



Our History

1800 - 1900

SINCE 1833

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In **1833**, 25-year-old John Menzies left his London publishing job and opened a bookshop at 61 Princes Street, Edinburgh. At the time, not many publishers sent representatives to Scotland, and John Menzies saw an opportunity to become the only wholesale bookseller north of the border.

In **1835**, John Menzies was described by Gray's Edinburgh Directory as Bookseller, Stationer and Printseller, although he was also known for publishing books, engravings and – rather unusual for the time – selling [The Scotsman](#) newspaper over the counter.

In **1837**, Charles Dickens' first novel – The Pickwick Papers – was published in monthly instalments. The publishers, Chapman & Hall, appointed John Menzies as their Scottish agent. The great popularity of the work enables John Menzies to lay the foundations of his wholesale department. It also brought about a friendship between himself and the author.

In **1841**, Bradbury & Evans appointed him agent for the famous periodical Punch.

In **1855** John Menzies opened accounts with the Daily Express and Daily Mirror – two very different daily newspapers from their present-day namesakes (The modern Daily Mail was founded in 1896, and the Daily Express in 1900). The 1855 papers were unsuccessful, but introduced John Menzies to the possibilities of newspaper distribution, and the firm was ready to handle dailies when the occasion arose.

The export market also caught Menzies' interest, and he conducted a lively export trade to New Zealand, Australia, and other colonies through the agency of an ex-employee who had emigrated to New South Wales in the **1840's**. The export business, however, became a fiercely competitive one and the export department closed in the 1850s.

A new phenomenon, and a very important one for John Menzies, arose in **1857**: the railway bookstall.

The Princes Street shop closed in **1859** and a new wholesale warehouse opened at 2 South Hanover Street. The company has no shop until **1928**.

By the time he handed over the reins of the Company to his sons he had secured the rights of bookstalls in almost every part of Scotland. His wholesale business meanwhile continued to grow, and 61 Princes Street was found to be too small to house the range of stocks he intended to carry. Premises in Hanover street were obtained, and, perhaps not very reluctantly, the retail side of bookselling was dropped.

The new warehouse in Hanover Street, became the home of John Menzies, Wholesaler.

After several attempts, John Menzies secures the bookstall concession for Waverley station in the heart of Edinburgh in **1862**.

The partnership of John Menzies and Company is formed in **1867**, reflecting the growing scope of the company.

The first Glasgow wholesale warehouse opened in **1868**, giving the company its first foothold in the west, while the Edinburgh warehouse moves to 12 Hanover Street in **1871**.

By the time he retired, handing the business down to his sons, John Menzies had secured the rights to bookstalls in almost every part of Scotland.

After the death of the founder, John Menzies, his two sons took over and began an era of remarkable expansion. John R. and Charles Menzies opened wholesale branches throughout the country, and by **1934** there were 13 branches around Scotland. During John and Charles' leadership, the business was transformed into a nation-wide organisation.