

James Ballantyne

1770-1833

James Ballantyne was the son and grandson of successful Kelso merchants who ran a business at the corner of the Square. He attended Kelso Grammar School, and it was there in 1783 that he first made friends with Walter Scott who was his fellow-pupil for several months, while Scott stayed with his aunt in Kelso. James went on to study Law at Edinburgh University, then returned to Kelso to practice as a solicitor in 1795.



James Ballantyne
Courtesy of Abbotsford House

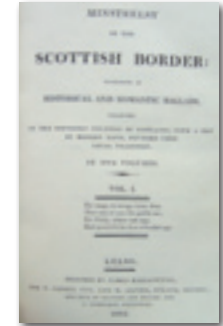
He was soon involved in a new venture, the *Kelso Mail* newspaper, which first appeared on April 13th 1797. After a chance meeting with Scott, Ballantyne invited him to write a legal article for his newspaper. When Scott visited Ballantyne's printing office in Bridge Street, he suggested that James should try some book printing work as well as newspapers. As a result of this conversation, Ballantyne printed first a limited edition of a few of Scott's ballads *Apology for Tales of Terror*, and then in 1802 a much larger work, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This was a great success and soon ran into a second edition.



Walton Hall

By 1803 Ballantyne had been persuaded to move his business to Edinburgh. *The Minstrelsy* was soon followed by *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion* and other best sellers. In 1811, with *Waverley*, published anonymously, Scott launched into his career as the best selling novelist of his day. He had also by this time become a major partner in Ballantyne's printing business, providing it with the capital to expand.

At the end of 1825 the partners were struck with disaster. Following a collapse in the publishing business which ruined Scott's publisher Constable, it was discovered that the Ballantyne printing company was seriously in debt. Faced with ruin, Scott stood by his friend Ballantyne, admitted publicly his role in the business, and undertook to pay off the debts from the proceeds of his writing. Their affairs were put in charge of a trust and Ballantyne was allowed to continue as manager of the business.



*Minstrelsy of the
Scottish Border*

The huge success of Scott as a novelist owed much to Ballantyne who not only printed all his works but also proof read and corrected them, and often offered his advice on matters of style and language. Ballantyne died in March 1833, just a few months after his life-long friend Walter Scott.

The Other Ballantynes

John Ballantyne James's brother was for several years Scott's agent and publisher, and copied out his manuscripts, to preserve the secret of the author's identity. He built Walton Hall in Roxburgh Street, but died before it was finished.

Alexander Ballantyne the youngest brother ran the *Kelso Mail* after James went to Edinburgh. He lived briefly in Walton Hall then moved to Edinburgh to help in the business. His son **R. M. Ballantyne** was a best selling children's author.

