

# Decline of the industry



**T**he large printing and publishing firms that dominated the industrial landscape in many Scottish cities have now largely disappeared. The industry, that employed a workforce of between 5,000 and 7,000 people in Edinburgh alone until the late 1960s, has suffered a severe contraction of its activities.

The period from 1880 to 1945 had represented a period of relative expansion for the larger printers based in Edinburgh and Glasgow. For printers in the smaller towns of Scotland it represented decline and marginality – or relocation to the larger industrial centres as was the case of MacLehose which had moved from a small-scale business in Ayr to an industrial plant in Glasgow. However, much of the expansion marked in the two major cities was as a result of amalgamation and consolidation. Morrison and Gibb, Edinburgh for example, merged with Scott and Fergusson in 1896, with W. and A.K. Johnston in 1931, and Mould and Tod in 1932.



After the Second World War such mergers were symptomatic of the weakness of the industry in Edinburgh and Glasgow and an uneasy alternative to one or other of the partners going bust. Increasing overseas competition and failure to reinvest in the new technologies of print production weakened the industry in Scotland. From the 1960s onwards, many firms such as Collins, Blackies and Aberdeen University Press decided to keep the publishing and close the printing operations of their companies. This became the increasing pattern within the printing industry with many companies amalgamating and production activities moving out of Scotland.

With this decline in the fortunes of the printing industry employers were less inclined to fulfil the paternalistic role that they had hitherto performed. The creation of larger conglomerates destroyed the family atmosphere that had existed in the industry. Annual paid holidays negotiated by the unions and the increase in leisure opportunities for all employees led to the annual trip and provision of other social activities for employees disappearing off the agenda of most companies. The social cohesion within the industry reinforced through these activities became a memory.

