

Books by the thousand

The mass production of books in Fakenham came about in the late 19th century when Miller, Son & Co obtained a contract from some London publishers. Miller's desire to expand and capitalise on this was their downfall.

Their successors, Wyman & Sons produced the first few titles of the new 'Pan' paperbacks. Later Pan went to a printer who had a smoother workflow which suited this new type of book, thereafter Fakenham produced mostly hard-cased books for high-end publishers.

Among them were Allen, Bodley Head, Cape, Cassell, Colins, Dent, Evans, H&S, Ward Lock, Methuen, Routledge, the Universities (2), Ward, Wiedenfeld, etc.

Before it ended Fakenham was producing coffee table books for the likes of Thames & Hudson and Hamlyn. A system was set up to service these customers but it had to be flexible at both ends to take account of events like the Second World War, the print strike of 1959 and the reduced hours in the 1970s. On the way some interesting publishers were picked up such as a Scottish one who corresponded by handwritten letters on the back of cornflake packets and another who published African books and had trouble sending proofs back for press because the authors were in prison or exile!

Suddenly lorries laden with books ceased to travel south out of Fakenham but local publishers continued to have books produced in the town by other printers.

There is speculation that, today in the digital age, as many books would be produced using only a fraction of the original staff.