

# A Collection of Business Papers From Eighteenth-Century Leeds

Through the kindness of Professor Herbert Heaton of the University of Minnesota the editor has learned of a valuable set of business papers recently found in Leeds, England. The *Yorkshire Post* of March 25, 1938, tells of the discovery of the papers of John Wilson & Sons, of Leeds, which date from the middle of the eighteenth century. This collection, according to the *Post*, consists of "nearly 200 volumes, comprising day books, cash books, company ledgers, district ledgers, inventories, stock books, warehouse and delivery books, and others of a miscellaneous character." The papers have been placed in the municipal Reference Library of Leeds.

John Wilson, born in 1731, entered business in Leeds as a very young man. He became a merchant—a linen draper—but, as the sedentary merchant had for centuries done, he also performed other functions than buying and selling goods. He did some banking. And in 1754 he formed a partnership with a John Arthington, another linen draper of Leeds, for dyeing linen and dealing in ferrets and buckram.

Here the collection touches a significant development. The merchant in England was already important in banking. John Wilson and his partner continued for some time to carry on an expanding business, but in 1774 their banking was amalgamated with the banking house of Beckett's. The merchant in England was also beginning to occupy an important position in the textile industry. Among the earliest processes that he took over as an industrial entrepreneur in textiles were apparently the dyeing, dressing, and finishing of the cloth,<sup>1</sup> and later he participated indirectly and directly in spinning and weaving. The *Yorkshire Post* tells us that Wilson and his partner dyed linen; probably their records will show that they went much further in their interest in textile manufacture. It would be interesting to know if John Wilson or his successors went through the whole process of change from a sedentary merchant to an industrial specialist.

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<sup>1</sup> On the industry around Leeds, see Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries* (Oxford, 1920).