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**William Proctor, Nathaniel Ponder, and the financing of
*Pilgrim's progress***

David Stoker

Among the manuscripts of the Beauchamp-Proctor family in the Norfolk Record Office, is a ledger entitled 'An account of My Estate out of Trade', described as probably belonging to William Proctor of Epsom and relating to various business ventures, between 1699 and 1705.¹ These ventures include a partnership with a Mr Bright, receipts from mortgages on property, and substantial investments in commodities such as wines, vinegar, tobacco, and parchment, in lottery tickets, Bank of England stocks, and in Old India and New India Company stocks. There are also records of loans to neighbours, to his relations, and to other businessmen. Among the latter, there are transactions involving about twenty members of the contemporary book trade.

In fact, the ledger belonged to William Proctor, a stationer who maintained a business in Bread Street, London, and who is recorded in Plomer's *Dictionary* under the surname Procter.² He was also listed by John Dunton, but among those men that supplied him with paper, rather than in the separate list of wholesale booksellers. However, it is clear both from Dunton's account and the entries in the ledger that Proctor had a role as a financier to the book trade as well as a supplier of its raw materials.³ Unfortunately the ledger does not provide a complete picture of his business activities: some of the debts recorded were taken out before it was opened, others were repaid after it was concluded, and he frequently refers to other ledgers, such as his Debt Book, his Cast Book, and his New Book. He also maintained a separate partnership account, which apparently relates to his business as a stationer, since there are several references to the purchase and sale of different grades of paper by the partnership.⁴ Nevertheless, this surviving ledger provides a rare and interesting snapshot of Proctor's activities in financing other members of the book trade. It also provides some useful information to supplement Frank Mott Harrison's account of Nathaniel Ponder the publisher of *Pilgrim's progress*.⁵

John Dunton describes William Proctor as

a Fortunate Man, being one of those that drew the Five Hundred a Year in the *Parliament Lottery* – As he is *Rich and Fortunate*, so he is free and Bountiful – He lives as a Man of an Estate shou'd do, yet (*like his Neighbour Merreal*) *he prefers Conscience before Riches, and desireth not to be Great, but to do good* – He is a GENEROUS CREDITOR, and will scarce think of the Debt I owe him, till I send it on my own Accord: For this must be said of the *Ingenious Proctor*, That his Wisdom can distinguish *betwixt Parasites and Friends, betwixt changing of Favours and expending them*.⁶

Money was regularly loaned to booksellers against mortgages of printed copies of their works, their rights in the copy, engraved plates, or else on a bond, but most entries provide scant details. For example, in December 1703 he loaned £80 to Benjamin Tooke Senior “To a Mortgage one some Copyes” or £30 to Gilham Hills at the King’s Printing House, “By his Bond to pay in July 1699” at an interest rate of six per cent.⁷ Proctor’s so-called *generosity*, or at least his reluctance to harass his debtors for repayment, is illustrated by his treatment of Walter Kettilby, bookseller in St Paul’s churchyard, who borrowed £100 “By a Mortgage of a parcel of Books date the 8th September 1697”. Proctor again charged a 6% simple interest rate on the principal debt each year, but no interest on any outstanding interest payments. Thus, he added £15 to the account on 8th March 1699/00 and £6 each year thereafter. He received his first payment of £10 interest on 19th June 1701 and by the fifth anniversary of the debt he had only received £13 of the £30 accrued interest owing and nothing of the principal.⁸ Likewise William Bonny of Bristol owed £10 “To three notes of his hand payable at severall times”. On 16th July 1701, Proctor delivered these notes to Richard Higgins of Bristol to receive payment on his behalf, but by 18th November he had received only half of the money due. Full payment was not made until 1704 and yet Proctor appears to have taken no further action, nor imposed any additional penalty.⁹

There are several transactions involving the publication of the fifth edition of William Howell’s, *Medulla historiae Anglicanae*. The copyright¹⁰ of this work was assigned to Proctor in 1699, by Abel Swayle, who had published the fourth edition in 1694.¹¹ On 20 March 1699/1700 Proctor refers to “1250 Books at Mr John Leakes paper and printing paid for”, and six months later on 23 September he notes “Mr Clavell Churchill, Bennett, & Company of Twenty is Drs To 1250 Books of Medula Anglicana sold them at 18d to pay in six months”.¹² When payment was received in May 1701, Proctor noted that it should be deducted from Leak’s account in the Debt book.¹³ The fifth edition is, in fact, dated 1701 with the imprint “Printed for R. Clavel, H. Mortlock, J. Robinson, E. Evets, S. Smith, J.

Taylor, T. Bennet, J. Knapton, J. Wyat, R. Knaplock, R. Wilkin, and D. Midwinter, Booksellers in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1701". The work therefore appears to have been produced on speculation by either Leak or Proctor, and the title page added only after copies had been sold to Robert Clavel and the other members of his conger.

Although Proctor did not normally operate as a wholesale bookseller, his name does occur on one occasion in the *Term Catalogues*. In February 1704, his shop is listed as one of the places where subscriptions were taken in for a new impression of Isaac-Louis Nicolas Fontaine's *History of the old and new testament*, on behalf of the "proprietor of the copy" Richard Blome.¹⁴ The reason for Proctor's involvement with this title is likewise illustrated by the ledger. Blome had borrowed £50 from him 18 December 1699, by a mortgage on some copper plates. A further £110 was loaned on 29 March 1703 against more plates and the copyright of the work. Again, on 15th December 1703, a further £41 was loaned against some more plates and maps. By the end of December 1703 Blome had repaid only £59 of the principal and £4 of the interest on these debts.¹⁵ Thus, Proctor was owed about £150 and therefore had a considerable financial stake in the sale of the new impression.¹⁶

The most detailed entries in the ledger relate to the sale of large numbers of copies of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress* in the period immediately following the death of Nathaniel Ponder, the original owner of the copyright, in June 1699. The background to the story is provided in Harrison's article. Ponder had registered the copy with the Stationers' Company in December 1677, and the first edition was published in 1678. The book enjoyed unprecedented and sustained popularity and was soon pirated, notably by the printer Thomas Braddyll, whom Ponder described as a "land pirate".¹⁷ Ponder therefore embarked on a series of costly, and ultimately ruinous lawsuits between 1679 and 1697 attempting to protect his property. However, partly due to the lapse of the 1662 Printing (Licensing) Act in May 1679, and the inability of the Stationers' Company to take action against those who were not members, Ponder was ultimately unable to obtain financial redress, and his business began to decline.¹⁸

The twelfth and thirteenth editions of the first part of *Pilgrim's progress* of 1689 and 1693 were printed for Nathaniel's son Robert, which is perhaps an indication that the father's resources were severely depleted. Further changes took place with the fourteenth edition of the first part (1695) and the seventh edition of the second part (1696), which were "printed

for W.P., and are to be sold by Nat. Ponder in London-House Yard”. This indicates that by then Ponder had assigned the copyright and was merely acting as a distributor or retailer for the work, and that he had also moved to smaller premises. The third edition of Bunyan’s *The life and death of Mr. Badman* (1696) was likewise printed “for W. P”, but without any reference to Ponder, who was by then describing himself as “being reduced to great Extremity” and canvassing for a position as one of the London Bridge-Masters.¹⁹ He was unsuccessful with his application and died in June 1699.²⁰ The fifteenth and eighth editions of the two parts of *Pilgrim’s progress* (both dated 1702) were also printed for the same W.P., whom Harrison surmises was probably a member of the Ponder family.²¹ However, William Proctor’s ledger rather indicates that he was the “W.P.” responsible for all these editions.

That Proctor was a creditor of Nathaniel Ponder is noted in two undated entries in the ledger. The first is headed “Copeys of Bookes is D” and lists the *Pilgrim’s Progress* (both parts), *The life of Mr Badman*, *The Holy War*, and “severall other copeys as by a Mortgage from Mr Ponder will appeare”.²² The second states “Mr Nath Ponder By a Mortgage on some Copyes, Several parcells of paper and Mony paid for him as in my Debt booke will apeare”²³. Neither of these entries mentions the extent of the debt, but the fact that by 1695 Proctor was undertaking new editions of Bunyan’s works in his own right, and thereafter several large transactions were still being credited to Ponder’s account in his Debt book shows that it must have been a substantial sum. Thus, Proctor’s account with the bookseller Henry Rhodes contains an entry for £65, dating from the summer of 1699, “for the first & second part of the Pilgrims Progress when this money is recvd it must be entered in my Debt Booke to Mr Penders Accompt Cr”. This transaction was later cancelled but later entries are as follows:

| | | | |
|--|----|----|------------------|
| Due more for Books sold him which will apere by the Debt Booke for ye Same Accompt | | | |
| Delivard Mr Roads by Mr Wild Printer at severall times 3000 | | | |
| of the second part of the Pilgrim at 3d as per booke | 43 | 15 | - |
| In Mr Wilds hand now to bee delivard him 925 of the second part of the Pilgrim at 3d | 13 | 9 | 9. ²⁴ |

Similarly, the ledger shows two parcels of books delivered to Awnsham and John Churchill on 26 July 1699 valued at £69 18s 3d, with the note “This money when recvd must be entred Cr to Mr Ponder”.²⁵ Such a figure would represent delivery of a further 5600 copies. The editions referred to were presumably the 14th edition of Part 1 (1695) and the 7th edition of Part 2 (1696), and so Proctor was still in a position to deliver nearly 10,000 copies three or

four years after publication of the editions. However, without access to the Debt Book, there is no way of calculating how large the edition sizes were nor how much he had expended on the printing and paper.

By the summer of 1701 Proctor was planning new editions of each of the two parts, as is apparent from the copy of the following agreement with the bookseller Nicholas Boddington, inserted into the ledger.

The 2d August 1701 bought of Mr William Proctor Eight Thousand of the first part of the Pilgrims Progress at three pence halfpenny per booke and five thousand of the second part of the Pilgrims Progress at three pence per booke to be Delivard in a reasonable time and I promis to pay the Mony to his content – given in part of payment one shilling.

Nicholas Boddington. Witness Tho Hawkes.²⁶

Despite the date of 1702 on the imprint, delivery of the 8000 copies of Part 1 was made on 14 August 1701, “by Mr Wild Mr Bradyll & Mr Croom printers at 3½ d per book”²⁷. The 5000 copies of part 2 were likewise delivered in September 1702. On this occasion, they carried the imprint “Printed for W.P. and to be sold by N. Boddington”, no doubt because of Boddington’s substantial advance order. The bookseller paid Proctor an initial £30 six months after the first delivery and thereafter made quarterly payments of £20 for each title. The whole account had been settled by the 13 June 1705.²⁸

Other booksellers who purchased Proctor’s new edition of *Pilgrims progress* on its publication in August 1701 were Thomas Guy who ordered 1500 copies and John Taylor who purchased 500 copies.²⁹ There are also recorded payments by Thomas Braddyll, the printer involved in some of the early piracies of the work.³⁰ All of these transactions were likewise credited to the Ponder account, although he had been dead several years. The implication is that the edition size of the first part was at least 10,000 copies, and at least 5,000 copies of the second part, and possibly considerably more.

William Proctor therefore appears to have been seeking to exploit his mortgage on the copyright and recover debts outstanding to him at Ponder’s death, which the latter’s heirs were otherwise unable to pay. The printing and sale of the 1701/2 editions of the two parts of

Pilgrim's progress may have been his only realistic chance of recovering his monies. Whether the profits were sufficient to discharge Ponder's debts is not clear. Soon afterwards the copyrights appear to have been sold to the Boddington family, who published the 16th-20th editions of the first part and the 9th-11th editions of the second part between 1707 and 1722. Whether the sale was by Proctor or by Ponder's heirs is not known. Thereafter the two parts of *Pilgrim's progress* were often marketed as a single work.

The remarkable sizes of Proctor's editions, and the frequency of new editions of both parts of *Pilgrim's progress*, during the half-century after its publication are further testimony to the contemporary popularity of the work, and the value of its copyright. This popularity was, of course, continued throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries through innumerable further editions and translations.

Notes

1. Norfolk Record Office (NRO) manuscript BEA 277 (shelfmark 438x), described in Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts “Report on the family and estate papers of the Beauchamp-Proctor family, Baronets of Langley” (1977), p.23. Despite the description, the ledger refers to transactions as early as 1696.
2. H.R. Plomer, *A dictionary of the printers and booksellers who were at work in England Scotland and Ireland from 1668 to 1725*, (London, 1922), p. 245. Proctor does not appear to have been a member of the Stationers’ Company.
3. John Dunton, *The life and errors of John Dunton late citizen of London*, (London, 1705), pp. 337-8.
4. Proctor mainly recorded totals for his partnership account in this ledger, but there are some references to purchases of paper, BEA 277, fols 68^r, and 20^r.
5. Frank Mott Harrison, “Nathaniel Ponder: the publisher of *Pilgrim’s progress*”, *The Library*, 4th series, XV, (1934), pp.257-294. See also his *A bibliography of the works of John Bunyan*, (Oxford, 1932).
6. Dunton, *Life and errors*, p. 337.
7. NRO BEA 277, fols 73^v, and 17^v.
8. NRO BEA 277, fol. 16^v.
9. NRO BEA 277, fol. 47^v.
10. Although the term copyright is strictly anachronistic before the mid-eighteenth century, I have used it to represent the legal rights in the copy of a text held by a bookseller.
11. NRO BEA 277, fol. 23^v. William Howell, *Medulla historiae anglicanae*, 4th edition, (London, 1694).
12. NRO BEA 277, fols 24^v-25^r.
13. Proctor received £95 in May 1701, with 15s worth of books remaining in Leake’s hands.
14. Edward Arber ed., *The Term Catalogues*, 3v (London, 1903-6), III. p. 396. The 3rd impression of *The history of the Old and New Testament*, has the imprint “London, Printed for the undertaker R. Blome and sold by S. Sprint and J. Nicholson, 1705”.
15. NRO BEA 277, fol. 14^v and 15^r.
16. Proctor may also have been given a few copies of the work for on 30 November and 1 December 1703 respectively he supplied one copy in quires to the booksellers William Hawes, and Mr Crouch of Popeshead Alley, on sale or return (fols 47b-48a).
17. Plomer, *A dictionary of the printers and booksellers ...1668 to 1725*, p. 45.
18. Details are given in Harrison, “Nathaniel Ponder”, 267-281, and H. R. Plomer, “A lawsuit as to an early edition of the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’”, *The Library*, 3rd series, V (1914), pp. 60-9.

Earlier editions of *Pilgrims progress* are described in the Introduction to John Bunyan, *The pilgrim's progress*, 2nd ed. edited by James Wharey, and Roger Sharrock, (Oxford, 1960).

19. Margaret Dowling, "Nathaniel Ponder". *The Library*, 4th series XVII, (1936/7) pp.109-10.

20. Alfred Chamberlain, "Nathaniel Ponder of Rothwell: Fresh Light on the Publisher of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'" *Graham Ward's Genealogy & Nonconformist History*, 2002
<http://website.lineone.net/~gsward/ponder/ponder2.html>.

21. Harrison, "Nathaniel Ponder", p. 286, footnote 1.

22. NRO BEA 277 fol. 41^v..

23. NRO BEA 277 fol. 73^v.

24. NRO BEA 277 fol. 42^v. "Mr Wild" refers to the printer Richard Wild.

25. NRO BEA 277 fol. 43^v.

26. The copy of the agreement is on a separate sheet inserted between pages 48^v and 49^f of the ledger.

27. NRO BEA 277 fol. 48^v. George Croom was also well-known London printer.

28. NRO BEA 277, fol. 49^f.

29. NRO BEA 277 fols 49^v-51^r.

30 Braddyll appears both to have been involved with the marketing of the work and received payments from Guy and Taylor on Proctor's behalf (NRO BEA 277 fols 49^v-51^r) but he also had an account with Proctor in his own right, borrowing £75 on 3rd January 1699/00, or which £30 had been repaid by 1704 (fols 25^v-26^r).

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