

344 PUMFREY, JOHN

Bookbinder, Bookseller

Richmond

Bookbinder and bookseller in Richmond (1799-1808), initially in partnerships with Archibald Currie (113) and W. H. Fitzwhylsonn (165), before conducting an independent bindery.

Pumfrey was a trained bookbinder affiliated with two of the most conspicuous bookselling and bindery firms in early-Republic Richmond. Yet despite that status, his familial and trade origins are unknown, and his fate is likely unrecoverable given his later flight from the city.

Pumfrey first appears as a bookbinder in Richmond with the death of Thomas Brend (051) in December 1799. He was then a rising tradesman, likely working in the shop Brend shared with Archibald Currie. Brend had conducted the capital's largest bindery from 1783, when he moved there from Williamsburg, forming a partnership with Currie, once his apprentice. On Brend's death, Currie had no trouble finding a successor in Pumfrey, who also seems to have been trained by Brend. His joining the bindery's ownership freed up time for Currie to now pursue other interests, leaving the bulk of the bindery's work to Pumfrey and their hired hands. But their affiliation was fairly short-lived, about fifteen months, as Currie died unexpectedly in April 1801.

Pumfrey was quickly appointed administrator of Currie's estate; the notices he published in Richmond's newspapers do not indicate that there were heirs to Currie's estate, only the mundane business of settling the company's accounts, all now in Pumfrey's hands. A week after Currie's death, he announced both the dissolution of their firm and his plan to continue the binding business in "the same house" as before. Settling the estate dragged on through at least July 1802, when Pumfrey published a notice seeking all outstanding debtors and creditors as he was "anxious to close the business of his administration." By then, however, the business was struggling and Pumfrey needed help.

Pumfrey found assistance in the person of William Fitzwhylsonn; the Welsh immigrant had resided in Richmond since 1786, conducting an "English" school (i.e. grammar school) for boys and girls, which drew him into the bookselling trade as a result of the need to provide books for his students. By 1801, his store had grown to such a point that he had to employ assistants. The following year he brought in Pumfrey as a partner, providing his store with an in-house bindery, so matching the capabilities of the leading Richmond bookstores of Samuel Pleasants (331) and William Prichard (343). The concern took on the responsibility for training a new generation of bookbinders as well, with Pumfrey holding the apprentice indenture of Charles Carter (476) from April 1804 to October 1807. The firm of Fitzwhylsonn & Pumfrey continued until July 1805, when Pumfrey set up an independent "stationary & bookbinding business." He evidently financed the parting by taking on collection of the old firm's debts, a move that enriched Fitzwhylsonn while burdening himself – a burden that would crush him over the next three years and so lead to an act of desperation.

In late spring 1808, Pumfrey was named as an executor of the estate of one Patrick Ternan, a Richmond apothecary who conducted his father's established store (Dr. James Ternan) next door to the former Pumfrey & Fitzwhylsonn location – now that of the succeeding firm

of Fitzwhylsonn & Potter. On August 8th, Pumfrey staged an auction-sale of the contents of the store in conjunction with the father. The terms of that sale required cash payments for all purchases under \$50; they also allowed for the private sale of portions of the estate in advance of the auction. In mid-October, father James Ternan placed notices in Richmond's newspapers warning that Pumfrey had swindled the family:

"the said John Pumfrey having suddenly departed from the usual place of his late residence, and now concealing himself so as to furnish just grounds to suspect and believe he intends fraudulently to convert as far as he may be able to, the debts due to the said Patrick Ternan's executors, to his own private use."

Pumfrey had absconded, never to be seen in Richmond again. Not surprisingly, no further trace of "John Pumfrey" has been found in the historic or bibliographic record.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: Imprints; MESDA Index nos. 8150, 29599, 29600; Hubbard on Richmond; notices in Richmond newspaper (1799-1808).