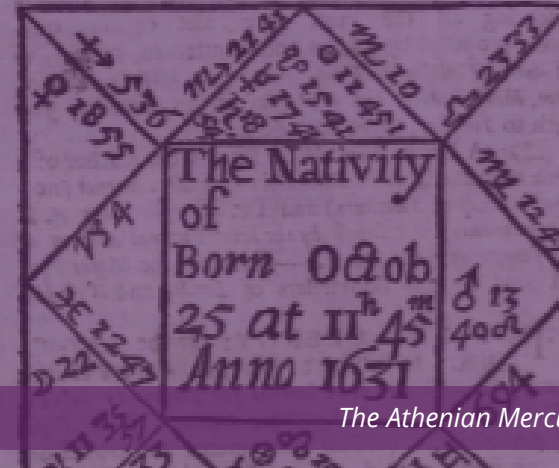
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The scheme follows.



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The Athenian Mercury, December 10 1695

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Anyone studying the late 17th-18th Century will find valuable material in this collection. Topics addressed in the publications are wide ranging, and include foreign news, diplomacy and reports on wars. On the domestic side, we find material on politics and religion as well as commerce, finance, legislation, entertainment, the arts, London life, horse races and various 'medicines' to name a few.

The *17th and 18th Century Nichols Newspaper Collection* is a valuable research tool on these subjects by itself, or in combination with other existing collections, such as the *17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, which covers the same period but holds many different titles and issues. Many documents in the Nichols collection are not found in the Burney collection and therefore constitute an essential complement to that other major newspaper collection.

To find out more about the archive, including the history of the collection and notable titles, visit

www.gale.com/explorenichols



If you have any questions,
or would like to discuss
purchasing options, click
the link below or visit our
website.

www.gale.com/rep



Various images from the Nichols Collection