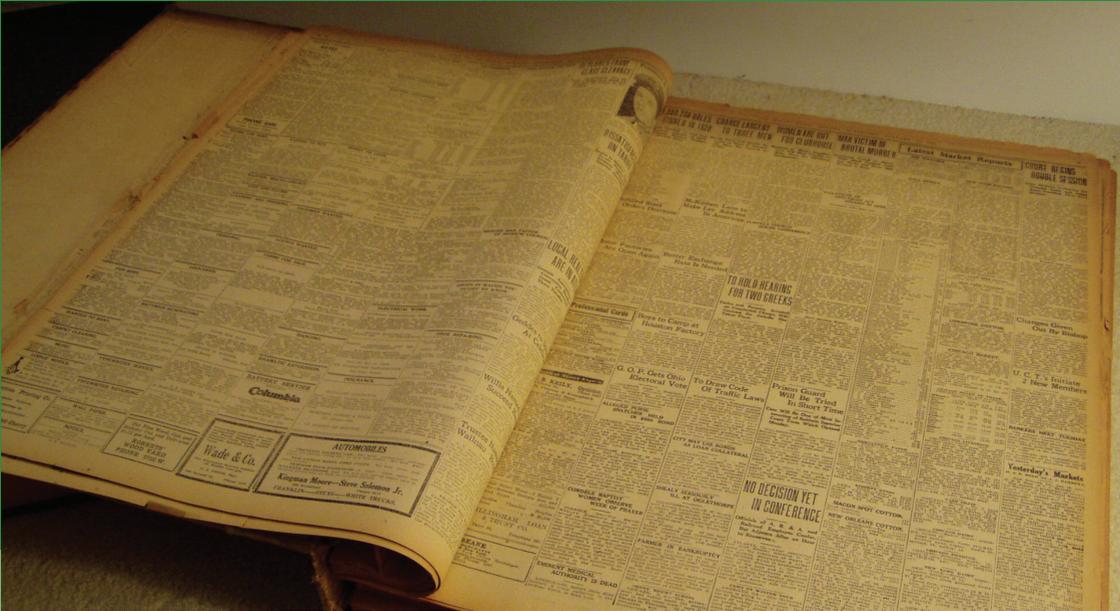


Historical Insights

Focus on Research



NEWSPAPERS

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'News is what someone wants to stop you printing: all the rest is ads.'

-William Randolph Hearst, US newspaper proprietor

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Introduction

Newspapers ... do not merely report the news: they 'make the news meaningful'. Their linguistic and visual style, their presentation and format, their address to audience and topics, their rhetorics and appearance offer us the vital clues to their collective identities.¹

The relationship between the periodical press, especially newspapers, and the study of history is a long and tumultuous one. Newspapers provide crucial information and first-hand accounts of historical events. Likewise, their form, language and content provide clues to the shape of the public sphere of a given location or period. On the other hand, the history of journalism and printing, of specific editors and titles, continues to be a rich and growing field in and of itself, pursued by students of history and journalism alike. Finally, students of literature and intellectual history strive to explore and illuminate the evolution of political, literary and scientific thought through serialised publications in their myriad forms. From these rich academic discourses, historians seeking to utilise periodical literature can draw on a wealth of experience and expertise.

This guide aims to serve as an introduction to these resources and methodologies. Those who begin working with newspapers often find themselves re-inventing the wheel, struggling to map out the political, literary and commercial nature of the press and the correct ciphers with which to decode the author's intentions, or even his or her identity. Therefore, this guide, divided along roughly chronological lines, will provide a narrative of the development of serialised publication alongside some practical advice on obtaining and utilising primary material. Owing to the divergent evolution of printing and newspapers in other nations, this introduction will content itself with a discussion of printing in Britain, though its bibliography will provide information on introductory texts for other Anglophone regions.

Although the reader may already have some indication as to the intrinsic historical value of newspapers, it is important to clarify both the rewards a researcher can reasonably expect to obtain and the considerations and limits they are most likely to encounter.

Rewards and considerations

The first and most obvious benefit of utilising newspapers in historical research is access to contemporary accounts of specific events. Although reportage cannot be taken as gospel truth of events as they occurred, reporters and correspondents often

¹ From Stuart Hall's introduction in A.C.H. Smith, *Paper Voices*, p.21.

had access to information and materials which are no longer available to modern historians. Properly vetted, this information can inform and even transform narratives of historical events and processes.

The range of voices is also an important reward of newspaper research. Unlike personal documents, such as diaries, correspondence and accounts, newspaper reports are generally written by individuals who were not directly involved with the event itself and can provide a degree of objectivity, or at least detached reflection. Newspapers with differing affiliations can also provide varying perspectives on the same event, adding to the historical debate. Conversely, letters-to-the-editor, public notices and advertisements provide a written record of individuals for whom manuscript material would be difficult or impossible to obtain.²

Moreover, these same advertisements offer qualitative and quantitative data crucial to understanding the commercial environment of various time periods. By tracing the frequency, length, ornamentation, language and marketing innovations present in these advertisements, historians can trace trends in consumer habits and fluctuations in local, regional and national markets. By examining the commercial content, including pricing and geographic distribution, historians can better understand the shifts in supply and demand of consumer and trade goods.³

Finally, the use of newspapers, especially those with a clear and consistent editorial stance or intention, can provide access to the public sphere of a particular place or time. Recorded verbal conversations are, unfortunately, a luxury only possible in the past 100 years and even these are highly selective, based on class and social prominence. Written conversation, however, in the form of printed letters and poetry, editorial response and counter response, existed within the periodical press almost from its inception, and was in fact an essential element from the mid-17th century onwards. Though removed from the everyday chatter of society, such accounts nonetheless offer us at least a preliminary view of the assumptions, presumptions, prejudices and aspirations of a society.

For all their worth, however, a scrupulous historian would not dream of taking the editors of newspapers at their given word. Bias, intentional and unintentional, stated, unstated and hidden, exists to some degree in all accounts of the past and present. Depending on the newspaper in question, this bias may in fact be part of the commercial and intellectual appeal of the publication. When the bias belongs to a known editor, or dutiful staff adhering to editorial instructions, it can generally be accounted for. But with anonymous correspondents, advertisers, poets, essayists and

2 S. Lovell, 'Finding a mate in late Tsarist Russia: the evidence from marriage advertisements', p.53.

3 M.H. Beals, "'Passengers wishing to embrace this commodious conveyance, will apply immediately': the rise in migrant passage advertising in the Scottish Borders, 1800–1830'.

eye-witnesses, bias is less readily recognised. Nonetheless, attempts to corroborate facts from these works, or catalogue obvious omissions or unwarranted additions, may lead to hints, if not confirmation, of biases maintained by the author.

Equally troublesome are those authors who relied on faulty or incomplete sources. A correspondent or journalist may have acted in true good faith in their presentation, only to be thwarted by untrustworthy information. Yet, like bias, verifiable mistakes in reportage can be as useful to the historian as direct evidence. By examining the reasons for the misinformation, a great deal can be determined about contemporary perceptions, communication methods and logical assumptions.

Human frailty is not, however, the only difficulty of using newspapers in historical research. Many practical problems will also beset the earnest academic. The most common is the fact that what is of interest to you was of no or very little interest to the newspaper. Not all topics have been covered systematically for all periods or regions. Moreover, while many newspapers overlapped in scope and intent, other combinations leave wide gaps in the public discourse. A rural community in the 18th century may only have had regular access to London miscellanies and a local literary magazine; neither of these is likely to have contained detailed information on local crop prices. For those historians researching the recent past, this problem is less acute, but the rise of modern local papers, and their idiosyncrasies, means this difficulty remains.

Even when a suitable set of publications is identified, incomplete runs abound. The consolidation of newspapers into larger repositories, such as the British Library, has reduced but not eliminated this problem. Although it is possible that many issues still exist in private collections, or wrapped around family heirlooms in private attics, it is certain that many serials, and their ephemera, have been lost forever. Some of these can be recreated from the reprints and transcriptions of other, earlier, historical accounts, or guessed at from the context of succeeding issues, but the loss of the original is an unfortunate truth in newspaper research. Many publications produced multiple editions, each bearing the same date and issue number, but with content which could vary greatly between: earlier and later editions, a by-product of spreading a print run over a number of days to reduce costs and deliver to faraway places; updated editions, to publish 'breaking news'; and geographical editions, with material selected to cater for different areas.

Individuals studying the newspaper itself are likely to encounter the other major practical stumbling block: the lack of complete business accounts. Information regarding larger newspapers, and those still in production, are often available in local, national or corporate archives, though the selection and available dates may vary widely. Accounts and other records attached to smaller newspapers may have been

conflated within family papers or other local archival collections but many more have been lost. One solution to this difficulty, albeit only a partial one, is the use of printers' copies, which have marginalia noting advertising prices and other editorial decisions.

Formats

Newspapers were originally disseminated in a variety of formats. Likewise, they have been preserved in a number of ways within libraries, archives and private collections, primarily as bound originals, microfilm reels and digital collections.

Loose and bound originals

Loose and bound originals, held by local records offices, public and academic libraries and national archives, were at one time the only publicly held record of serialised publications. Individual broadside sheets and magazine issues may be held by these bodies, with early publications usually maintained in special collections. However, when a sufficiently long run of a publication is held, most archives and libraries provide bound volumes of newspapers. This method of temporally organising printed material is extremely useful when undertaking longitudinal studies, such as economic or social trends, or research focusing upon a single event, the date of which is already known. It is also helpful when studying particular sections or articles within the context of the entire issue, its placement as well as a reference by or to it within other pieces. If a historian is fortunate enough to obtain printers' copies, or a complete run from a personal collection, they may also find insightful marginalia illuminating either the commercial or political interest of the reader.

This method is less helpful to those historians seeking a number of small, temporally discrete items. If a researcher has no clear indication of where the sought-after information might exist, either from secondary literature or indices, they must sacrifice many days, if not weeks and months, systematically digesting the issues in order to obtain the correct details. Even when specific dates are known, bound volumes may present other practical problems. For example, having to seek out editorials by a particular correspondent, whose writings appeared only once or twice a year over the course of a decade, would usually result in a high stack of heavy volumes or frequent returns to the circulation desk, often with lengthy wait times between retrievals. Perhaps more pressing is the difficulty or impossibility of transferring these volumes between locations. Careful study may require the researcher to visit a distant library or archive for a lengthy period, or even a number of different libraries in order to examine a complete run.

Technical considerations are few. Being original print on paper copies of the serials, they can be read without the aid of machinery, save lighting. Bound volumes may obscure text or images near the binding, but this is usually a minor issue. Reproductions can usually be made with standard photocopiers, though fragile or oversized pieces may need to be reproduced by archival staff or be excluded from reproduction altogether. Conservation concerns, on the other hand, are many. Unlike pre-20th-century books, most newspapers were published on inferior paper that requires specific humidity and care to maintain it. As newspapers are used by researchers they become damaged by not only the movement of pages but also the dirt and oils on their fingertips. Even the light and adverse humidity within the reading rooms will eventually degrade most newspapers beyond the point where they can be consulted. It is for this reason that reproductions are becoming more and more important for historians.

Microfilm / Microfiche

The next technological step up from loose or bound originals is the use of microfilm or microfiche. These provide miniature reproductions of the newspapers on either reels (Microfilm) or sheets (Microfiche) which are then viewed on special readers that backlight and magnify the image.

In terms of research methodology, microfilm and fiche can be moved through linearly, as with bound volumes, keeping articles within the context of their pages and issues. However, the researcher can also move quickly through weeks or years with little physical effort. Like bound volumes, however, there is no simple method for quickly identifying specific information without the aid of secondary literature or an index.

Practically, there are many important considerations when using microfilm or microfiche. Both formats usually contain multiple issues of the newspaper, ranging from several days to several years, in a lightweight and easily movable medium. Because of this, researchers will have to make fewer individual requests from librarians and may even have direct access to otherwise rare or fragile newspapers. They can also be shipped between libraries and archives with relative ease and safety. Machinery is required to view, but is simple and widely accessible, being composed primarily of a backlight and magnifying glass, neither likely to become obsolete or require updating in the near future (unlike digital reproductions). Many of these also allow the user to print their current view, making the reproduction of articles a much quicker process. However, high printing fees — often more than 50p per page in many archives — should be taken into consideration when planning a research budget.

In terms of long-term historical preservation, the life expectancy of properly stored microfilm and microfiche is 500 years, though they are susceptible to some fungal

degradation in tropical conditions. Moreover, it would take particularly determined vandals to damage the film, which is not easy to tear or otherwise deface. In the same vein, as they are reproductions, it is unlikely an individual would extract valuable pages or steal the entire reel. Even if they did so, the originals or master copies remain and the reels are easily replicated.

There are several disadvantages, however. Regardless of the material being reproduced, almost all microfilm is black and white — usually not even greyscale — as colour reproduction is highly expensive and beyond the means of most libraries and archives. This reduces the clarity of images, especially photographs, when moving into research of later 20th-century publications. The films or fiches are also usually backlit, which can cause eyestrain during the prolonged viewing needed for historical research. Likewise, the machinery, though theoretically simple in nature, is often difficult to use, especially when manual feeding and winding of the reels is necessary. Moreover, while public access to microfiche and film makes it more accessible, it also greatly increases the frequency of mis-shelving and loss.

Digitised

As we progress into the second decade of the 21st century, we are blessed with an increasing selection, both geographically and temporally, of digitised newspaper collections. Within Britain, the British Library's online collection of 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century newspapers is quickly becoming a first port of call for historians exploring the public implications of events and processes. Likewise, the National Library of Australia and America's Library of Congress offer extensive publicly accessible digital collections of newspapers and magazines from all periods of their colonial and independent histories. Fee-based digital collections, such as those by individual newspapers and Newsbank, also offer access to a wide range of newspapers. Finally, as part of Google News and Google Books, the Google Corporation has already digitised a large number of Anglophone newspapers from throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. To access these, one must simply alter the date range under Google news to the appropriate decade or century.

Digital newspapers offer a number of advantages over physical or microfilm versions. The first is the ability to search rapidly for specific keywords. Apart from a handful of newspapers, most hardcopy newspapers lack a comprehensive index. Furthermore, these indexes are far from definitive, being constrained thematically and temporally. Without (or even with) an index, searching for specific details can therefore be like looking for a needle in a haystack. For early newspapers especially, there is no guarantee of distinctive headlines to aid you. Even if the newspaper does have relevant articles, the time taken to search can be prohibitive. Since there is no guarantee of

success, some historians would consider this to be an inefficient use of their time, particularly in the early stages of research.

Digital technology has provided a highly effective solution to this issue. The vast majority of online collections are searchable by keyword. This allows historians to search millions of newspaper pages in a fraction of a second and find all instances of a particular word or phrase. Although this technology is not 100 per cent accurate, it greatly increases the likelihood of finding useful information. It is now possible to perform months' worth of research in a matter of hours. This makes it easier to explore the viability of a new research project without first spending time and money in a conventional archive.

As well as making newspaper research quicker and more convenient, keyword searchable archives also open up the possibility of developing new methodologies. Historians are gradually beginning to recognise that digital archives allow them to do things not possible before. We can now ask new kinds of questions of our sources, make new connections between material, and resolve questions that have long eluded us. Although this research is still in its infancy, it is already beginning to generate a range of new qualitative and quantitative approaches to newspaper research. As these resources mature, it is likely that they will have an increasingly significant effect on the development of new research questions and debates. It is increasingly important, therefore, to consider how the availability of digital archives might impact upon, or even reshape, the possibilities of a research project.

The second key advantage of digital archives is a matter of access. Although microfilm and microfiche can be transported and duplicated for multiple libraries, this process is not comprehensive and still requires access to machinery within the library or institutional environment. As public libraries and archives restrict opening hours, researchers are increasingly at the mercy of shifts in public funding. As it is unlikely that all the relevant publications are available locally or through inter-library loan, most serious investigations will require long term research with newspapers in the relevant national library at great expense of time and money. This is especially true for those studying newspapers from multiple colonies or nations, as none of the major national libraries hold a fully comprehensive collection of Anglophone newspapers.

Digital systems, however, allow for access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from most internet terminals. Although the collections of the British Library require access via a subscriber institution, all UK Higher Education institutions currently have one. These resources are typically accessed through a university library's website. Some local libraries, keen to capitalise on the popularity of amateur genealogy, also offer free online access to these resources for library card holders. For researchers

unaffiliated with an academic institution, becoming a member of one of these libraries is the most effective way to gain long-term access to certain online archives. Alternatively, the British Library currently sells 24-hour and seven-day individual passes to its 19th-century collection.

The National Library of Australia and the Library of Congress, on the other hand, offer free access worldwide, as do some Canadian collections. Like original and microfilm copies, most digital collections allow you to view the article or advertisement within the context of its page and issue. However, this is usually not the default view and requires the foresight of the researcher to expand his or her view beyond the highlighted portion. Failure to do so can cause difficulties in establishing authorship and relative importance, which are often gleaned from an article's location within the issue. Options for reproduction, digital and in hardcopy, are usually available at a lower cost than in-library photocopy services, though these do vary based on copyright restrictions.

Digital newspapers do, however, have drawbacks. First, many smaller and even some major newspapers have not been and may never be digitised. Solely relying on digital resources, therefore, is likely to skew historical research significantly. Moreover, those studying early newspapers, especially those before 1850, are far less likely to obtain a representative sample of digital sources. Researchers interested in exploring regional difference should also take caution. Most databases contain one paper from each town, making it difficult to ascertain whether a publication articulates a local consensus or represents one of many divergent viewpoints. In order to speak of 'Manchester's opinion' or of 'Portsmouth's response' to an event, it is still necessary to consult a representative range of non-digitised publications. Another disadvantage is the loss of marginalia, which are usually avoided in favour of clean copies, since these are easier to word-search with optical character recognition software. As regards variant editions, only the Nineteenth Century Serial Edition has made an attempt to digitise all available editions for each date. More sentimentally, some researchers consider the loss of materiality — physical interacting with the page, understanding the weight, quality and true viewing — to be a significant flaw of digital reproductions.

In terms of long-term preservation, digital copies, which can include greyscale and full colour images at a comparable cost, theoretically have a superior lifespan compared with either copies of originals or microfilm reproductions and can be duplicated with little or no degradation between generations. However, the rapid increase in digital technology threatens to quickly make obsolete current holdings in much the same way that computer punch-cards, and even some early software, are unreadable to modern machines. Even with the correct software and hardware available, digital newspapers usually rely upon access to broadband internet and competency

with Boolean search engines and a variety of viewing interfaces. Nonetheless, as technology and its competency increases, it is hoped that digital newspaper archives will grow in holdings, usage and accessibility.

Early newspapers (pre-1714)

History

The gathering and dissemination of news took many forms during the 16th and early 17th centuries. Occasional publications, regarding specific events or information, were present throughout the period, as were newsletters, written by correspondents in London to subscribers throughout the country. The latter, being private in nature, were somewhat protected from official condemnation, but by the same token were not part of a larger public conversation regarding current events.⁴ True serial news publication did not appear in Britain until the 17th century.

The first among these was the coranto (from the French *courante* or running).⁵ Unlike previous news publications, these appeared semi-regularly, albeit without a consistent title, and provided a variety of news and other information from the recent past. Originally, the corantos read by Britons came from Holland, whose liberal environment 'tolerated a wide diversity of ideas and opinions, which encouraged the growth of the news industry' and the export of publications to France and Britain.⁶ First appearing as single folio sheets, corantos in Britain metamorphosed into quarto newsbooks with anything from four to 24 pages, a circulation of 400 to 500 copies and a lofty cover price of two pence. The first English coranto is believed to be the *Corante, or Newes from Italy, Germanie, Hungaria, Bohemia, the Palatinate, France and the Low Countries*, first published in September 1621. Over the next 20 years, the shape and size of corantos underwent many changes but, importantly, their content remained consistently devoted to the dissemination of foreign news. Whether this was the result of the printers' aversion to conflict with domestic authority, or their catering to public demand for information regarding the Thirty Years' War, is not yet fully clear. What is important is that corantos were not businesses in and of themselves, but merely a small part of larger printing operations. As a result, corantos lacked any semblance of logical organisation and were, in the main, a collection of unrelated and non-delineated abstracts and transcriptions from other news sources. Corantos declined in the 1630s with a diminishing interest in the war, possibly the

4 M.A. Shaaber, *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England*, pp.307–8.

5 *Ibid.*, pp.311–15.

6 Kevin Williams, *Read All About It! A History of the British Newspaper*, pp.40–1.

result of the declining reliability in their reports thereof, and the banning of certain prominent serials for slander. In 1641, their publication ceased entirely.

In their place appeared newsbooks, which provided domestic news in a time of heightened animosity and Civil War.⁷ Kin to corantos through their serialised publication, newsbooks brought Britain closer to the advent of modern newspapers by more consistent publication and regular inclusion of both domestic and foreign news content. Most importantly, owing to a lack of centralised government authority and heightened political awareness during the early years of the war, the news market was allowed to flourish unencumbered by onerous licensing or censorship legislation, at least at first. The first newsbooks to appear were notable not only for their novel inclusion of domestic news but also their accounts of parliamentary debates and speeches. The printing of such information had been banned and punished with slander legislation. Within three years, London was home to over a dozen weekly newsbooks, many shameless copies of each other; by the end of the 1650s over 300 are believed to have been launched, though with varying lifespans. As they developed, much more was made of original journalism, the presentation of eyewitness accounts and claims of accurate reporting.

The key factor in Civil War reportage, however, was the rapid decline of impartiality. As animosity transformed into outright war, printers came under the influence, or rallied to the cause, of political factions. This was perhaps the first hint of what has become commonplace in the modern media, news as a means of political influence. Contingent with this aim was the defamation of political and commercial rivals, professionally and personally. At this stage, Parliament again attempted to wrest control over printed news. Although early newsbooks had been supportive of Parliament and its efforts, and were therefore allowed a degree of freedom, the rising popularity of the royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* and other dissenting voices prompted (a failed) effort to restore government censorship in 1643.⁸ Other means of coercion, however, such as fines and incarceration, did put printers under increasing pressure. This is reflected in the quick reversals of content in some newsbooks on politically sensitive issues. In 1649, the *Act against Unlicensed and Scandalous Books and Pamphlets* further constrained printing news reporting. Cromwell's 1655 ban of all newsbooks brought their prevalence to a sharp end. Throughout the Restoration, only official publications were licensed to print.

During the Restoration, Charles II appointed Henry Muddiman as the officially-sanctioned news provider. His publications, the *Mercurius Publicus* and *Parliamentary Intelligencer*, were the only newspapers to be 'published by authority', bestowing upon

7 Ibid., pp.45–6.

8 J. Williams, *A History of English Journalism to the Foundation of the Gazette*, p.187.

them unrivalled access to official sources.⁹ Their content, however, remained awash with official proclamations and notices, interrupted only by a page of advertisements. *The London Gazette*, the next evolutionary step in Muddiman's publication career, did not offer new content to London's readers but did provide a new format. The *Gazette* was printed as a single sheet, divided into two columns, which could be scanned rapidly without flipping pages, making the newspaper a much more quickly consumed product. Nonetheless, its popular success is debatable, as it was London's only newspaper during the Restoration, it received scathing reviews of its content and much of Britain's news remained transmitted through newsletters.

In 1679, being preoccupied with issues of succession, Charles II dissolved Parliament before it had renewed the Licensing Act. In response, more newsheets appeared, only to be restricted again under James II and liberated once more by the Glorious Revolution. William III, confident in his own popularity, allowed a degree of press freedom and the Licensing Act expired without renewal.

Pressing on into the 18th century, a number of true newspapers graced the streets of London, including Britain's first daily, *The Daily Courant*.¹⁰ Other papers followed suit, publishing daily or tri-weekly. This considerably shortened the news-cycle, allowing a more rapid conversation to develop in the public sphere, but also greatly increased the need for steady streams of news content. With news regarding domestic politics still somewhat dangerous, and contact from foreign correspondents subject to frequent interruptions, part of this need was filled with editorial opinion. Although opinion and partisanship was not new to British reportage, it was at this point that miscellanies, combining news, opinion, gossip, advertising, entertainment and edification became a mainstay of the public sphere — a position they maintained throughout the ensuing 300 years.

Characteristics

Run lengths

With the exception of the *London Gazette* and its official predecessors, most 17th-century publications maintained only brief existences. Even the Civil War serials could only boast runs of a few years, and with somewhat irregular publication. More importantly for historical research, the lack of consistent titling, especially prevalent with corantos and illegal newsbooks, means that the identification of all issues of a serial or of the editor is often extremely difficult, if nigh on impossible.

⁹ Williams, *Read All About It*, p.52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.54.

Format

Corantos and early newsbooks were formatted as quarto publications with roughly eight pages, though occasionally more as content dictated.

Sections

Early British news publications were less likely to serve as miscellanies than their successors. Up until the Civil War their content was entirely foreign in nature. This information was generally obtained from foreign publications and correspondents as well as through interviews with ship captains in Britain's ports.¹¹ During and after the war, domestic news and parliamentary intelligence became far more important, but still personally dangerous for editors to print. Generally, only official newsbooks and those with connections to specific parliamentarians could provide lengthy political news sections. Advertising played an important commercial role, either through front-page notices or ephemera, but their relative importance to the printer, and the range of products on offer, varied from publication to publication. Finally, the end of the 17th century saw the first inclusion of Bills of Mortality, brief obituaries of local residents, which became customary in all British newspapers thereafter.¹² The general inclusion of these main areas notwithstanding, these publications were in no way divided into sections in the modern conception of the term. Moreover, the use of general or specific headlines was an invention of the 18th century and not present here. Instead news was inserted, via cut-and-paste, as it was collected or written.

Key titles

Corante (1621)¹³

London Gazette (1665)

Mercurius Aulicus (1643)

Mercurius Britannicus (1643)

Mercurius Publicus (1660)

Parliamentary Intelligencer (1659)

Key holdings

British Library Newspapers, 1600–1900 contains digital copies of over 540 17th-century English-Language serial publications. Physical copies of these and other early newspapers can be found at British Library Newspapers collections in Colindale and Boston Spa.

11 James Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper and its Development*, p.131.

12 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.53.

13 For a more comprehensive listing of important Restoration newspapers, see Sutherland, pp.250–3.

Key considerations

Historical importance

Although corantos, newsbooks and newsheets became prevalent at certain points during the 17th century, news was still in great measure shared through newsletters, ballads, pamphlets, visual media and word of mouth. They were certainly a part of the public sphere but by no means the definitive record of it.

Official status

Throughout the period, the maintenance of official status was vital to longevity and freedom from fines and incarceration. However, this status brought with it the requirement of reproducing official pronouncements and information as well as favourable coverage, even in other publications by the same printer. Conversely, unofficial newspapers might offer more objective accounts, or at least anti-establishment accounts, but their sources and authorship are more difficult to trace.

Authorship

Because most papers in this period were run as side ventures to a main printing operation, outside journalists were unlikely to write local or editorial content in newsbooks and newsheets, though outsiders were often used as sources of information.¹⁴ In this respect the printer, if he or she can be established as such, was in most cases the author of the written material. However, news content, especially foreign news content, was shamelessly plagiarised from other news sources without citation. Indeed, the *Daily Courant* was the first paper to regularly cite the origin of external reportage and many newspapers failed to do so throughout the 18th century.¹⁵

The Georgian press (1714–1837)

History

The 18th century saw a rise in the regularity and variety of newspapers in Britain; the end of state censorship in 1695 led to an explosion of print in weekly, tri-weekly and daily London papers. In the first decades of the century, journeymen apprentices from London travelled out into the country and provincial towns to establish their own businesses. Many of these failed but, by 1780, 50 independent newspapers had

¹⁴ Sutherland, pp.185–232.

¹⁵ Williams, *Read All About It*, p.54.

been successfully set up outside London. The capital, however, remained the centre of public debate with the majority of political, economic and social news originating from newspapers printed or received there. What is perhaps most important for historians utilising these newspapers is that the estimated annual circulation of Britain's newspapers rose dramatically from fewer than three million copies sold (based on stamp returns) in the first quarter of the century to nearly 13 million by the last.

Despite this increase in circulation, the replacement of the Licensing Act with the Stamp Act in 1712 meant that Georgian newspapers could not survive on subscription revenue alone.¹⁶ Indeed, many London papers and nascent provincial presses were forced to close when it came into effect. Even with advertising fees or political patronage to cover production costs, few were able to maintain a significant number of news gatherers, which led to reliance upon essays and opinion-pieces, by the editor or correspondents, to fill pages. This, of course, only heightened the partisan nature of those newspapers who received patronage or bribes from key political figures. Politicians' outright manipulation of the London press reached its height in the 1780s, under William Pitt the Younger, who used 'intimidation, Secret Service subsidies, the withholding of official news and advertisements as well as threats of "trouble at the Stamp Office" to manipulate the newspapers.' Despite the kinship and acrimony between newspapers and politicians, the printing of parliamentary debates or voting records had been prohibited in 1660, with only a minor reprieve in 1680 when newspapers could legally publish accounts of which motions had carried without the votes of individual parliamentarians noted. It was not until 1771, through the efforts of John Wilkes, MP, that printers won recognition of their right to publish verbatim accounts of Parliamentary proceedings.

Until the 1780s, although rich in local history, provincial newspapers largely comprised digests of the London news (selected according to local criteria), and often boasted about the breadth of their coverage and the number of London papers from which they derived their material. Thinly scattered throughout the country, most had readers from a wide geographic and economic spectrum. However, by the end of the 18th century, the level of competition had risen sharply, forcing provincial printers to narrow their geographic or political breadth by shifting towards either regional and local news content or towards political extremes. Through the growth of liberal or radical papers alongside conservative or reactionary ones, newspapers beyond London continued to flourish despite growing competition. As radicalism, and the fear of radicalism, grew in the 1780s and 90s, this trend became increasingly pronounced. Radical and other working-class newspapers flourished briefly only to be replaced by more moderate middle-class reformers or lambasted by reactionary competition.

16 The 1712 Act placed a tax of one penny per full sheet of paper and a duty of one shilling on every advertisement placed.

In the early 19th century, however, the popularity of radical newspapers rose again, with over 560 individual titles across the nation starting their run between 1831 and 1836.¹⁷ They supported political agitation and trade unionism by providing accounts of trials of political activities and public meetings, printing the text of important speeches, responding to correspondence from readers and critiquing parliamentary debates and legislation. The majority of these remained unstamped with the notable exception of William Cobbett's *Political Register*.¹⁸ Although as fiery in its content as its unstamped brethren, the Register suffered in circulation because of its high cover price. However, Cobbett exploited a loop-hole in the stamp duty legislation. By repackaging his editorial commentary in pamphlet form, removing all news content, he was not required to pay the duty and sold 200,000 at a price of just two pence. By the start of the Victorian period, however, the popularity of these radical papers faded as the Reform Act of 1832 was seen to ameliorate major grievances and the reduction of stamp duty removed their price advantage.¹⁹

Throughout Britain, however, by far the most important development to the newspaper industry was the increasing importance of advertising. Beginning in many cases as simple trade notices, after mid-century the periodical press saw a rise in consumer advertising. Patent medicine was the most important and widespread product advertised, but advertisements for consumer goods (including the printers' own publications), land and services multiplied as the decades passed. At the end of the century, the most visually important were those for patent medicines, which utilised intricate seals and other engravings, and international passage, which almost consistently employed engravings in order to catch readers' attention.

Characteristics

Geography

By the end of the 18th century, newspapers had developed far beyond the limits of London. A wide variety of English, Irish and Scottish cities and market towns developed local newspaper operations, as did key colonial provinces. In the first half of the century, these provincial papers were generally, though not exclusively, digests of London and foreign newspapers with no editorial interest in local affairs. Local information was typically restricted to advertisements, birth, marriage and death announcements and shipping or trade intelligence. By the end of the century, however, much of the provincial press had expanded its local coverage to encompass 25 to 35

17 Williams, *Read All About It*, pp.86–8.

18 See British Library Newspaper's Online (1800–1900).

19 *Ibid.*, p.91.

per cent of the copy. This included not only local news but also editorial content on cultural events, literature, fashion and, after 1789, radical activity.

Run length

There was no typical run length in the 18th century; many newspapers lasted less than a year, while others spanned decades well into the 19th century. There was also a continuing propensity for some editors to change the title of their serials. However, better records, notably from the stamp tax, allow researchers to trace the lifespan of a publication with relative ease. Indeed, most of this work has been undertaken by the Waterloo Directory, the Newsplan 2000 Project and cataloguers within local libraries and archives. For those publications which have not been fully catalogued, and for which there are no stamp tax records, tracing precise owner and editorship, as well as title changes, may be more difficult.

Frequency

'Respectable' stamped London newspapers were printed regularly at weekly, bi-weekly, tri-weekly or daily intervals. Many provincial newspapers, however, tended to run only weekly for the first three-quarters of the century, and bi-weekly from the beginning of the 19th century. The publication of 'radical' and clandestine newspapers could vary considerably owing to their production and distribution methods. Also important to note is that Sunday newspapers, often targeted at working-class readers who could not afford to read dailies, had no organisational connection with similarly-named daily papers (*The Sunday Times* and *The Times*) and should be treated as separate publications. Separate morning and evening editions also became a feature in the 18th century and may provide additional information on fast-moving events.

Format

After the 1712 Stamp Act, which charged per sheet but neglected to specify the size of that sheet, broadsheets replaced smaller quarto newsbooks from the 17th century. The reduced size of typeface, however, and the number of columns, allowed for a greater amount of content in each edition. By the second quarter of the century, newspapers were generally four sides on two folio sheets, roughly 57–79 cm in height, though certain titles did employ a fifth page or produce exceptional issues of up to eight sides. Provincial newspapers were often very similar in format to their Metropolitan counterparts, because their printers had apprenticed at London papers, and followed the general pattern above.

Sections

Provincial newspapers in the 18th century were generally organised in relation to the order in which the information was obtained. The first two pages generally held information from Monday's post, the third from Thursday's and the fourth was shared between Saturday's post, local news and the advertisements. This led to much of the most recent news being left off for lack of space, only to appear in the subsequent week's copy. As the century progressed, more space was allocated for the latest news stories and a whole page was generally devoted to advertisements, if not more.

Circulation

Determining circulation numbers for a particular title depends largely on its stamp status. Those which did pay government duties left circulation footprints in government records. For example, there were 7.3 million stamps recorded in 1750, 9.4 million in 1760 and 12.5 million in 1775. Those studying unstamped newspapers must rely on contemporary qualitative accounts of readership or, if fortunate, records kept by the printers themselves. Contemporary accounts of London, for example, suggest that the combined circulation of six of the ten unstamped titles was 50,000 copies a week in the 1730s and 1740s. A century later, the *Poor Man's Guardian*, an unstamped radical paper, was selling between 10,000 and 15,000 copies a week on its own.

Key titles

The Caledonian Mercury (1720)

The Cambridge Intelligencer (1793)

The Glasgow Advertiser (1783)

Leeds Mercury (1718)

Manchester Guardian (1821)

Morning Chronicle (1769)

The North Briton (1762)

Poor Man's Guardian (1831)

The Times (1785)

Key holdings

Eighteenth-century newspapers are held in a variety of formats throughout the UK. The standard repositories are the British Library Newspaper collections at Colindale and Bath Spa and the National Libraries of Scotland (Edinburgh) and Wales (Aberystwyth), but many regional libraries will contain full or near-complete runs of

local newspapers, either in bound volumes or as a microform reproduction. Digital holdings are available on a public, institutional or individual subscription basis for many key 18th-century holdings.

Key considerations

Authorship

The author of editorial content is often ambiguous in 18th-century newspapers. Not containing modern bylines, researchers must try to extrapolate the author based on a number of factors. First of these is the location of the newspaper's printer. Provincial papers, especially in the first three-quarters of the century, were known mainly for their ability to offer a selection of London reprints. To this end, many provided precise attribution to the London papers from which they derived their material, either at the end of the commentary or as a heading to a selection of pieces. London newspapers, on the other hand, relied upon the writing ability of the main editor, associate journalists and a web of correspondents, none of whom were generally attributed in text. In these cases, knowledge of the newspaper's business records alongside text analysis may be necessary to narrow down the true author. The second determiner of authorship is the scale of the publication. Simply put, the larger the enterprise, the more likely the editorial content was created by a number of different individuals, rather than collated and abridged by a single editor and his subsidiary staff.

Location

The provincial status of newspapers became incredibly important in the later 18th century. London newspapers had distinct advantages due to the size of their potential subscriber base and their access to the centres of political and international debate. However, they also had severe limitations placed on their content in regard to political reporting and commentary. Their proximity to Parliament gave them access to information, but the printing of sensitive material was far more likely to come to the attention of the powerful. Conversely, provincial printers had more leeway in publishing political gossip and even republished sensitive information from newsletters. As the century progressed, the rise of provincial port towns such as Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow meant that foreign intelligence no longer arrived solely via London.

Political loyalties

Although the political loyalties of newspaper editors are certainly a consideration of the 17th century, they become truly paramount during the later portion of the 18th.

As production and distribution methods improved, London and provincial newspapers met increasing competition for subscribers and advertisers. The surest way to the former (and by extension the latter) was inclusion of the latest, most dramatic news content, delivered at increasingly regular intervals. This meant adjusting their content to include additional non-news content, such as editorials, essays and extracts. When competition remained fierce, newspapers were able (or forced) to divide along political lines in order to maintain a defined and regular subscription base. This means that information presented in newspapers should always be vetted against the known political intentions not only of the editor, but also any local patrons or subscriber base.

The Victorian press (1837–1914)

History

The 19th century saw several important shifts in British newspapers. On one level, this was the result of rapidly expanding technology: papermaking was mechanised in 1803; the steam-powered press came into use in 1814; and, in 1827, multiple-cylinder stereotype printing greatly increased the speed and lowered the cost of printing.²⁰ As the century progressed, further developments — notably Pitman’s shorthand method and the telegraph — fundamentally changed the nature of news reporting.²¹ The use of shorthand meant that transcriptions of debates and eye-witness accounts could appear in print and, more importantly, claim absolute accuracy. Likewise, the telegraph reshaped the length and depth of news content. Long, descriptive letters, which could take many weeks to arrive from foreign correspondents, were supplemented, and in some cases even replaced, by short, direct relations of the immediate facts ‘on the ground’. As the service improved, a 24-hour news cycle developed in which all reportage was written, relayed and printed within a single day.

In terms of character, the trajectory of the British press during Victoria’s reign has been described as one of increasing editorial independence from party political control. The reduction and eventual repeal of the stamp duty greatly reduced operating costs, while growing advertising increased incoming revenue. The latter was doubly important as solid advertising attracted additional readers, improving subscription income, granting the operation further commercial freedom.²² Editors such as Delane of *The Times* exercised complete control over the content of their newspapers, redrafting the proof text to ensure consistency of style and purpose and

20 P.Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790–1860*, p.2.

21 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.101.

22 Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1700–1850*, p.97.

visiting foreign correspondents to ensure they understood fully their remit.²³ As with Stuart and Georgian newspapers, the lack of journalistic bylines furthered the public perception of editorial omnipresence.²⁴ It was not a reporter that had an opinion, it was *The Times* itself. This prominence, free from overt political control, allowed the newspaper to take up the role of *fourth estate*, independently monitoring those holding political power and decrying their misdeeds. *The Times*, in particular, vigorously took up the role during the Crimean War. Its foreign correspondents continually crossed swords with the government over incompetent military leadership and a lack of effective logistical administration.²⁵ In the end, however, the authority of the editor was greatly diminished by the end of the 19th century with the shift towards commercial journalism and the rise of owner influence.

Of course, the primacy of editorial influence had long been a characteristic of the unstamped, radical press. After the decline of their Georgian predecessors, a new generation of radical titles emerged. From 1839 to 1859 the Chartist press gained prominence throughout Britain with 120 newspapers and other periodicals established.²⁶ Because of the technological advances of the early 19th century, these papers could be run by owner-operators who did not have to answer to moneyed politicians or commercial interests. Despite lacking advertising revenue — advertisers saw little profit in working with radical publications — their unstamped status meant they had a large advantage in price. Nonetheless, like their predecessors, these papers eventually declined in popularity owing to improved working conditions in the 1840s and 1850s, the rise in charitable endeavours and the increasing cost of operating a newspaper after mid-century.

Changing political, social and economic conditions diminished the appeal of these papers, and saw views previously considered dangerous becoming acceptable within the mainstream press, but the radical titles were combated most effectively by competition from those publications offering ‘useful knowledge’ to their readers.²⁷ These newspapers, in conjunction with public lectures, offered the working classes information on trade and mechanical skills and other information likely to improve their minds. However useful this information may have been to readers, the rationale was clearly aimed at moralistic social control. In 1832, for example, a representative from the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge noted that ‘the population of this country (was) for the first time a reading population, actuated by tastes and habits unknown to preceding generations and particularly susceptible to

23 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.110.

24 M. Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History*, p.126.

25 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.108.

26 *Ibid.*, pp.91–6.

27 Brian E. Maidment, ‘The Manchester common reader — Abel Heywood’s “Evidence” and the early Victorian reading public’; Williams, *Read All About It*, p.94.

such an influence as that of the press'.²⁸ Reading without proper direction, they felt, led to political instability and moral corruption.

Thus, there were many important continuities and evolutions in technology and style in the Victorian press and the breadth of coverage was no different. Political reporting, namely Parliamentary reporting, had been a staple of newspaper content since the 17th century in a variety of official and clandestine forms. Mentioned previously was the legal right, won in 1777, to print government debates. It was not until 1803, however, that Westminster gave official recognition of this right with the creation of the Press Gallery, a physical location from which reporters could observe parliamentary proceedings.²⁹ This relationship with the press was made more exclusive and intimate in the 1880s with the development of the Lobby system.

Although London-based newspapers certainly held considerable sway throughout the country during the 19th century, the provincial press blossomed under Victoria. The number of British titles increased by 300 per cent nationwide compared to a mere 60 per cent in London.³⁰ There were a variety of reasons for this. On the one hand, the development of telegraphy meant that provincial newspapers could obtain foreign, Parliamentary and other metropolitan news directly, rather than relying upon publications and contacts in London, and could print these stories before the London papers arrived by train. This was particularly the case with evening newspapers, which expanded rapidly after 1870. Likewise, news agencies, pre-eminently the Press Association from 1870, provided a network of support for provincial editors throughout the country in gathering editorial content.³¹ On the other hand, the development of an efficient national rail system, upon which newspaper distribution relied, helped close the temporal gap. In response, provincial newspapers began to devote a larger share of their copy to regional news, such as local court proceedings, council meetings and the calendars of local social and cultural bodies. This focus gave them an advantage over London newspapers in their own local communities.

In the second half of the Victorian period, two more important shifts took place in the British newspaper industry. The first was the development of the penny newspaper and popular journalism. The repeal of Stamp Duty in 1855 and Paper Duty in 1861 — otherwise known as the 'taxes on knowledge' — resulted in the growth of cheap, popular newspapers. At the same time, rising literacy rates created an expanding reading public, clamouring for accessible, entertaining, and cheap reading material. By the 1880s, this had resulted in the emergence of a fiercely competitive

28 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.79.

29 *Ibid.*, pp.104–5.

30 *Ibid.*, pp.116–17.

31 Andrew Hobbs, 'When the provincial press was the national press (c.1836–c.1900)'.

marketplace for popular journalism. Editors were quick to recognise that an emerging mass audience was more interested in jokes, prize competitions, serialised stories, football scores and fashion advice than lengthy Parliamentary reports, and changed the content of their papers accordingly. The most successful exponent of this new journalism was George Newnes, whose weekly magazine *Tit-Bits* (launched in 1881) spawned many imitators in both the provincial and metropolitan press. These papers generated content through reader contributions and by clipping material from other newspapers.

This culture of ‘scissors and paste’ journalism resulted in the large-scale importation of content from American newspapers. Techniques employed by the American press — such as ‘scare heads’ and interviews — were also adopted by British editors. At this time, many newspapers also slashed operating costs and expanded advertising space in order to dramatically lower their price. Others, such as *The Telegraph* and later the *Daily Mail* under Northcliffe, strove to attract new readers by reshaping their editorial tone and making it ostensibly ‘more readable’ to the wider public.³² Another important shift, appearing first in the 1860s, was the development of campaigning journalism, such as *The Pall Mall Gazette*, under W.T. Stead, and later the *Daily Express*. These newspapers cried out for social reform, pressuring parliament for social legislation through public outcry.³³

Characteristics

Geography

Defining a provincial newspaper as ‘local’ and a London newspaper as ‘national’ in the 19th century is a risky endeavour.³⁴ Instead, it is important to consider carefully the nature of a particular title and its period to discern the newspaper’s area of coverage and readership. Once established, preliminary assumptions regarding content and tone can be made.

Frequency

After the 1830s, tri-weekly and weekly publications became less common in London and, from 1855, many weekly and bi-weekly provincial papers became dailies as well. As printing and distribution technology developed, up-to-date news was demanded by readers and provided through daily issues and supplemented through evening and

32 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.113.

33 *Ibid.*, p.120.

34 Hobbs, ‘Provincial Press’.

Sunday editions. By mid-century, Sunday newspapers were the most popular titles in the United Kingdom.

Format

Before the reduction of the Stamp Duty in 1836, most provincial weekly papers comprised four pages on a single sheet of folded paper. After 1836, the most successful of these newspapers increased to eight pages and, by the second half of the century, most papers outside London had increased to eight pages with the frontrunners boasting 12 by the 1880s. In London, pagination increased somewhat earlier but followed the same general trend. In terms of dimensions, most Victorian newspapers were 40–50 cm in width and 50–70 cm in height.

Sections

Even in the Victorian period there was still nothing like the sectional layout of the modern newspaper, except for the divide between advertisements and the main text. In fact, the majority of newspapers were overloaded with content squeezed into narrow, small-type columns with relatively few headlines to distinguish articles. While London dailies such as *The Times* concentrated on political news, the weeklies (particularly in the rest of the country) included fiction, literary extracts and reviews, history, biography, geography, women's columns, travel writing, sport, satire and a wide variety of other non-news content, plus maps, portraits, diagrams and local views, both urban and rural, in their advertising as well as their editorial columns. Moreover, because of the glut of information now flowing into editors' hands, including those in the provinces, long essays and commentaries were replaced with detailed accounts of parliamentary proceedings and eye-witness accounts of important events. After mid-century, and especially in the last quarter, more prominent headlines began to delineate the pages. *The Telegraph*, notably, borrowed from the American convention of creating numerous headlines on a single major story. It likewise supplemented advertising revenue through the inclusion of classified advertising.³⁵

Circulation

A common source for Victorian circulation figures is A.P. Wadworth's 'Newspaper circulations, 1800–1954' in *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society, 1954–5*. Also useful are Stamp Duty returns until 1855, advertisements in *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory* and *Deacon's Newspaper Handbook*.³⁶ For many of the major newspapers, however, circulation figures may equally be obtained from business

35 Williams, *Read All About It*, p.102.

36 Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, p.52.

accounts or previous histories of the title in question. When dealing with raw circulation numbers, however, it is important to remember that public readings, which were common throughout the UK, also increased the distribution of newspaper content. *Corbett's Political Register* explicitly directed its copy to 'my readers and hearers' and the *Northern Star* had a 'highly rhetorical style' to facilitate reading it aloud.³⁷

Key titles

Bolton Evening News (1867)
The Daily Mail (1896)
Glasgow Herald (1783 as *The Glasgow Advertiser*)
Lloyds' Weekly News (1842)
The Manchester Guardian (1821)
Northern Star (1837)
The Pall Mall Gazette (1865)
The Poor Man's Guardian (1850)
Reynold's Newspaper (1850)
Sheffield Weekly Telegraph (1855)
The Standard (1827)
The Times (1785)
Tit-Bits (1881)
True Briton (1851)

Key holdings

Like their Georgian counterparts, Victorian newspapers are held in the British Library Newspaper collections, the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales and regional libraries and archives. Digital holdings are available on a public, institutional or individual subscription basis for many key Victorian century titles.

Key considerations

Authorship

As mentioned above, authorship and editorship were sometimes indistinguishable in the Victorian press. Despite the reality of large operations employing numerous gatherers, correspondents and writers, the lack of bylines maintained the illusion of a single voice. However, other contemporary sources, including rival newspapers,

³⁷ Barker, *Newspapers*, pp.54–5.

as well as the history of the business or the biography of the editor, can provide researchers with a great deal of insight into the size of newspapers' writing staff and the key figures therein.

Location

By the end of the century most major and even some minor cities had two if not more daily newspapers. This was the result of decreasing production costs in the earlier part of the period and the increased speed with which news could be gathered directly in the latter part. However, because of the increased distribution of news the competition between London and provincial newspapers, and between local rivals, became more pronounced. This competition was dealt with in a variety of ways including tailoring of content to fit particular local needs or organisational advantages. Location, particularly the proximity of the paper to regional and national rivals, should be noted when searching for information on particular trends or events.

Political loyalties

As before, explicit political bias was crucial to the success of early Victorian provincial newspapers, being the most obvious factor in differentiating themselves from local rivals. Owing to the difficulties experienced by urbanising and industrialising provincial towns, newspapers based in provincial towns and cities were generally, though by no means uniformly, liberal in their political outlook. Indeed, many contemporary commentators saw the newspaper as an intrinsically Liberal, democratic phenomenon.³⁸ However, it should also be remembered that by mid-century many newspapers were taking up the mantle of the *fourth estate* and acting as a civil watchdog rather than as the voice of a particular faction, a process made easier by the growth of advertising revenue and the abolition of the Stamp Duty.

The modern press (1914–present)

History

The relationship between the press, public and politics changed in Britain in the 20th century, not least because of the polarisation of British party politics between the Conservative and emerging Labour parties. Following World War I the aspirations and education of the working classes grew, the shape of the middle classes changed and women became more overtly politically active: party politics was on the daily agenda for a much broader section of the British population.

38 Aled Gruffydd Jones, *Powers of the press: newspapers, power and the public in nineteenth-century England*, p.157.

The 20th century was truly the press baron era in Britain. As it developed, figures such as Lord Beaverbrook (*Daily Express*, 1916–64), Lord Northcliffe (*Daily Mail*, 1896–1922) and his brother Lord Rothermere (*Daily Mail*, 1922–40) were hugely influential in the move to the popular journalism, and much has been written about them. Decades before Rupert Murdoch's control of *The Times*, *Sunday Times*, *The Sun* and *News of the World* became part of a successful world media empire, his earlier counterparts' approach was commercial and independent, with somewhat maverick behaviour. Beaverbrook once famously said, 'I run the paper purely for the purpose of making propaganda and with no other motive.'³⁹

At the other end of the spectrum was the setting up of the *Daily Herald* in 1912 as the voice of the labour movement, financed in the 1920s by the TUC and Labour Party. The fact that it was a politically-based newspaper aimed at the poor and working class meant that it attracted little advertising revenue, and it lurched from one financial crisis to another in its early years. When the TUC sold a 51 per cent share to Odhams Press in 1930, its new-found commercial backing led to a huge increase in sales for a time — making it the first newspaper in the world to sell two million copies a day before growing competition led to further difficulties. It was re-launched in 1964 as, of all things, *The Sun* and later sold to Rupert Murdoch.

Another interesting anomaly in the press family can be found in the early story of *The Guardian*. Originally *The Manchester Guardian*, this local newspaper was developed by C.P. Scott to national success, and was published in London from 1961. As a former editor, Alastair Hetherington (appointed 1956) was well placed to comment on the independent nature of the newspaper and its innovative ownership structure:

After C.P.'s death the Scott family did something that is so far unique in newspaper history. They divested themselves of all beneficial ownership in the company ... transferring the whole of the ordinary shareholding to the Scott Trust ... All profits are ploughed back into the company ... The trustees appoint the editors and managing directors of the group's two principal newspapers ... It has in practice secured the continuity of *The Guardian* and the independence of its editor.⁴⁰

The era of the press barons can be unfavourably compared to the Victorian period, since they eclipsed 'strong' editors as formulators of newspaper policy. However, their authoritarianism and sometime delight in interventionist propaganda should

39 A comment to the first Royal Commission, see Alastair Hetherington, *News, Newspapers and Television*, p.23.

40 *Ibid.*, pp.25–6.

not detract from their underlying role as drivers towards a politically independent, commercial press.

Valuable perspectives on audience interests in their national press were revealed in the first Royal Commission on the Press (the Ross Commission of 1947–9): ‘To be news an event must first be interesting to the public, and the public for this purpose means for each paper the people who read that paper and others like them. Second, and equally important, it must be new, and newness is measured in newspaper offices in terms of minutes.’⁴¹

Interestingly the report sets out the interests of an average British audience in 1948 through a survey of those involved in the industry:

This put sport top of the list, followed by ‘news about people, news of strange or amusing adventures, tragedies, accidents, and crimes — news, that is, whose sentiment or excitement brings some colour into life ... many replies suggested that interest was increasing [in public affairs] because of education and because of the increased impact of politics, and particularly of Government activity, on the lives of ordinary people.’⁴²

By the third Commission in 1974–7,⁴³ the influence that radio, television and the printed press had on each other was explored. The fact that a broadcast event or story could no longer be ignored in the written press was firmly established: a truism that cannot be escaped today.

Researching 20th-century newspapers should be tempered by the knowledge that while the press was the only means of reaching and influencing people en masse at the beginning of the century, it was just one mass medium among many by its close. The huge circulation figures of the 20th century were the culmination, and peak, of increases beginning in the 17th. The second half of the century was an increasingly competitive environment, ‘... where the mounting pile of dead titles was a constant reminder to publishers of the consequences of failing to adjust to change.’⁴⁴

The term ‘mass media’ was coined in the 1920s to describe mass-circulation newspapers, and increasingly, the rise of nationwide radio networks and magazines. The term has always been associated with advancing technology, but is now more

41 Ibid., p.2.

42 Ibid.

43 This Commission was chaired by Lord McGregor of Durris, a sociologist who looked at the wider remit of finance, ownership, performance and industrial relations.

44 J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power without Responsibility: the press, broadcasting and new media in Britain*, p.92.

commonly used, as we have moved into the 21st century, with the constantly changing world of internet media.

Characteristics

Geography

The increasing power and London-focused remit of the national press is well documented and bound up in commerce and the wider development of radio, and later television broadcasting.

Mass media also had a huge impact on the provincial press in the 20th century. Michael Dawson notes that the important earlier role of local and regional press included party politics, with many newspapers being owned by local politicians.⁴⁵ However, in the decade after World War I, the cost of funding a local newspaper became too high for most politicians, and 'the status of the provincial press was increasingly undermined by improved rail communications, allowing the national press to compete even in farthest Cornwall.'⁴⁶

In the last century a greater distinction developed between the content of the local and national press. The circulation of national dailies overtook local publications by the 1930s, but the local press maintained a role in reflecting the local landscape. The internet holds both huge possibilities and major threats for the world of publishing and newspapers. Whilst print survived the threat of radio and TV, paid circulation and advertising revenue is generally declining in Western Europe and North America, and newspapers are still finding their place online.

Run length

The development of press publishing empires had significant impact on competition and the number of titles in the last century. Newspaper chains, incorporating national and regional publications, grew at the turn of the century and consolidated further in the 1920s and 1930s.

The percentage of provincial evening titles controlled by the big five chains rose from 8 to 40% between 1921 and 1939; ... the number of towns with

45 M. Dawson, 'Party Politics and the Provincial Press in Early Twentieth Century England: The Case of the South West', pp.201–18.

46 Ibid., p.201.

a choice of evening paper fell from twenty-four to ten, while towns with a choice of local morning paper declined from fifteen to seven.⁴⁷

This concentration at both regional and national level has been relentless in recent decades: 'By 2002, just three publishers controlled two out of three national papers sold in Britain.'⁴⁸

Frequency

Many local newspapers closed during World War I due to wartime economic difficulties, but London dailies quickly rallied after it ended, and became genuinely national by printing regional editions in Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow. Consequently, sales of provincial dailies fell and many titles closed. Provincial evening and weekly newspapers thrived until the 1960s, when circulations began to fall. Post-2008, the decline in advertising and circulation, coinciding with the increase in web-based alternatives, has been most striking and the rate of local newspaper closures rose dramatically.

Format

By the 20th century standard formats were in place. Most modern newspapers are now in either the broadsheet (600 mm by 380 mm) or, increasingly, the tabloid format (380 mm by 300 mm): only *The Guardian* has adopted the European 'Berliner' size which at 470 mm by 315 mm is roughly in the middle. Social pre-conceptions developed relating to 'quality' broadsheets and 'popular' tabloids but these have been blurred in the last 20 years with some 'quality' publications turning to a tabloid format which some choose to call 'compact' to make a distinction.

Virtually all printed newspapers, local and national, now have online editions, with increasing emphasis on enhanced features to encourage this alternative readership. For contemporary historians, most of these newspaper websites include archives dating back to the beginning of this century.

Sections

New categories within newspapers developed as the 20th century progressed. Business sections, the colour supplement, home and travel reflected the assumed shift in patterns of readers' interests. This has been aided by technological developments in reproducing images and graphics in advertising and editorial content.

47 Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p.39.

48 Curran provides statistics on the concentration of press ownership, *ibid.*, pp.76–7.

Circulation

Financial imperatives led to the concentration of press ownership into fewer hands following World War I, with many publications struggling to return to daily circulation after it ended. The rise of the press barons saw dramatic changes, with circulation of the biggest national dailies outselling any newspapers across the world at different times. The *Daily Mail* had been the first British daily to sell a million copies a day by 1902 and in the 1920s, it had an impressive readership: ‘... nationally, 37% of established middle-class families, and in London nearly 50%, saw the paper.’⁴⁹ Following World War II the *Daily Express* had a circulation of 3,706,000.

Following the Wapping dispute (see the section on key considerations below), once newspapers were produced and stored in digital format, electronic distribution became feasible. Even before the internet, the UK saw its first CD-Rom newspaper, the *Northern Echo* in 1990, soon followed by *The Independent* in 1991. The first newspapers were launched on the web in 1995.

Key titles

Daily Express (1900)

Daily Herald, later re-launched as *The Sun* (1912)

Daily Mail (1896)

Daily Mirror (1903)

Daily Record (1895)

Daily Star (1978, the first new national paper launched since the *Daily Mirror*)

Daily Telegraph (1855)

Financial Times (1888)

The (Manchester) Guardian (1821)

The Herald (1783 as *Glasgow Advertiser*)

The Independent (1986)

The Morning Star (1930)

News Chronicle (1846)

The Times (1785)

The Scotsman (1817)

The Sunday Times (1821)

Western Mail (1869)

49 These figures are from the survey, ‘Press Circulations Analysed’, by H.G. Lyall in 1928, cited in T. Jeffery and K. McClelland, ‘A world fit to live in: the *Daily Mail* and the middle classes 1918–39’, p.31.

Key holdings

The storage of newspapers for research purposes became standard practice in the early 20th century. It is interesting to note that the Mitchell report of 1924 found that 148 of the 424 libraries in the UK spent more on newspapers and periodicals than on books. Linked to this library usage, the number of repositories for newspaper collections increased greatly with the establishment of public record offices at county level from the 1930s, and particularly after World War II.

The most significant national development came out of the lack of space for an ever-increasing newspaper collection at the British Museum. The repository at Colindale had been established in 1903, but a purpose-built library opened in 1932 to facilitate research on site.

Newspapers are increasingly seeing the commercial value in an online archive of their files.

Key considerations

Advertising

By the early 20th century political prejudice amongst advertisers was in decline as professional advertising agencies and the development of market research emerged and responded to the economic arguments of readily available circulation statistics. This is not to say that political preference did not play a part in company selection. Left-wing publications suffered on commercial advertising grounds, as exemplified by the precarious financial state of the *Daily Herald's* early years.

Advertising expenditure on the press almost trebled between the wars. One outcome of this was that political parties could no longer afford their previous control in the face of growing commercialism. Resulting high publishing costs also restricted entry into the national newspaper market until computerised production methods were developed in the 1980s.

A distinct gap between quality and popular newspapers has arguably developed since the 1960s, differentiated by the role of advertising funding. Curran argues:

The quality press generally derived over two-thirds of its revenue from advertising, secured through appealing to high-spending niche audiences. The

popular press, on the other hand, obtained over half of its revenue from sales and its value to advertisers was rooted in its circulation success.⁵⁰

Location

In the late 1980s the press became the news in a dispute that marked a sea-change in newspaper operations. Rupert Murdoch, owner of the *Sun*, *News of the World*, *Times* and *Sunday Times*, built a high-tech computerised production and print facility in Wapping, London's East End, away from the traditional newspaper centre of Fleet Street. His overnight switch to non-unionised production in Wapping in 1986 led to a bitter industrial dispute, but is widely credited with lowering the costs of entry into the newspaper market. It enabled increased pagination, more colour and more newspaper sections — following the general adoption of News International's print practice — and widespread relocation to London's Docklands. Despite major advances, until this point Fleet Street had still used the labour-intensive linotype method rather than electronic composition.

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50 Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*: 96. Also note Curran's analysis of editorial content and space, pp.94–5.

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Digitised newspapers

British Library Newspapers Online, available free of charge to students and staff affiliated to a UK higher or further education institution

<http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs>

Newsplan 2000 Project (1780–1950), free of charge

<http://news.vispweb3.userarea.co.uk/index.html>

The Times (1785–1985), available on a pay-per-view and subscription basis

<http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive>

The Guardian (1821–2000)/*The Observer* (1791–2000), available on a pay-per-view basis

<http://archive.guardian.co.uk>

The Financial Times Historical Archive 1888–2006, available on a subscription basis

<http://gale.cengage.co.uk/financial-times-historical-archive.aspx>

The Illustrated London News Historical Archive 1842–2003, available on a subscription basis

<http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/illustrated-london-news.aspx>

The Jewish Chronicle (1841–present), available on a pay-per-view basis

<http://archive.thejc.com>

The Watchman (1835–85), *Daily Mirror* (1903–present), *Daily Express* (1900–present), *Sunday Express* (2000–present), *Daily Star* (2000–present) and *Daily Star Sunday* (2000–present) available on a pay-per-view basis

www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/

The London Gazette (1665–present)

www.london-gazette.co.uk/

The Edinburgh Gazette (1699–present)

www.edinburgh-gazette.co.uk/

The Belfast Gazette (1922–present)

www.belfast-gazette.co.uk/

Newsbank (digitised UK newspapers, 1639–1800), available on a subscription basis to institutions

www.newsbank.com/

The National Library of Australia (1816–1954), free of charge

www.nla.gov.au/digicoll/

American Library of Congress,

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Project (1860–1922), free of charge

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

For a comprehensive list of digitised Anglophone newspapers from around the world, see R. Hawkins, *Historical Insights: Digitised Newspapers* (History Subject Centre, 2011).

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