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Monday, March 27th 2017

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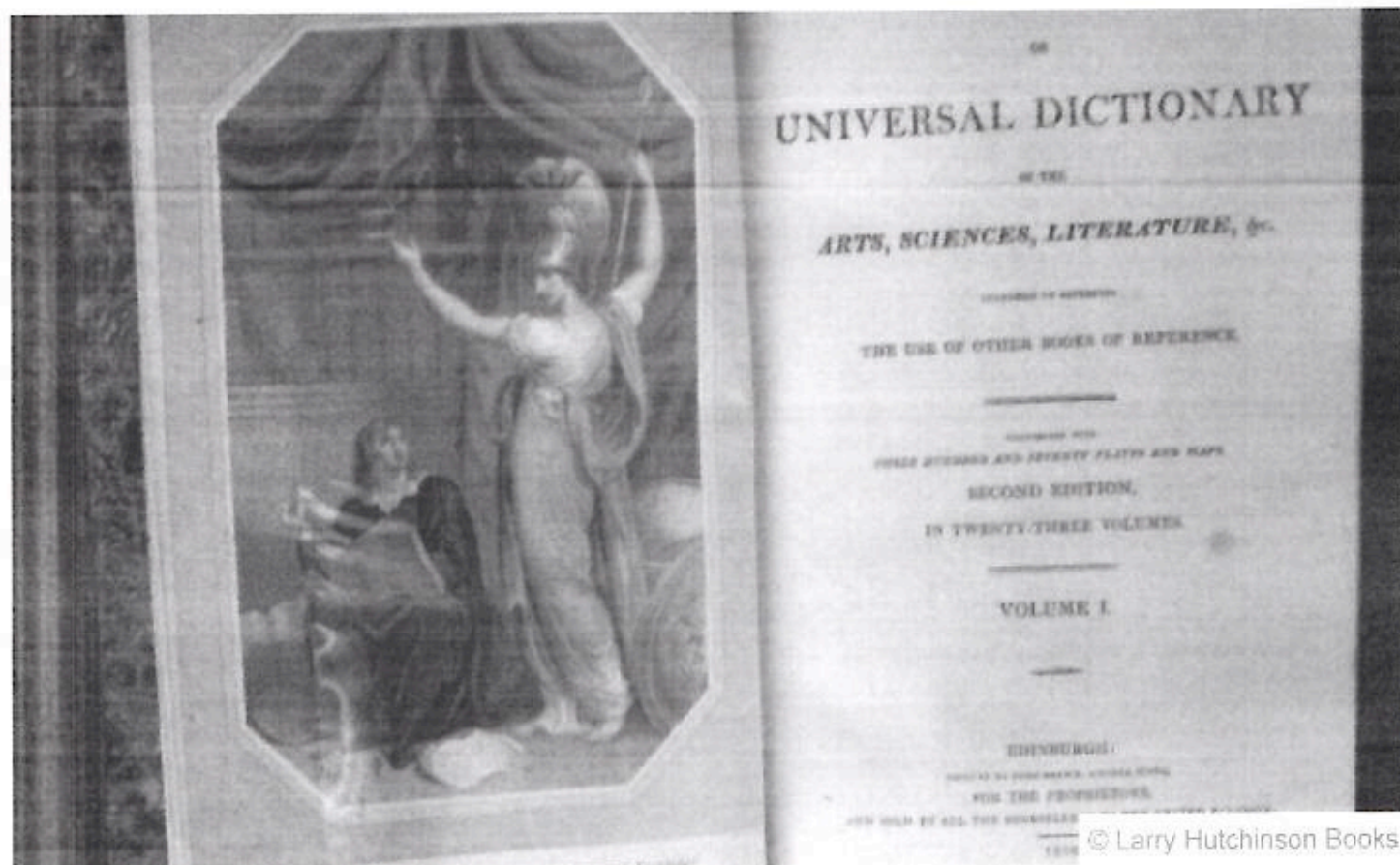
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Perth publication was a bright star in the printing world

by **Norman Watson**

March 25 2017, 8.00am

Updated: March 16 2017, 10.03am



Encyclopaedia Perthensis, £1800

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DUNDEE TOOK up the printing trade in fits and starts, but the Morison family of Perth brought great distinction to the town – not least by bringing out a Courier newspaper in 1809, seven years before this wee brother came along!

Robert Morison, born in 1722 and apprenticed to his bookbinder father, was the brightest in a firmament of shining family stars, and around 40 titles passed through their prolific presses between 1773 and 1800.

A second edition of the greatest of them all appears in the catalogue of Dunfermline antiquarian book dealer Larry Hutchinson, priced at £1800 (www.larryhutchinsonbooks.com).

Begun in 1796, *Encyclopaedia Perthensis; or, Universal Dictionary of the Arts, Sciences, Literature, &c.*: intended to supersede the use of all other books of reference, was originally

published in Perth in monthly parts costing six shillings, but did not proceed as regularly as the Morisons had hoped. By 1802 it was behind schedule with the cost of a monthly part raised to seven shillings as the result of increasing taxes on paper.

Encyclopaedia Perthensis must have sold well enough, however, to encourage the proprietors to embark on the second edition now in Mr Hutchinson's stock. Spanning 23 volumes, this was printed by John Brown in Edinburgh in 1816.

I am indebted to Mr Hutchison for the following note:

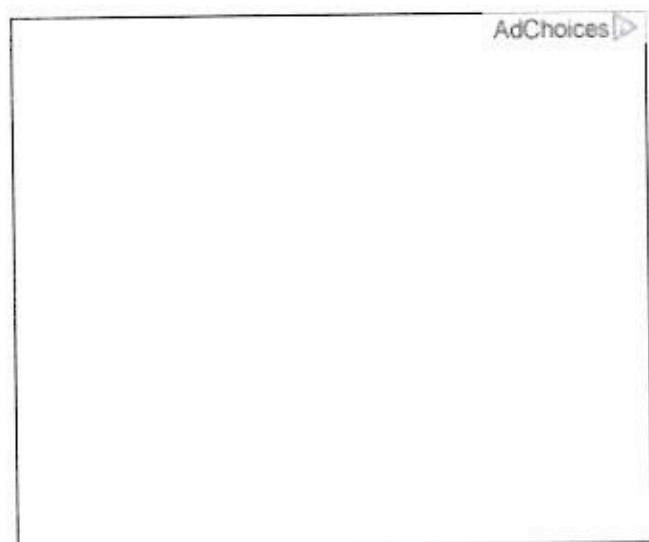
"While there is little evidence to support the claim made by some that William Morison was the real editor, there can be no questioning that he was the driving force behind the venture. Tragically, his death on July 22, 1806 at the age of just 26 – possibly from overwork – came only months before the work was advertised as complete on September 5.

"The grandiose claim made on the title pages that the *Perthensis* would supersede all other encyclopaedias was to prove ill-founded, but it did serve as the basis for the first American encyclopaedia, before the expanded Britannica swept all before it."

Meanwhile, a new festival dedicated to rare and collectable books is under way in Edinburgh.

'Rare Books Edinburgh' celebrates book culture, collecting and the history of the book. The programme includes talks, workshops, and exhibitions, and incorporates the Edinburgh Book Fair.

The festival runs until Thursday. Further details online.



Picture: *Encyclopaedia Perthensis*, £1800 (Larry Hutchinson Books).

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