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Mathematicians in the British Financial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century

Some modern historians of science have argued that during the eighteenth century practicing mathematicians had little or no impact on the pricing of life contingent products that were sold in the marketplace, although the same mathematicians wrote several books on the fair pricing of these products. For the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century, the major life contingent product was the life annuity. Annuities were sold both on the open market for privately financed schemes and through the government to finance the national debt. Through the use of several examples, it is shown that there was a diffuse, but perhaps not very large, group of mathematicians active in the annuity and insurance marketplace during the eighteenth century. These mathematicians acted as consultants to those buying or selling annuities in the marketplace. It is argued that publication of their books on annuities was, in part, a form of self-advertisement and an establishment of the credibility of their qualifications.