

James Abree was a printer in Canterbury in the eighteenth century.

By 1726, and possibly earlier¹, Abree was the printer of the Kentish Post. In a letter in his newspaper, written in 1768, he described himself as the ‘first printer and publisher of the Kentish Post, or Canterbury Newsletter’². The content of this newspaper was primarily London news. It has recently been discovered that the Kentish Post also serialized Moll Flanders in 1722³, only a year after the book was issued. The Moll Flanders content was not printed as an extra within the newspaper, but appeared on the front pages to attract new readers.

Having died at the age of 77 in 1768, it can be calculated that he was born in 1691. His apprenticeship papers state that his father, William, was of Winchester. James Abree served his apprenticeship with Ichabod Dawkes in London between 1705 and 1712. Until the end of the seventeenth century, printing had been confined to the cities of London, York and the two University cities but times changed and printing started spreading into provincial towns.

James Abree’s premises were sited somewhere near the junction of St Margaret Street, Castle Street and Beer Cart Lane in Canterbury.

In 1722⁴ he bought his freedom of the City of Canterbury, allowing him to work within the city.

His main printing work was the production of his twice weekly newspaper, the Kentish Post, but he also printed items for local civic authorities, as well as sermons for local clergy, and ballads, cards and advertisements for the general public⁵. The newspaper was issued on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and was a small format, the sheets being 9”x6¾”.

As well as printing, Abree was also a bookseller, stationer and sold patent medicines. This was not unusual for the times. Plomer suggests that in addition to the selling of bibles and hymn books, he also sold low priced popular books⁶. As well as selling books from his shop, he also employed ‘newsmen’ to travel around the towns and villages selling the books.

Imprints in Abree’s books show that he had links with various booksellers around Kent, in London and also with other cities around England.

¹ F.W. Cock, ‘The Kentish Post or the Canterbury News Letter’, *The Library*, The Transactions of the Bibliography Society vol.53, IV Issue 15, (1913). P.290. (<http://library.oxfordjournals.org>) Poem called Panegyric Poem on the Fair and Celebrated Beauties in and about the City of Canterbury – printed in 1718.

² D. Shaw and S. Gray. ‘James Abree (1691?-1768) Canterbury’s First ‘Modern Printer’ in P.Isaac and B McKay, ed., *The Reach of Print: Making, selling and reading books*, (1998)

³ D. Shaw, booklet 2007 ‘Serialization of Moll Flanders in The London Post and The Kentish Post, 1722’, offprint of *The Library*, The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society vol.8. No. 2, (2007).

⁴ E.Snell, ‘Discourses of criminality in the eighteenth-century press: the presentation of crime in The Kentish Post, 1717-1768’, *Continuity and Change* Vol.22, Issue 01, (2007). P.17.

⁵ Shaw and Gray, op.cit., p.29

⁶ H R Plomer, ‘James Abree, Printer and Bookseller, of Canterbury’ *The Library*, The Transactions of the Bibliography Society. P.51. (1913)

In 1764 Abree appointed George Kirkby as his assistant at the Kentish Post. In May 1768 James Abree printed a letter in the newspaper stating he would be retiring in favour of Kirkby. However, as the Kentish Post was changing to a new editor, so another newspaper, the Kentish Gazette, came into competition. In 1767, James Simmons had returned to Canterbury, after his apprenticeship in London, and almost immediately set in motion the setting up a newspaper. This trade war between the two newspapers was shortlived as Simmons persuaded Kirkby to join him at the Kentish Gazette and the last Kentish Post was published on July 20 1768.

On August 20 1768 James Abree died only a month after the announcement that the newspaper he had run for so long was to cease. He was buried at Deal, St Leonards on September 1 1768.