

How John Ryland Read Jonathan Edwards: Material Texts and the Eighteenth-Century Expansion of Evangelicalism
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For the Baptist minister and theologian John Ryland (1753-1825) reading was as much a material process as a mental one. Historians have long acknowledged the influence of specific texts by Jonathan Edwards on Ryland's emergence as a leading eighteenth-century evangelical and proponent of the modern missionary movement. What they haven't explored is the way Ryland's physical engagement with these texts – the complex ways Ryland *read* Jonathan Edwards – shaped his understanding of his own faith as well as that of evangelicalism as a transatlantic, and later global, movement.

The recent rediscovery of Ryland's annotated copies of *An Account of the Life of David Brainerd* (1765 edition) and *The Life of Jonathan Edwards* (1765 edition) provides an opportunity to explore the way John Ryland read Jonathan Edwards in three different contexts. First, I want to look at Ryland's engagement with the material text, focusing on the range of inscriptive practices he used over the course of his life while reading and re-reading these books. Second, I want to situate these books in relation to the other material texts in the libraries of dissenting academies of which Ryland knew or had access, as a boy in Northampton and from 1793 to his death in 1825 as the head of the Bristol Baptist College. This is something we can now do thanks to ongoing efforts to reconstruct these libraries digitally. Finally, I want to interrogate the role of material texts played in the transformation of the evangelical movement on personal, regional, and transnational levels from the transatlantic revivals of the 1740s to a global missionary movement of the 1780s and beyond.

Such an approach furthers not only our appreciation of the complex ways in which evangelicals like Ryland read material texts, but also the central roles books played in facilitating networks, spreading new ideas, and providing opportunities for transformative experiences over the eighteenth century.