17th and 18th Century Nichols Newspapers Collection

Notable Titles
The 17th and 18th Century Nichols Newspapers Collection includes some of the most notable publications from the period, many of which were highly innovative and influential in the development of printing and publishing history.

Covering news from within the UK and beyond, including pioneering views and formats, ranging from conservative to provocative, this archive brings to light the genesis and evolution of many elements of newspapers we still recognise to this day.
The Athenian Mercury
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The Athenian Mercury was a twice-weekly periodical published by The Athenian Society, believed to have introduced the advice column format. John Dunton (1659-1733) served as the Editor-in-Chief, with the content written alongside other members of The Athenian Society.

The periodical provided a space where reader’s queries were answered, with questions accepted from both men and women.
The Athenian Mercury

Aimed at both male and female readers, it covered a range of topics from science to sex. Dunton claimed the content was plagiarised by The Lacedemonian Mercury (also in this archive), prompting Dunton to use advertising to encourage readers to resubmit their questions for amended answers.

According to Dunton, notable figures submitted questions to the periodical, including Jonathan Swift. The ‘question and answer’ format was later adopted by Daniel Defoe in some of his projects, and is still common to this day as the root of ‘agony aunt’ columns in many contemporary publications.
The Ladies Mercury
The Ladies Mercury was the first periodical designed for a female audience, and ran for four weeks during 1693. It provided an important moment in publishing history, opening the door to future publications aimed at entirely female audiences.

The Ladies Mercury inspired many subsequent publications for female-only audiences, including The Female Tatler, also contained in this archive.
A single sheet publication, *The Ladies Mercury* was a response to the success of female-oriented topics in *The Athenian Mercury*, which were so popular that the first Tuesday edition of each month had been dedicated to responses to women's questions.
The Tatler

Various images from the Nichols Collection
The Tatler

*The Tatler* was founded by Sir Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, and ran for two years between 1709 and 1711. A tri-weekly publication, it introduced a new approach to journalism, stepping away from traditional reportage and focusing on essays dedicated to news and gossip circulating in the growing coffeehouses of London.

The majority of the content is believed to have been written by Steele, who adopted the persona of Isaac Bickerstaff, believed to be the first known usage of an authorial persona. Although all articles are credited to Bickerstaff, they were in fact written by Steele or Addison, with some contributions from Jonathan Swift.
Both Whig politicians, Steele and Addison placed Whiggish views and opinions throughout their writings. When The Tatler came under Tory attack, it was shut down. Steele and Addison subsequently founded The Spectator in 1711 and The Guardian in 1713.

The Tatler was a highly influential publication, creating an approach that would be continued by many notable titles in subsequent years, including Samuel Johnson's Rambler.
The Female Tatler
The Female Tatler

The authorship of *The Female Tatler* is a mystery, as like *The Tatler* it was published under a pseudonym. Writing under the name ‘Mrs. Crackenthorpe’, the identity of the writer (or writers) has yet to be definitively established.

It was highly innovative in its discussion of women and women’s issues, and it was ahead of its time in its attitudes. It covered issues such as women’s education, appearance and social etiquette, and was open in its critique of women being denied the benefits of progress by their male counterparts.
The Female Tatler began in July 1709, but in August (from issue 19) the publication split into two rival papers following a dispute between the author and printer. For two months, two papers claiming to be “By Mrs. Crackenthorpe, a Lady that knows every thing” competed for female readership under the same title, The Female Tatler.

In October 1709, the paper printed by the original printer (Benjamin Bragge) ceased publication, while the splinter paper (printed by Abigail Baldwin) continued publishing until March 1710. Both are present in the collection.
The Spectator
The Spectator

After liquidating The Tatler, Sir Richard Steele and James Addison formed The Spectator, which aimed to bring the topics of discussion typically confined to academia and scholarly enterprise into the public sphere, making them the focus of polite conversation among the leisure classes outside of their traditional formal settings.
The paper ran through over 550 issues between 1711 and 1712, and could be read through a private subscription, or at one of the growing number of coffeehouses that subscribed and provided the paper to patrons.

Much like *The Tatler*, reader's correspondence played an important role in the paper, alongside its adoption of a fictional mode of presentation, whereby author’s ideals were presented through the ‘Spectator Club’, a group of fictitious characters from a range of backgrounds. Some notable figures contributed to the paper, including Ambrose Philips and Alexander Pope.

After closing its initial run in 1712, Addison briefly revived *The Spectator* (without the involvement of Steele) in 1714, for another 80 numbers.
International News
John Nichols’ collection included many publications relating news from outside of the United Kingdom. Some of the publications relating international news are:

- The Haerlem Courant, Truly Rendred into English
- The Impartial Protestant Mercury, Or Occurrences Foreign and Domestick
- The Loyal Impartial Mercury, or News both Forreign and Domestick
- Mercurius Civicus or, an Account of Affairs both Forreign and Domestick
- The True Protestant Mercury, or Occurrences Foreign and Domestick
- The Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Germany, or the History of the Reformation of Religion There
To find out more about the archive, including the history of the collection and an interview with the product manager, visit

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