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1. The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe

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4 News, history and the construction of the present in early modern England

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In *Before Novels*, his important cultural history of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century literary milieu, J. Paul Hunter suggests that when the novel began to emerge in the early eighteenth century, it did so amid 'a developing concern for contemporaneity, a wish to recognize the momentous in the momentary and to feel the power of all time in its most fleeting moment.' England had developed, he continues, 'an urgent sense of now' and a preoccupation with novelty; but, he concedes, 'it is hard to say exactly when the present time became such an urgent issue in the English cultural consciousness.'¹ Hunter is undoubtedly correct both as to the existence of this phenomenon of present-mindedness, and its clearest expression in the journalism of the Augustan era. His account raises a number of problems, not least (as he admits in the latter quotation) the beginnings of a strong sense of the present, and that present's connections to the past. In noting, for instance, the obvious etymological link between the French word *jour* and 'journalism' (a word that did not itself appear until the early nineteenth century), he suggests that by the 1690s, English culture had become so intoxicated by 'the potential significance to human consciousness of any single moment that an immediate written record was required.'² This correctly and astutely identifies the relationship, but puts the cart before the horse. The newspaper was not merely the creation of a cultural obsession; it in large measure created that obsession, which cannot have sprung *ex nihilo*. To make this point, it is necessary to go well back beyond the 1690s and link the Augustans' concern with contemporaneity to the creation of that contemporaneity over the preceding century.

The perception of the present

The modern sense of the present as a segment of time experientially distinguishable from past or future differs sharply from that which existed in the mid-sixteenth century. This is owed in large measure to the progressive shrinkage that has occurred over four centuries in the length of time deemed minimally necessary for a series of events to unfold, to be fashioned into formal or informal narrative (or even into competing and mutually contradictory narratives), and dispersed over a wide geographic field.³ The indulgence of a recent example

may serve to illustrate how presentness is manufactured in our own time, by way of contrast with the pre-electronic era. In January 1986, as I left my home for the university to teach an afternoon class, I saw on the television the first report of the *Challenger* space shuttle disaster. This had been flashed only moments earlier from Cape Canaveral, Florida nearly two thousand miles to the south. Within thirty minutes, the time it took me to walk to campus and get into the classroom, the entire university, including my students (not normally the group of people most conscious of events outside their scholastic and recreational universe), was abuzz with talk of the catastrophe. When I flew to England for the mid-term break three weeks later, the shuttle was still the main subject of conversation, dwarfing Mrs Thatcher's latest attacks on the unions and the impending fall of Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. What was already a 'past' event, essentially, was still talked of, understood, and treated as part of an extended present. Having lost none of its shocking immediacy over the preceding weeks, it was still 'news,' and not yet 'history.'

News of some kind – oral or written communication of some new event, some fluctuation in the 'normal' process of things – is of course as old as civilization. There has always been an interest in new events, something to enliven the boredom of daily life, and bad news often has the added appeal to *schadenfreude*. News stands on the cusp between past and future; it arouses recollection, anticipation, expectation, or apprehension. But the *means* by which it has been communicated, and consequently the ways in which it has been perceived, have evolved over the millennia, in response to developments in transportation and technology. Our perception of news is very different from that of early modern people, because both our technology and our relationship to that technology is radically different; theirs, in turn, differed from that of the pre-print era. Stephen Kern's panoramic study of European culture in the pre-First World War era, as it made use of new instruments of communication such as the telephone and Marconi wireless, points to the *simultaneity* of experience as a critical mark of a culture's tacit recognition of a public present in which a wide range of experience can be shared by many people over wide distances. Commentators on the wireless news reports of the *Titanic's* last hours in April 1912 noted 'with a sense near to awe that we have been almost witness of a great ship in her death agonies.' The process that Kern notes has been magnified by technology in the course of the century, but its antecedents can be pushed back to the seventeenth century.⁴

Because major events now reach a wide audience through the print and, especially quickly, the electronic media, they can almost instantaneously form a common currency in local, national and international discourse – a 'public sphere,' to borrow Jürgen Habermas' terminology – that they could not have done as easily two centuries ago, and scarcely at all three centuries before that.⁵ And because they do reach listeners or readers so quickly, they are now deemed 'current events,' rather than history, at the point at which they are perceived, cognitively processed, and discussed. As one student of the psychology of memory and time has put it, 'the psychological present is a duration, not an

instant.⁶ Since this would appear directly to contradict the formal, philosophical understanding of the present as a brief moment among most commentators since St. Augustine, some explanation is needed of the shift toward an experientially-defined sense of the present as meaningful duration. In the West, at least, we now have a very strong sense of the present (and hence of an immediate past flowing into but distinct from that present) because our lives, and the society that shapes them, have themselves been pre-narrated by the public institutions that organize and convey information. As Pierre Janet, a pioneer in the study of the psychology of memory, noted in 1928 by way of studying the phenomenon of *déjà vu*, the sense of duration is largely intellectual, its preciseness impeded by our construction of the present.⁷ In other words, our present is as much a social fabrication as our past, but it is seen as independent of that past, even if it draws on that past through memory, and even if we acknowledge that it will, *in the future*, become past, and hence a matter of history.

People of all classes in the Middle Ages and in the sixteenth century inhabited a remembered past (enhanced for the then-relatively small number of literate by reading) and an expected future. In contrast to us, they conceived of the present as an instant rather than a duration, through most of the period recognizing no 'present' beyond that instant. This lack of a sense of the present as duration was owed less to intellectual theories about the nature of time than to the reality of its experience, and in particular to the limitations constraining the perception of news. These limitations will figure prominently in the argument I wish to make about precisely how the printing press affected news. They can be enumerated as follows:

- 1 speed: the slow rate at which people learned of remote events, a velocity that increased in inverse proportion to their geographical distance from the event itself;
- 2 flow: the discreet, blip-like and erratic way in which news reached them and had then to be sorted out from rumour;
- 3 commonality: the degree to which knowledge of a particular event is shared simultaneously among persons or communities separated by geography; and
- 4 density: the number of aural and visual cues to sudden change, most obviously represented in the printed media and in the public world of conversation, but most often in combination of these.

Our own experience of these limits is not monolithic, but conditioned by race, class, gender, family, occupation and other factors. On the whole, however, it is very different from that of our ancestors of four centuries or so ago. We do not learn of news in the way they did, which was normally slowly, sporadically and sparsely, unless they were directly caught up in the events by proximity. Rather, we are enveloped by it, and the plots of our own lives are absorbed into an ongoing social narrative (the medium-term 'march of events,' or 'today's big story') – whether we choose to take an interest in them or not.⁸ It is in the seventeenth century, however, that the social and psychological experience of

news first acquired something like its modern form, with the only major changes still to come falling under category 1 (speed), as communication became virtually instantaneous beginning with the telegraph.

Modern technology has increased our awareness of news but perhaps also deadened our sensitivity to it, as theorists of boredom such as Klapp suggest, so that we now need a major event like Kennedy's assassination or the Princess of Wales' death to jolt us into engagement with a present beyond our domestic and professional lives.⁹ Nevertheless, it is possible to trace the origins of the communications trajectory that has ended in the present back to the last great revolution in communications, the printing press. How printing affected the perception of news is less obvious than it might seem: any advances in the velocity of news transmission prior to that time were very modest, and approaches that emphasize the 'speed' of the print era are emphasizing an attribute that the press did not in fact possess. In terms of the four constraints on news mentioned above, the press did not materially increase the speed at which news travelled (it was still sometimes slower than a fast horseman). However, it did expand the number of people simultaneously reading or discussing variant versions of the same news (commonality); it presented multiple – even if conflicting – reports of those events (density); and it eventually regularized the rate at which events were transmitted and the intervals between transmissions (flow).¹⁰

Time and the speed of news

From the point of view of a person receiving news of a great event, and recording it or passing it on to an acquaintance, there was an unbridgeable temporal gap between the event itself and his or her perception of it. This is a gap which contemporaries did not often remark on, since they were accustomed to it, but it made their understanding of what was present and what was past fundamentally different from our own. At the end of the seventeenth century something like a modern understanding of temporal relations had been achieved, so much so that Richard Steele made it the subject of a satire on the verb tenses, cast in the form of a mock letter from a Civil War prisoner who is about to be executed by Roundhead captors. In a final letter to his wife, the captive Royalist reports his death as *past* rather than impending, since he knows she will not receive this news until his head has fallen; this produces farcical complications since she weds again soon after receiving the letter, unaware that her husband had in the meantime been rescued.¹¹

It was literally impossible before the advent of the telegraph for an event to be noted at great distance almost immediately, in what is now colloquially termed 'real time,' after its occurrence. In addition, the period before 1641 (the year Crown restrictions on publication effectively ceased, or were at least considerably loosened) also lacked the enhanced density and flow of news conducive to the experience of 'current events,' except once again for those situated in close proximity to those events. To individuals who believed that the present was only an existential instant, an ephemeral joint between a dead past

and an unborn future, a delay of several days or more meant simply that the event they had heard about *already belonged to the past*: a recent past, perhaps, but past none the less. The principal difference, then, between the period before 1640 and that after was not the greater *speed* of printed news, nor a noticeable change in overall reception times (the time elapsed between an event and a person's learning about it, by whatever means, at a distance). Rather, the sense of an enveloping present owed its development to changes in the other limits on news reception that I sketched out above: flow, density, and commonality. All of these substantially altered during the seventeenth century, and particularly in periods of continuous activity, publicized through multiple media (printed, oral and written) such as the 1640s. It is this, not print's superiority over oral or manuscript transmission, that accounts for the changing relationship between past and present, and the establishment of the latter as a free-standing locus of social experience. These changes had profound implications for the modernization of the sense of time, and for the development of new media such as the novel (Hunter's point, above) and, slightly earlier, the diary; the latter genre was the literary consequence of individual attempts to record and order life-experiences according to a faster-moving diurnal and hourly experience in a new world dominated by clocks and watches. They also occasioned the decline and disappearance of older media such as the chronicle, whose capacity to record rapid change on an annual basis seemed by the mid-seventeenth century as inadequately slow as daily news now seems to users of Internet news servers and CNN.¹²

By way of illustrating the dispersal of a major news event and the importance of geography, let us look at one well-known example, the announcement to the world of the death of Elizabeth I. The old queen died at about three in the morning on the last day (as it was reckoned then) of 1602, 24 March, which was a Thursday. According to the young barrister John Manningham (whose friendship with the late queen's chaplain, Dr Parry, gave him inside knowledge), the Council had met at Whitehall and by ten o'clock, had proclaimed James VI of Scotland as the new king of England. Sir Robert Cecil read this proclamation aloud outside Whitehall; he then journeyed to Cheapside to read it there. Two districts of the city thus heard of this major event separately but immediately, and without any interposing media commentary, from the same high official. Over the course of the day, most of London discovered the death of the queen, though reports were fragmentary and coloured by rumour. Would there be a civil war over the succession? Had the queen, already the subject of numerous plots, finally been assassinated by Jesuits? Would the new king of Spain attempt another invasion – or had Spanish troops indeed already landed in the south? Those who could read would, some days and even weeks later, have the opportunity to discover answers to some of these questions as proclamations were issued by the Council, and as city hacks wrote poems and processions about the queen in anticipation of her funeral, or of her successor's arrival.

So much for the city. Because London, and especially the royal court, served as a kind of clearing-house for news from all points of the kingdom and beyond,

the closer one was to the metropolis the sooner one was likely to hear of most events.¹³ The rest of the nation had to wait much longer to discover this news, as did the expectant heir, several hundred miles to the north, despite the hurried departure of Sir Robert Carey and his famous breakneck ride (at about seven miles an hour) across country to Edinburgh. Carey reached Doncaster, 162 miles away, that night, and Berwick (184 miles) on Saturday; he then 'poasted on to Edinburgh' (fifty miles), after stopping to refresh himself, change horses, and acquaint his brother, Sir John, with the news. He got to Edinburgh later that night, having covered about 400 miles in three days. Consequently, lowland Scotland, or at least Edinburgh, may have learned of the change of dynasty before some parts of England. It took considerably longer for the news to travel to rebellion-torn Ireland; the earl of Tyrone, his armies worn out and his supplies exhausted, surrendered to the late queen on 3 April, still in ignorance of her death.¹⁴

News travelled as quickly or slowly as the men or women who carried it in the early modern era, which is to say that it did not normally travel quickly at all. Fernand Braudel estimated that until the major road improvements of the mid-eighteenth century, the average speed of all types of transport was a maximum of 100 kilometres (sixty miles) per twenty-four hour day.¹⁵ This may be overly pessimistic (depending on the terrain), since an estimate derived from Kentish postal speeds in the later part of the seventeenth century indicates that an average journey could take place at no greater than four and a half miles per hour, somewhat less during the winter – considerably slower than Carey's mad gallop of 1603 – but the general point stands.¹⁶ Between England and the Continent, delays were longer, though perhaps one ought to be surprised that they were not even greater. The news of Francis I's defeat at Pavia on 24 February 1525 first reached England in late March, in a letter of 15 March to Cardinal Wolsey from the English ambassador to Madrid, who himself had heard the news five days earlier from 'a currier, that passyd throw France be [*sic*] the France kings salve conduit.'¹⁷ Sir Thomas Barrington complained to his aged mother in 1632 that 'newes comes so uncertaynely and slowly to hand.' Sir Thomas was able to relay to her the spectacular victory of Gustavus Adolphus over the forces of Maximilian of Bavaria at Lech, which occurred on 5/15 April, only on 15 May, having just heard it in London; others had to wait for newsbooks to report it over the course of the next week. Bad news may have been fleetier of foot: a year earlier, the burning of Magdeburg by Tilly's troops on 10/20 May 1631 reached Oxford a mere three weeks later, on 30 May.¹⁸ From more remote areas, news took even longer. Samuel Pepys first learned from his patron Edward Montagu of the death of Charles X of Sweden on 3 March, 1660, exactly a month after the king had died. Running in the other direction, word of the battle of Worcester (3/13 September, 1651), which destroyed Charles II's Scottish army and sent him into exile, reached Paris nine days later, on the night of 12/22 September.¹⁹

Nor did the regular newspapers of the Restoration much improve the speed of foreign news, since they could only print material as they received it by packet

boats from across the channel. Although more contact as well as back and forth travel between England and the colonies took place in the seventeenth century than has often been acknowledged, the ocean remained an even greater divide.²⁰ Word of the dreadful earthquake in Lima, Peru (20 October 1687) took the whole winter to cross the Atlantic, appearing in the *London Gazette* only on 24 May 1688.²¹ On 20 September 1705 Nicholas Blundell in Lancashire heard, for the first time, of the death of his brother in Maryland nearly ten months earlier.²²

Provincial papers remained heavily dependent on the London press or on handwritten newsletters from the capital well into the eighteenth century.²³ The same was true of news going in the opposite direction as information from the country was sent to city newsletter writers, and eventually newspapers, by post or rider; the principal difference between foreign and provincial news throughout the period was the considerably greater dependence of London news-writers on the foreign printed press for international news, supplemented by diplomatic dispatches and material supplied by newly-returned merchants, sailors and travellers.²⁴ In contrast, news from other English and Welsh towns or even further afield in Scotland and Ireland could be sent by a system of regular correspondents.²⁵

Information and the flow of news

Like the sense of time itself, the ways in which news intruded on an individual's mental horizon could undoubtedly be shaped by such factors as social degree, gender, religion, or occupation. But the most influential determinant was without a doubt geography. Because towns, especially London, served as national or regional clearing-houses, those living in them were apt to think that there was an over-abundance of news, a chaos of passing events which had to be understood and mentally categorized, and which threatened to disturb the orderly passage of time. In a celebrated passage of his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton commented, from the perspective of an Oxford college room, on the variety of new information reaching his ears and eyes from different sources every day:

I hear new news every day, and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions, of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, &c. ... A vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances, are daily brought to our ears. New books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy, religion &c. ... To-day we hear of new Lords and officers created, to-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of fresh honours conferred. ... Thus I daily hear, and such like, both private and publick newes.²⁶

So great was the flow of information that the news-conscious town-dweller was obliged to come to terms with the relative importance of an event, its national, international or local significance, or be overwhelmed by it. Burton's comments on this 'vast confusion' are a pungent reminder that the anxiety induced by too great a stream of information is merely the flip side of the feelings of boredom, melancholy or ennui which were first being articulated at the same time.²⁷

In the country, the case could be much different, though rural gentry and clergy, at least, were able to keep themselves informed of events elsewhere, especially during times of crisis. In the comparative isolation of her husband's Yorkshire estate, Lady Margaret Hoby appears to have heard from a visiting friend of the execution of her former brother-in-law, the earl of Essex, on 25 February 1601, within a day of the event. More trivial news, though coming a shorter distance, could take much longer. Through one Mr Pollard, the high constable of Pickering Lythe, Lady Hoby heard, a month after it happened, of the death from drunkenness of a York parson and 'some other thinges of lesse moment.'²⁸ National events were received and noted together with those of familial or parochial interest. If they came in slowly and sporadically, as they generally did, they did not much disrupt the gentle trickle of time through daily, weekly and yearly routines. The diary of an Essex minister, Ralph Josselin, may serve as an example of the way in which extraordinary news could be quietly noted, its occurrence meshing with facts of everyday life such as planting or the weather. On 24 February 1678, Josselin made the following entry:

Lovely growing weather, a million granted the King to begin the war with France (,) wee are a people peeled and polled, help lord, see the issue of things.²⁹

Josselin, an articulate and intelligent observer, was clearly aware of the significance of events taking place outside the tiny world of his Earls Colne home to a greater degree than would have been his humbler parishioners. This awareness would still have been somewhat limited and conditioned by geographical isolation, though in Essex Josselin was relatively close to the capital. Even in the mid-seventeenth century, when newsbooks had proliferated, news travelled slowly into the provinces, thereby making 'current events' that much less current. It is best not to overstate this distinction between centre and periphery: a shocking event was a shocking event, wherever one heard it, and recent studies of the circulation of political news and of the attitude of the 'county communities' suggest that they were considerably less narrow and localist in interest than was once believed. In his brief autobiography, John Evelyn recalled, as one of his Sussex childhood memories, being awakened abruptly one morning in 1628 with the news of the duke of Buckingham's assassination. One of the earliest memories of Abraham de la Pryme was of the death of Charles II in 1685; as a small boy in Yorkshire he had 'heard a gentleman say that came from London, that the city was in tears, and most of the towns through which he came.'³⁰ For both men, these morsels of 'news,' unconnected blips on their

youthful horizons, occurred too early in their lives to shape their immediate futures, yet still occupied a privileged status in their retrospective understandings of their own pasts.

Density and commonality: Multiple modes of transmission of news

Thus far, I have argued that print affected the reproduction of news, and its effect on consciousness of present events, less by the speed at which it could record or disseminate events – which was still much slower, in the era of the hand-press, than writing or speech – than because of its mass-reproduction capacity, and the consequent rapidity with which it could replicate itself. This capacity was itself realized slowly, and until the late seventeenth century both the creators and receivers of news continued to rely heavily on more conventional media such as manuscript newsletters.³¹ Within England, visual and aural signals such as bells and bonfires (the latter set up in relay form) offered the easiest means to ‘flash’ news from one part of the country to another. Although they were unable to indicate exactly what that news was, some events (or rather, the outcomes of ongoing events) were already anticipated, so that the significance of a bonfire or bell-ringing would be understood in most places.³² This system remained in place half a century later: the proclamation of James II and the defeat of the duke of Monmouth were signalled at Leicester by a bonfire paid for by public money, as was the birth of the king’s son in 1688.³³ A slower but more informative route was to rely on a network of correspondents for ‘retransmission’ of news across the country and on the Continent. In such a manner did the Protestant reformer Richard Hilles, living in Strasbourg in 1547, pass on to Heinrich Bullinger, in Zürich, the news of the death of Henry VIII and the coronation of his son, ‘which they write me word from England is all true.’ In the 1620s, the Cambridge scholar Joseph Mead subscribed to private newsletters as well as to the newer corantos which that decade produced; he in turn was a tireless recirculator of their contents to his own contacts.³⁴

News continued to be conveyed by oral transmission throughout and long past the end of the period under discussion here.³⁵ During Elizabeth I’s reign and through the early Stuart period, however, this was increasingly complemented by a variety of graphic forms including official and unofficial manuscript newsletters, libels,³⁶ and ‘separates,’ written or printed sheets sent from London to the provinces and giving details of foreign affairs, parliamentary speeches, and court scandals, as well as the regular diet of broadsheet ballad accounts of marvels and prodigies.³⁷ Written and printed news reports were often sent together, a coranto adjoined to a personal newsletter, a practice that would continue after 1641.³⁸ An important recent study by Alastair Bellany of the spread of news about the early Stuart court has exploited family muniments and especially diaries and commonplace books to demonstrate the breadth of circulation of oral, written and printed news concerning such *scandala magnata* as the Thomas Overbury murder and the career and assassination of the duke of

Buckingham.³⁹ As Bellany perceptively remarks of the early seventeenth century: ‘A vibrant news culture created the space in which increasing numbers of people were able to engage with and become agents in the political process.’⁴⁰

Oral news lost no ground to its graphic counterparts after the collapse of Caroline censorship in 1641. If anything, its relationship with both print and manuscript became more symbiotic as each medium provided checks and confirmations on the others. The ballads published shortly after events such as the defeat of the Armada, the destruction of Charing Cross in 1647, the execution of the king, the Great Fire, and the Battle of Sedgemoor, which found their way into the collections of readers like Samuel Pepys, were successful in part because they could mediate between the oral and written. Other forms of printed news tended to complement rather than replace oral communication.⁴¹ In Elizabethan and Jacobean London, one simply had to go to a central meeting place such as Lincoln’s Inn Fields, or ‘Paul’s Walk’ in the Cathedral environs, to hear the latest news. The Royal Exchange was ideal for this purpose since there, as one Jacobean writer noted, ‘from all countreys there was dayly newes to be heard by one meanes or other.’⁴² In rural areas, markets and fairs served the same function. When the diarist John Rous tried to obtain news of the king’s siege of Coventry in August 1642, he consulted both newsbooks and Coventry men whom he encountered at Stourbridge Fair in Worcestershire. The Yorkshire cleric Abraham de la Pryme went to nearby Brigg to ‘heare the newse’ in 1696; since he also writes of going there to ‘see the newse,’ it is probable that, like Rous, he was picking it up from both newspapers and casual conversation.⁴³

Couriers, ambassadors and private messengers, travelling by foot, ship and mainly on horse brought news at widely varying rates,⁴⁴ and the development of a more sophisticated postal system in the seventeenth century did not, in the short term, greatly alleviate the irregularities in news circulation that were worsened in times of disaster or upheaval like the plagues that struck London in 1603, 1625 and 1665, or the Great Fire (which in addition to burning down the Letter Office, halted publication of the *London Gazette* for a week, while utterly destroying its rivals). The Civil War on the whole propelled the spread of news (of which it was the dominant though not exclusive subject), the energies and resources devoted to communications more than compensating for the countervailing disruption occasioned by the existence of hostile camps and the blockage of major roads and bridges. These retardants should not, of course, be underestimated, as contemporary complaints suggest. Writing to the earl of Essex on 26 May 1645, Sir Samuel Luke provided the Parliamentary commander with news from the garrison at Newport Pagnell, though he warned that it might be ‘stale by the slowness of the messenger.’ At other times news could travel very fast. Luke wrote to his brother, Sir Oliver, three weeks later, that his bearer had come in ‘good time,’ and had been dispatched back again almost immediately.⁴⁵ Yet the very slowness and unreliability of ordinary channels – the local officials who were supposed to keep the government informed – contributed to improvements, forcing central officials like the Cromwellian Secretary,

John Thurloe, to employ networks of agents and spies, much as his Elizabethan predecessor Sir Francis Walsingham had done in peacetime.

The gathering of information and the careful control of its release in the press indeed became one of the Secretary of State's major functions after the Restoration, as illustrated in the newsletters regularly dispatched in the 1660s and 1670s, at a subscription cost of about £5 a year, by individuals such as Henry Oldenburg or Henry Muddiman, and especially by writers working for the Secretaries of State, Henry Bennet earl of Arlington, his colleague, Sir William Morrice, and Arlington's subordinate and then successor, Sir Joseph Williamson.⁴⁶ Caroline and Commonwealth improvements to the postal system were maintained at the Restoration with the 1660 Post Office Act (12 Car. II cap. 35), which made permanent the removal of the office from private hands and set standard rates. The Act was accompanied by a purge of the office's suspect ex-Cromwellian leadership; the use of the post to send and receive news was further aided by the exemption of news-factors like Muddiman from the inland postage cost of 2d for the first eighty miles and 3d for anywhere else in England and Wales, a relatively high cost by contemporary standards.⁴⁷

Beginning with certain royal proclamations and with the short chronicles published by men like William Rastell and Richard Grafton in the early to mid-1500s, news had begun to make its way into print, albeit initially at a turgid rate. The next step, taken in the early seventeenth century, was the publication of monthly and then weekly 'newsbooks,' such as the foreign corantos that crept into England slowly prior to 1620 and thereafter much faster.⁴⁸ These initially had to be imported from Antwerp or from the Dutch Republic. In 1621, the government permitted their printing in London (so long as they stuck to foreign news and left domestic matters alone) thereby further reducing the time between the occurrence of events and their printing, since the news could travel faster across the channel in pre-print form, and increasing the volume of copies that could be quickly distributed. Beginning in October 1623, the first of several numbered series appeared, initiating a tentative regularity – of titles rather than intervals of publication – to the production of news.⁴⁹ Pamphlets such as *Mercurius Britannicus* (not to be confused with its parliamentarian namesake of the 1640s, *Mercurius Britanicus* with one 'n') began to proliferate.⁵⁰ By the early 1640s, according to one estimate, about 1,000 separate issues of a number of these corantos had been published, though only about one-third of these have survived.⁵¹ For various reasons, including complaints from the Spanish ambassador, Charles I suppressed the corantos in 1632, thereafter allowing only slower 'annuals' like the *Swedish Intelligencer* to be printed in the kingdom. Once again the letter-writers had to fill the void for their gentry customers, though the corantos were revived in 1638, under their earlier printers, Nathaniel Butter and Nicholas Bourne.⁵²

In his play *The Staple of News* (1631), Ben Jonson asked the question whether news remained news once it was committed to print, thereby identifying a distinction between history and current events that, I have posited, was emerging at exactly this time. Indeed, even a decade earlier, in his Twelfth Night masque,

News from the new world, discovered in the moon, Jonson had already raised the same issue. In this masque, two characters, a printer who prints newsbooks and corantos, and a factor who writes letters to correspondents in the countryside, debate the proper medium for the conveyance of news. The factor claims to be offended at the printing, rather than the writing down of news, 'for when they are printed they leave to be news; while they are written, though they be false, they remain news still.' The answer of the printer is that: 'It is the printing of them makes them news to a great many who will indeed believe nothing but what's in print.' It is these customers who keep his presses running, and his writers writing; and every ten years or so he recycles his stories as the age 'grows forgetful' of their contents.⁵³

One has only to examine the heading 'Newsbooks' in the revised *Short-Title Catalogue* to notice how, by 1640, print had already largely formalized the recording and transmission of news and begun to accustom readers to regular reports. Whether print caused an increased appetite for quicker, more regular news or simply responded to an interest that was already there is a chicken-and-egg question of little significance. The issuing of proclamations and the publication of statutes and letters patent, or the circulation of other pieces of information in sermons and at meetings of the Assizes from the late Middle Ages through the seventeenth century must certainly count as a form of the transmission of news, as did the return of MPs from parliaments, albeit news so spread was both sparse and irregular.⁵⁴ There can similarly be little doubt, from the reception end, that the gentry, clergy and aristocracy had already been growing acclimated to semi-regular news, in non-printed form, through diplomatic letters and private correspondence (for which the letters of the Pastons in the fifteenth century, as much as those of John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton or of Henry More to Anne Conway, offer well-known examples), and through the services of professional letter-writers such as Rowland White, who during the turbulent 1590s, with an aged queen, Irish rebellion, and the Spanish lurking across the channel, had kept paying correspondents in the country in touch with developments in London and elsewhere.⁵⁵ But it is also apparent that without print and its rapid-replication capacity, any wider public appetite for information would have remained severely constrained by the transmissional limits of oral and handwritten reports. In 1600, the provincial citizen or rural subject was more or less entirely at the mercy of oral reports, visitors, and correspondents. In 1728, by contrast, the mayor of remote Durham could supply himself with a year's worth of printed news for a mere shilling.⁵⁶

At first sight it might be argued that one effect of the newsbook and the newspaper was to silence the news, making it something to be perceived quietly by the reader, in isolation from others, rather than a part of ordinary conversation. This would be a mistake, since news could run freely between speech and writing or print. It is true that in reading a newspaper or letter in privacy, one is confined simply to comprehending and acknowledging the message contained therein: a solitary reader may surely read between the lines to discern hidden intent, but texts cannot fill in nuances, clarify details, or answer questions. In

contrast, to converse about the news – even about a newspaper one has just read and has in hand – is not only to possess knowledge of its contents but also to be able to respond to it directly and dialogically. In conversation with the provider of oral news, one can evaluate the messenger as well as the message, and judge from gesture, facial expression, and intonation whether the news is true, or at least whether its spokesperson believes it to be true. It is no wonder, then, that early modern people long preferred to have their news by mouth when possible. Henry VIII often read diplomatic letters to himself, but at other times he would read them aloud, or have them read to him, and converse with the messenger. Sir Thomas More reported in 1529 that the king had received and read a foreign letter which ‘mencioned credence to be geven to the bringer in the declaring of the same.’ On another occasion, five years earlier, More noted that the king had read a dispatch from Richard Pace aloud to the queen and court, ‘and furthwith he declared the newes and every material point, which uppon the reding his Grace well noted un to the Quenys Grace and all other about hym who were mervelouse glad to here it.’⁵⁷

Writing in 1580, John Lyly commented that ‘the eare is the caryer of newes.’⁵⁸ A century later print, an upstart competitor, had challenged the ear’s monopoly but not overthrown it, aural news being among other things less demanding on its recipients (something that remains true today when newspapers have lost ground to less time-consuming media like radio and television). In fact, though print allowed for private digestion of the news, it just as often promoted discussion. This is best demonstrated by the interplay between oral, written and printed news at that most characteristic of Restoration and Augustan institutions, the coffee-house, which one scholar has, in the wake of Habermas, called ‘the architecture for the emergence of the public sphere.’⁵⁹ These were not limited to London. In larger towns, one simply had to go to the nearest coffee-house to consult the papers, read letters, and hear and discuss news. Rowland Davies, dean of Ross, who visited England in 1689, records going to a coffee-house and ‘reading the news’ throughout his journal as part of his ordinary daily activities. But he also, while at dinner with a friend, ‘heard an account of the Turks being defeated.’⁶⁰ The West country physician Claver Morris heard of the peace terms with France in 1709 at a coffee-house (news which seems, however, to have been of less interest than that which he heard while at music later in the day, ‘of poor Molley Mills’s being scalded to death in Cornwall, in a kettle of water’).⁶¹ These remarks all come from the gentry and professional classes, but the expanded literacy of the later seventeenth century makes it nearly as applicable to their social inferiors. If one listens to such contemporary comments as those of the Swiss-French visitor César de Saussure in 1729, the coffee-houses attracted ‘workmen’ who began their day ‘by going to coffee-rooms to read the latest news’ and ‘discussing politics and topics of interest concerning royalty.’⁶² Lewis Theobald thought it ‘provokingly ridiculous’ to hear a haberdasher in a coffee-house ‘descant on a general’s misconduct, and talk of an army’s passing a river with the same facility as he himself could go over Fleet-bridge.’⁶³

The degree to which the recipient of news did not distinguish between information conveyed orally and that conveyed in writing, even in the early eighteenth century, appears in the detailed record afforded by one diarist in the reign of Queen Anne, Henry Prescott. The deputy registrar of the diocese of Chester, Prescott was a lazy functionary with a higher devotion to drink and conversation than to ecclesiastical law. He was, however, an inveterate news-hound who daily recorded the bits of information that came his way through personal contact, conversation at alehouses and coffeehouses, correspondence, and what he called ‘the public news.’ Figure 1 breaks down the news that he recorded by subject.

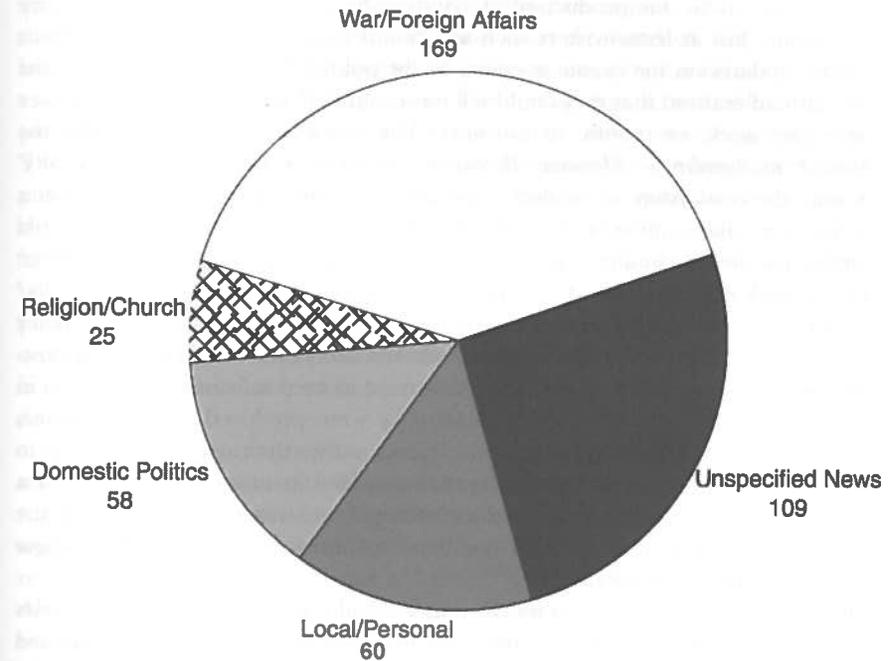


Figure 1 The circulation of the news at Chester: subjects of events heard of or read of by Henry Prescott, 1704–11

Note: Sources include personal information, letters, alehouse/coffeehouse discourse and the ‘public news’

Source: *The Diary of Henry Prescott LL.B.*, vol. 1, J.M. Addy, ed., Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 127

Aside from a large unspecified category of general ‘news’ that he records without further detail as to its subject (about one quarter of all references), he paid about the same attention to local matters, or those involving his immediate family, as he did to domestic British politics. Either despite or because of his employment as a

lay official of the Church, he had little interest in recording news involving religion and the Church. But the chart makes it crystal clear that in the relative isolation of Chester, the news that regularly had the greatest impact on him was that of foreign affairs and especially war. In all, 169 references in the diary are concerned with international affairs. War had an ability to puncture the flow of time so effectively and shockingly that it could overwhelm the intake of other forms of news. Let us now see if some earlier cases of war had an equivalent effect on the sense of the present.

News and current events

By the late 1620s, the production of corantos had become serialized and more systematic. Just as letter-writers such as Chamberlain gave their correspondents weekly updates on the events at court, so the publishers of newsbooks at home and abroad realized that they could sell more copies if they retained an audience from one week, or month, to the next. The repeated use of names like the *Swedish Intelligencer* or *Mercurius Britannicus*, suggests a nascent 'brand loyalty' among the readership, as readers bestowed their trust, and their pennies, on a publication that appeared at intervals. After 1641, ideological conflict would further the division and redivision of the readership of news along political lines: John Cleveland, the royalist poet, denounced parliamentary diurnals as 'urinalls,' as different from royalist newsbooks 'as the Devill and his Exorcist; or as a black Witch doth [differ] from a white one, whose office is to unravell her enchantments.'⁶⁴ The proximity of events and the need to keep informed about them in turn affected the speed at which newsbooks were produced, since publishers wished their products to keep pace with events, rather than simply responding to them on an *ad hoc* basis. *Regularity* was thus added to newness and truth as a quality for the successful newsbook, something demonstrated once again by the increasing number of dated and numbered corantos in the *Short-title Catalogue* and later in the Thomason Tracts.⁶⁵

The Thirty Years' War did much to increase the importation of foreign news on a regular basis. Gustavus' victories or the atrocities of Tilly's troops remained remote events; though Protestants might fear the possible outcome of an imperial victory for the Reformation throughout Europe, though they might shudder at accounts of babies hurled into the flames by marauding Spanish soldiers, they had little sense of these events having an immediate effect on English life. Yet troubles for Protestantism in Germany were potentially deadly to Englishmen apprehensive for the future, their memories still fresh with Bloody Mary, the Armada, and the Gunpowder Plot. Even if they did not resonate in the same way as a crisis on home soil, they involved English mercenaries and money, an English princess in distress (the Electress Palatine), and rising fears about the future of reformed religion in England.⁶⁶

The vigour of public discussion of foreign affairs and court scandals in the 1620s and 1630s, whether in corantos, newsletters, or private correspondence, is difficult to deny. Yet it is possible to argue that the activities of the Long

Parliament, the Irish Rebellion, and the Civil War that ensued in 1642 marked events different in kind as well as degree from anything that had preceded them, and that they produced in the 1640s newsbook a printed mirror that is just as distinguishable from its early Stuart predecessors.⁶⁷ For the first time in 200 years, and the first time ever since the advent of printing, large armies were fighting battles not across the Channel but right at home, on British soil, and in all three kingdoms at the same time. This would happen only on a much smaller scale after 1660 and would cease altogether with Culloden in 1746. To read of military, religious and political developments became not just a matter of interest (though that it surely was), but also potentially one of survival; to publish such accounts offered not simply the prospect of a small monetary gain but an opportunity to fight a propaganda campaign that was unprecedented, at least in scale and duration, in English history. And once the hand of the censor was lifted in 1641, even the shaky control of news exercised by the Elizabethan and early Stuart regimes ceased to exist. The result was a veritable flood of pamphlets, parliamentary speeches,⁶⁸ and especially newsbooks, beginning with *The Heads of Severall Proceedings in this Present Parliament* (22–29 November 1641), produced with weekly regularity, each presenting an account of recent events that was both up to date and, from the point of view of the side generating it, 'true.' In 1642 came greater regularity as a few newsbooks established themselves under titles like *A Perfect Diurnall*, and as each day of the week became the publishing territory of rival series.⁶⁹ The printed word was occasionally supplemented by woodcuts, the effectiveness of graphic representations having been demonstrated much earlier in such Elizabethan works as Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.⁷⁰

The distribution of news was not, even then, confined to the newsbooks, as testified by the continuation of pre-war practices, such as the dispatching of manuscript newsletters by professional writers who specialized in providing weekly information to rural subscribers; booksellers now took on extra copyists or employed scribes in order to service their swelling subscription lists.⁷¹ Alastair Bellany has rightly remarked that the news culture of the half century before 1640 had set the stage for the 'phenomenal growth of political expression and debate' after the end of censorship.⁷² With such favourable conditions in place, the volume of printed and written material was in itself sufficient to carry news through different parts of the realm in an unparalleled volume and with unprecedented regularity; and, as Joad Raymond points out, even in small runs of 250 to 1,000 copies, the same newsbooks would be re-read by several readers over a period of days elsewhere in the provinces.⁷³ This represented a major increase in the flow, density and commonality of news even though it brought with it, as we will see further below, added problems for recipients unable to distil truth from propaganda, reality from rumour.

The flip side of a current event is 'public opinion,' the collective if discordant responses of the readers or hearers of news to what that news means, whether it is good or bad, and, most important, what should be done about it. The petitions produced on the eve of and throughout the Civil War represent among other

ings a more concerted and direct provincial response to events in Westminster than had ever occurred previously; and the conflicts between rival newsbooks rather fuelled the political flames.⁷⁴ The same environment for ideological response to events would be achieved again during the Exclusion Crisis, where it as recently been studied by Mark Knights, with the volume of pamphlets published in 1680, about 1,800, representing double the number published three years before.⁷⁵ News thus does much more than recount events that are part of a longer story, still in play; it solicits possible resolutions to that story. Where history relates acts which are complete with a narrative beginning, middle and end, news is Janus-faced, simultaneously peering into the past and the future. The literate public of the 1640s were aware that the events through which they were living were incomplete and that, subject to providence, they would be called upon to shape their final disposition.

This had lasting consequences for the future development of news in England: Figure 2 illustrates the stages in the expansion of the present from the early seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, with relation to the national events occurring at that time and the printed media wherein they were related.

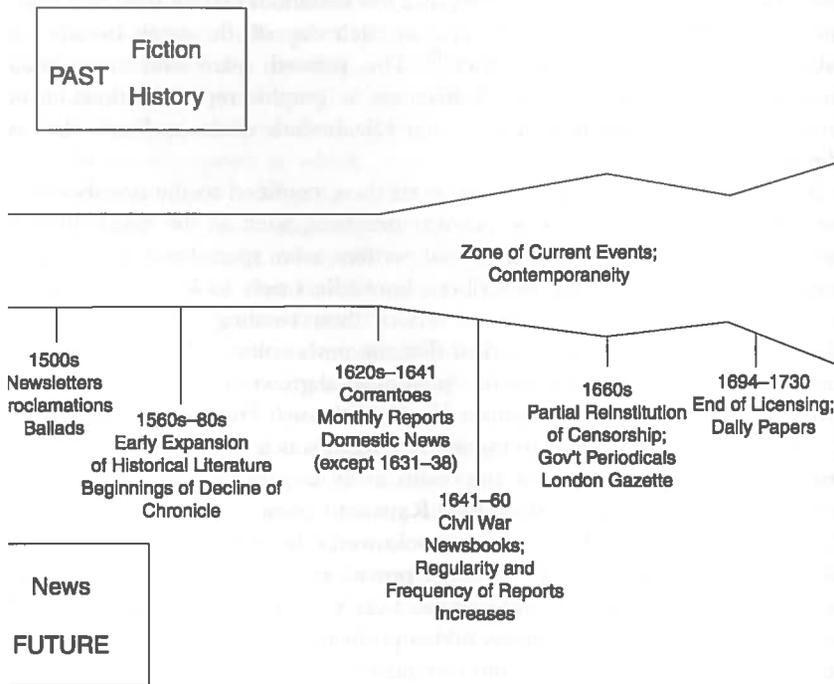


Figure 2 News and the expansion of the present, 1500-1730

The desperate urgency with which the newsbooks were greeted may have abated with the temporary cessation of armed hostility in 1646, but not the appetite for their information. Despite the ban on newspapers other than the official *Gazette* from 1666 to 1679 and again from 1682, the attempts of successive regimes throughout the Interregnum and Restoration to restrict the publication of all domestic news proved largely futile, notwithstanding the scrutiny of watchdogs like Sir Roger L'Estrange, Charles II's Surveyor of the Press. The proclamation issued by Charles II's government in 1680, at the height of the Exclusion Crisis, which attempted to suppress the unlicensed printing and distribution of news, was a desperate barn-door locking after the horse had escaped. Nailed awkwardly back into place in 1682, the door squeaked open again in 1688-89. It would come off its hinges for good in 1695, though the use of 'general warrants' issued by the Secretaries of State remained a frequent but controverted practice until the time of John Wilkes and the *North-Briton* in the 1760s.⁷⁶

On the theory that the best defence lay less in a sieve-like censorship than in the good offence of an official and Crown-friendly publication, the later Stuart period saw the advent of L'Estrange's own *Intelligencer* (1663) and then the *London Gazette* (1665), which for its first few months, while the Court was in Oxford fleeing the Plague, was published both there and in the City. That the government felt compelled to supply an official outlet for news at all – not something done under any preceding regime (if we exclude proclamations) – is a mark of how news-oriented English society had become in the ensuing two decades. These papers to some degree competed for the most interesting stories with the manuscript newsletter services largely controlled by L'Estrange's rival, Williamson, and by Henry Muddiman, whose own *Current Intelligencer* was put out of business by the Great Fire within weeks of its initiation.⁷⁷ The *Gazette* was the monarchical successor to two Marchamont Nedham-run official publications of the 1650s, *Mercurius Politicus* and the *Publick Intelligencer* (which enjoyed an official monopoly after the Cromwellian crack-down on newsbooks in 1655), and to Nedham's 1659-60 successors *Mercurius Publicus* and the *Parliamentary Intelligencer*, run by General Monck's client Muddiman. Boasting the barred rubric 'published by authority,' the *Gazette* first appeared in a double-column broadsheet, before evolving into a four-page format. It enjoyed special status as an official publication, despite the relative sparseness of domestic news and outlasted most of its contemporary rivals, holding a virtual monopoly between 1666 and 1679. In May of that year, the expiration of the 1662 Licensing Act owing to Charles II's prorogation of Parliament permitted a brief window of three years during which nearly forty different papers were published, many of them short-lived.⁷⁸

Both the *London Gazette* and the other papers that sprang up briefly during the Exclusion Crisis signify that the old weekly or bi-weekly newsbook was on its way to becoming, in form and frequency, the new newspaper. By the turn of the seventeenth into the eighteenth century, the transition to a daily issue of the same series had been achieved in such titles as the *Daily Courant* (a morning paper) and the *Evening Post*.⁷⁹ With the dailies came the thrice-weekly *Posts* of William III's reign, and then the literary periodicals such as the *Guardian*, *Tatler*,

and *Spectator*. These functioned as the printed link between members of different clubs and coffee-houses, which were themselves active agents in the dissemination of news, blending oral rumour with writing and print into a pastiche of contemporaneity.⁸⁰ The dailies even introduced an early sort of stop-press instrument to allow up-to-the-hour additions, in the form of 'postscripts' which began as handwritten notes in the margins of printed papers, and soon became printed sheets separately issued, albeit without an explicitly advertised connection to their parent paper.⁸¹ Only further improvements in communications, in the nineteenth century, would seriously reduce the lag between an event and its recounting in the press.

News and history

There was one further consequence of the creation of a meaningful present, which was the amicable but permanent separation of news from history. The corantos and early newsbooks of the 1620s speak of news as history and often were published under the rubric of history, a further reinforcement of the argument that at its earliest stage the published news was perceived as a record of the recent past, not of an ongoing present. During the 1640s and later, writers such as John Cleveland drew a sharp contrast between the dignity and truthfulness of history – at a time when it was losing both – and the vulgarity, lack of elegance, and sensationalism of the newsbooks, 'the embryo of history slinckt before maturity.' Cleveland would not have been pleased at the manner in which the contents of yesterday's newsbooks reappeared, from the late 1640s onward, as today's histories in writers from Joshua Sprigge through William Dugdale and John Rushworth.⁸² References to the word 'history' in newspapers of every sort decline sharply in the second half of the century, though the term 'chronicle,' no longer in vogue among historians, would enjoy a second life as a purveyor of news, and though, too, the former close relation of the two is conveyed in Steele's reference to newsbooks as 'weekly historians.'⁸³ It is perhaps significant that when two formerly independent papers, the *Post-man* and *The Historical Account* were merged in 1695 and for a time published under both titles, the 'historical account' subtitle was soon dropped.⁸⁴ There were, naturally, exceptions. But even in a paper of the 1730s entitled *The Historical Journal*, the serialized *History of England from the Earliest Accounts of Time Down to the Reign of his Present Majesty King George II* that it provided readers (an adaptation of Paul de Rapin-Thoyras' popular history) was deliberately kept separate from the news, and printed as a detachable half-sheet supplement.⁸⁵

News had not, of course, displaced history as a subject of discussion. But it had definitively established the present as a zone of activity, as narratable as the past, but distinguishable from it, and thereby constructed a public space within which events could enjoy their ephemeral life before slipping into the maw of history. A very clear expression of the proper spheres of history and news comes from 1733, when Eustace Budgell tried to evade the latest (1725) Stamp Tax on newspapers. Successive governments since 1712 had been obliging the publishers

of newspapers carrying recent intelligence to use stamped paper.⁸⁶ Budgell was the author of *The Bee; or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet*, and he had neglected to apply to the Commissioners of the Stamp Revenue for exemption by virtue of his publication being a three-sheet pamphlet rather than a newspaper proper (pamphlets over a certain number of sheets were counted as books and exempted). Accordingly, *The Bee* was taken as a 'Weekly Collection of news' and entered at the Stamp Office as a newspaper, which should be printed on a half-sheet with the half-penny stamp. Budgell protested that his publication, insofar as it contained news at all, as opposed to other matter, was not a newspaper but a magazine, like the *London Magazine* or *Gentleman's Magazine*. The publisher of the *London Magazine*, however, was keen to defend the commercial advantage of his own exemption. He therefore made the case that his publication was qualitatively different from Budgell's because as a monthly its news was *by definition* no longer current, hence not news at all but history:

The true *Import and Meaning* of the Word *NEWS* is the Return of Intelligence of any Kind, by the Posts *Foreign or Domestick*. But all Transactions of a Month's standing, are, long within that Time, recorded in the *Secretary of State's Office*, then, by the Law of Nations, become *Memorials*, and all future Recitals of them, fall under the proper, and only, Denomination of *HISTORY*.

At the end of a month, Budgell's enemy pointed out, all intelligence collections were bound up and indexed – essentially turned into history books. Any attempt to include such materials under the coverage of the tax was in his view ludicrous and 'might as well include *Josephus*, Rapin's *History*, and Baker's *Chronicle*,' all three of which works had recently been serialized.⁸⁷

The removal of news from the realm of the historical was not absolute – since the present inescapably emerges from the past it never can be. The diarist Lady Sarah Cowper indiscriminately classified her snippets of news together with stories under the marginal rubric 'histories,' and she makes a telling comment in 1713 that speaks to news and history being close relations, but not identical because of the temporal spheres in which they operate:

History and news are so nearly alli'd that the only difference seems to be; the one informs us of what was done in times remote from us, and the other of what is so late as may be properly call'd present and in being; if anything which depends on time may deserve that name. It serves to shew how like the several ages of the world have been to one another, what warrs, and revolution monarchy's erected, empires pull'd down; cittys built and destroy'd. Ravages, alliances, treatys, and all the other variety's wee see in our daye, have gone on in a course of succession since the earth has been inhabited.⁸⁸

The past helped Cowper, like most readers, to make sense of the present, and the present to understand the nature of events in the past.

By the end of the seventeenth century, events were seen to be part of an ongoing historical process continuing into the future, a process that could be broken down into weekly, daily or even smaller units. Various links between the media that conveyed the present and those that commemorated and interpreted more remote events continued to exert an attraction to readers, not least of all the family of genres that includes the salacious 'narratives' or 'true narratives' or 'true accounts,' as they often titled themselves, of crime and punishment, scaffold speeches, and reports of marvels and miraculous cures, as well as the occasional *chronique scandaleuse* of misconduct among the famous. An examination of the 'news' contained in one major collection, the Pepys ballads, indicates a concern with events ranging from the apparently trivial, such as the cow that ran into Clerkenwell church during a sermon in 1689, or the 'Somersetshire wonder,' a calf born with the face of a woman, to major political and military events.⁸⁹ As Paul Hunter writes, there is a strong sense in the titles of most such works that they are 'helping to write the full history of the times and ultimately of reality itself.'⁹⁰

News, rumour, distrust, and anxiety

The presence of the present in news was not universally welcomed. In addition to the anxiety occasioned by the onrush of information, there remained throughout the period a deep distrust of news because it was both new and difficult to verify. News lacked the air of authority that surrounded old texts. Vocalized, it could scarcely be distinguished from rumour, *a fortiori* when it emanated at second hand, or from a less than credible source.⁹¹ Print did not help since for many readers and writers in the first two centuries after Caxton, printed publication constituted a 'stigma' that made a communication or utterance inherently less trustworthy than a manuscript text.⁹² 'When a piece of false intelligence gets into one paper,' reported the *Craftsman* in 1734, 'it commonly runs thro' them all, unless timely contradicted by those who are acquainted with the particular circumstances.'⁹³ Steven Shapin has argued that in the realm of science, truth was increasingly thought to issue exclusively from the mouths of the social elite, and particularly from those of good 'credit.' Shapin's point can be supported from fields other than science, news among them. In the credibility of news, however, other elements more than social degree were important, such as political and religious affiliation: put simply, one inclined to believe one's friends and disbelieve one's enemies. Dudley Ryder, a constant reader of newspapers and haunter of coffee houses, was keen to get a good seat at the execution of the Jacobite earl of Derwentwater in 1716. Ryder discounted the news presented by his lodging-house maid, to the effect that the earl and his condemned comrades had been reprieved, because its original source had been a fellow lodger of Tory persuasion, and 'the Tories love to deceive themselves with agreeable news.' He was uncertain enough, however, to

go straight into town and make sure of his facts, arriving just in time to get a perfect view of the falling heads.⁹⁴

Such distrust existed throughout the early modern period, but it did little to kill the appetite for news. As Thomas Cromwell remarked to John Creke in 1523, 'news refresheth the spirit of life.'⁹⁵ Throughout the period, thirst for news, like innovation in general, provided a target for wits. In about 1516, the court poet John Skelton commented that news had made men worse gossips than women:

For men be now tatlers and tellers of tales;
What tidings at Totham, what newis in Wales,
What shippis are sailing to Scalis Malis,
And all is not worth a couple of nut shalis.

Bishop John Jewel, writing to Bishop John Parkhurst in 1553, refused to report any news, punningly remarking that, 'the old is more than enough.'⁹⁶ In Chapman's play *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, Renel tells Clermont that if he wishes to be considered a 'gentleman well-qualified,' he must ask 'what the news is.' Clermont, in reply, refers to the Locrian princes who punished any newcomers who enquired as to the news,

Since commonly such brains are most delighted
With innovations, gossips' tales, and mischiefs.⁹⁷

A sermon preached at Whitehall in 1619 denounced the quest for news, which had become so widespread that 'Every man's religion is known by his news; the puritan talkes of Bethlehem Gabor, &c.'⁹⁸

Such satires became more common in the 1620s, the decade of the corantos. In Jonson's *News from the New World*, to which I have already referred, the anti-masque opens with a discussion between two heralds (the purveyors of oral news), a factor of news who writes letters to clients in the country, a printer and a chronicler.

1st herald: News, news, news!
2nd herald: Bold and brave news!
1st herald: New as the night they are born in.
2nd herald: Or the phant'sie that begot them.
1st herald: Excellent news!
2nd herald: Will you hear any news?

The printer then enquires as to the price of the news and is asked if anyone ever buys the news: has it, in short, become a commodity, like fish or corn? He responds that he is all in favour of selling it; in fact, being a printer, he makes his living hunting out news wherever it may be and selling printed versions of it. 'I'll give any thing for a good Copie now, be't true or false, so't be newes.'⁹⁹ In 1626

Jonson returned to these themes at greater length in *The Staple of News*, performed in that year and first printed in 1631. In this work we meet a woman called Tattle, one of a quartet of 'gossips' including Mirth, Censure and, significantly, Expectation. She enjoins Prologue to 'Looke your Newes be new, and fresh, Mr. Prologue, and untainted, I shall find them else, if they be stale, or flye-blowne, quickly!' It is not clear that 'untainted' necessarily means 'truthful.' Another exchange between several characters emphasizes the theme of information overload or 'vast confusion' we have seen in Burton's *Anatomy*, before raising a related concern: the lack of any rubric by which to distinguish true and false, amid the Babel-like noise of the newest events.¹⁰⁰ News addicts presented as inviting a target as those who fed their habit; with allowances for the greater prominence of printed news, there is a close family resemblance between Skelton's early Tudor remarks on news-hunger and an essay of two centuries later by Joseph Addison. This features an impoverished Political Upholsterer who is 'the greatest newsmonger in our quarter.' Up before dawn to read the *Postman*, he walks up and down town to check for Dutch mails. More anxious about the welfare of King Augustus than that of his own family, 'He looked extremely thin in a dearth of news, and never enjoyed himself in a westerly wind.'¹⁰¹

But there was more to object to in news than simply its promotion of a perceived popular addiction to novelty. Another, and major, reason why commentators from one end of the period to the other were so suspicious of news – in whatever medium – was that it was so often either false or out of date.¹⁰² To counteract such well-established distrust, the newsbooks (rather like another, less regular, medium of news, the ballad, which was also subject to distrust), very early commonly emphasized two qualities in their titles. First, they stressed their newness, the excitement to be gained from reading them. In 1614, Philip Gawdy remarked to his nephew, Framlingham, 'That newes is best in season, when it is newest, whether it be true, or false.' Exactly a century later a letter printed in *The Spectator* made a comparable comment, but used the shorter time span of an hour as the measure of freshness. 'A piece of news loses its flavour when it hath been an hour in the air.'¹⁰³ Title-page set-ups quickly developed the marketing technique of stressing the newness of their contents in a graphic anticipation of the modern headline, thereby predetermining the reader's sense of what had become an important event. Second, they assured readers of their truth, each book claiming that it was the most up-to-date and reliable account of the events being related. Thus the most accomplished newsmonger of the 1640s, Marchamont Nedham, felt obliged in 1645 to declare that he was reporting events independently and without interference from his parliamentary masters; other pamphlets carried encouraging names like *The Moderate* or *Perfect Passages*.¹⁰⁴ Both truth and newness were necessary claims, as the volume of such material increased. Publishers and booksellers began to compete for a still relatively limited literate market, and in order to persuade readers to buy one account rather than another it was essential to persuade them that the account was genuinely 'new,' in the sense of most recent and that it was truthful, both in the sense of having not committed deliberate falsification, and

in the different but no less important sense of having not been overtaken by further events. It might seem strange that writers had to make a special plea for the veracity of their accounts. That is because in democratic countries with a free press we now take it for granted that this should be so (though we are often disappointed) and demand immediate editorial retractions when it is not. The early modern mind, with its deep distrust of anything new and unsanctioned by authority, needed reassurance that what was contained in the newsbook was not idle rumour, or fancy. Not only was early modern news explicitly biased, it was also widely expected to be so. The modern goal of 'objective' and unopinionated reporting (whether or not it is ever, in practice, really achieved), would have seemed strange to news readers and writers of 300 years ago.

Rumour and report, said the Jacobean MP Sir Walter Cope, are 'two bastards begotten by the people; the author seldom knowne.'¹⁰⁵ It was easy to invent tales, or simply to let one's imagination creatively edit a piece of information and pass it on in greatly changed form. Robert Crowley pointed out some of the ill consequences of false news in the mid-sixteenth century, in words reminiscent of Skelton's earlier comparison between news and women's gossip:

Some men do delite
 straunge newes to invente,
 Of this mannes doynge,
 and that mannes intente;
 What is done in Fraunce,
 and in the Emperours lande;
 And what thyng the Scottes
 do nowe take in hande;
 What the kynge and his counsell
 do intende to do;
 Though for the most parte
 it be nothing so.

Such men cause murmuring, discontent, even sedition – a gloss on this epigram points out, 'We sawe the experience of thys of late,' referring to the rebellions of 1549.¹⁰⁶

It is not difficult to see why the incompleteness or uncertainty of news aroused anxiety. The godly steward of Northampton, Robert Woodford, expressed a grave sense of public fear of rumoured French and popish conspiracies in 1639, a good two years before the advent of a real cabal, the Army Plot, during the earl of Strafford's trial. 'The times in the apprehencion of all seeme to be very doubtfull, and many feares we have of dangerous plotts by French and papists.'¹⁰⁷ Tudor and Stuart governments, always acutely conscious of the danger of rumour and report, were consequently strict in the punishment of rumour-mongers. English law had long admitted the possibility of treason by words as opposed to acts; while the dissemination of false news was less obnoxious than treason, it was also much more commonplace. Statutes against

false news date from the late fifteenth century and were revived and enhanced under Elizabeth I. Lord Keeper Egerton noted in 1596 the dangers that false reports posed to due process. 'Thought is free, but the tongue should be governed by knowledge'; a false accusation could lead easily to the miscarriage of justice since 'on common voice and rumour a man may be imprisoned.'¹⁰⁸ In 1628, Sir John Coke complained to the House of Commons that discussions of the Petition of Right had caused various rumours abroad, thereby damaging the king's reputation; he claimed that news of it had 'flown so far that I have a copy of it in Spanish in my pocket, that the people of England will not rely upon the King's word.'¹⁰⁹

A single example from the late seventeenth century suggests that governments were not mistaken in being concerned about the overly free travelling of news, even if they were relatively powerless to do much about it. On the eve of the Revolution of 1688, rumours flew about the country of murdering armies of Irish, of popish conspiracies, and of 'ferocious Laplanders clad in bearskins' serving in William of Orange's army. The Irish rumour – not the first of its kind – caused a minor panic in Yorkshire. As Abraham de la Pryme put it, 'all was up in arms, yet nobody knew where they were to fight.' What is most striking about this case is the degree to which, even in the age of printed news, such rumour moved much more quickly and furtively by voice.

This newse or report ran, as I sayd, quite through the country, and for all it was some weeks a running northward, yet no one letter appear'd out of the south concerning any such thing there till it was always gone past those places where these letters were to go.

What clearly began as orally-communicated rumour had thus made its way into written form, which inevitably appeared, as Jonson had long before noted, to stamp it with a specious authority in the eyes of the foolish. Pryme soon learned, however, to be equally sceptical of the letters that followed the verbal reports north, which told of buried copper pots full of oil for boiling heretics, and of wild horses kept underground for years and fed on human flesh so that when the papists rose they would tear Protestants to pieces.¹¹⁰

Deliberate distortion was not necessary for the truth of news to be lost amid competing rumours, fears and speculations. The degree of falsity often grew in direct proportion to the distance from the event, as the number of relayers of news expanded and the means of checking for accuracy diminished. Small wonder, then, that country gentry and Englishmen abroad were suspicious of any sort of news, but especially of that which came *exclusively* in oral form – not because print and writing were inherently more trustworthy but because letters and newspapers could provide a check on or confirmation of oral reports. The English Catholic Richard Verstegan, who lived much of his life in Antwerp, was confronted with conflicting information concerning recent anti-Catholic persecutions in England when visited by two co-religionists in 1602. As he in turn wrote to Father Robert Parsons, the information from these men did not concur

with earlier reports, 'yet had I rather write upon the relation of these two gentlemen, beeing knowen and of credit, then upon other reportes of lesse certainty.' During the anticipatory period of the Spanish Match in November 1623, the Norfolk gentleman Thomas Knyvett could only write that there was 'a great deal of uncertaine newes.' The court, however, was not much better informed: Sir John Coke received a message from London on 14 June that there was 'as yet no news, no marriage,' noting that 'the scenes and the actors are so far off.'¹¹¹ Sometimes the problem was too many reports, and no basis for choosing one over another. Following developments in the Low Countries, the Norfolk gentleman and future judge, Francis Wyndham, was perplexed and anxious at contradictory accounts reaching him both direct from Flanders and via informants in his own county.¹¹² Brilliana Harley had difficulty ascertaining, from her home in Herefordshire, the truth about negotiations at Westminster between the English and the Scots in March 1641. 'Many rumors are in the cuntry' she noted; two months later, she wrote to her son reporting that 'in the cuntry they have in report hanged the archbischope.' In fact, Laud was still under safe-keeping in the Tower: the rumour of his death was probably a confusion of reports concerning the execution of Strafford on 12 May.¹¹³

Extraordinary circumstances might intervene to make news even harder to obtain and verify. The home counties, close to London, were normally in a good position to receive accurate reports. But in 1625, as the planned match of Charles I and Henrietta Maria drew near, the Suffolk incumbent John Rous, an assiduous reader and collector of corantos, was frustrated by a lack of news concerning this. 'Newes of her arrivall, and the occurrences thereof, was very litle and very uncertaine in Norfolk,' he observed, blaming this on the fact that the plague had forced Parliament to abandon London for Oxford, and was making travel dangerous. In October of the same year, Rous recorded from his corantos that Mansfeld had defeated the emperor and slain the duke of Friedland (Wallenstein); he was inclined to believe this last rumor because 'many corantoes confirmed' it.¹¹⁴ Once again the greater density of news reports, and the ability to compare them, rather than their speed, was the decisive factor that invested the story with credibility.

The births and deaths of notables lent themselves most easily to rumour-mongering. Often reports of death were either 'distorted' or at least premature, if a person were known to be ill. The death of Jane Seymour was turned by rumour into a report of the death of the king himself. The London merchant tailor, Henry Machyn, recorded reports of the death of Edward VI in 1553, including the tale that 'he was poyssoned, as evere body says, wher now, thanke be unto God, ther be mony of the false trayturs browt to ther end. ...' Two years later, the city was alive for a day or two with news that Queen Mary had given birth to a son:

The xxx day of Aprell and the last day of Aprell thydynges cam to London that the Quen[s] grace was delevered of a prynce, and so ther was grett

ryngyng through London, and dyvers plases *Te Deum laudamus* songe; and the morow after yt was tornyd odurways to the pleasur of God.¹¹⁵

Philip Gawdy noted anticipatory rumours concerning the fate of Mary Stuart in 1587, climaxing in the unconfirmed reports of her beheading, which unlike the Tudor executions had not been public. 'Much uncerteyne newes touching the Queene of Skottes, in that she should have hidd herself in the topp of a hymney, and so by that meanes not being founde that they should have made resently great search for her and then she might have escaped,' he wrote. 'It is such bothe thought and reported that she is executed, but the truthe not directly knowen.' In June 1633 a rumour reached Oxford that the earl of Arundel (who died in 1646) had fallen from his horse while riding with the king's progress into Scotland, 'and being trod upon so dyed.' The diarist who recorded this rumour, Thomas Crosfield, never remarked on the falsity of the information, and three years later noted that Arundel was about to visit the emperor in Vienna to negotiate restoration of the Palatinate.¹¹⁶ Late seventeenth-century letter-writers regularly report and then un-report such deaths as rumours were either verified or disproved. Richard Lapthorne warned his Devonshire client Richard Coffin that although the bishop of Oxford had been twice declared dead, he was merely ill. 'Sir William Norrie's brother is not dead, as was reported,' wrote one of Lord Wharton's correspondents, adding, a touch opefully, 'but 'tis true he is very sick.'¹¹⁷

The tendency to report news before it had actually happened or before the facts were fully known was thus by no means an invention of the newspaper era. But the 'determination to be first' that characterized the papers of the late seventeenth century, and which always had to be balanced precariously against the urge to be 'freshest,' made rumour and error a public institution.¹¹⁸ The regularization of printed news reports and their greater availability in the second half of the seventeenth century did little to prevent such errors; if anything the pressure of producing to pre-established deadlines increased the likelihood that a published news report would be based on incomplete facts and require revision in subsequent issues. In September 1696, the news was abroad that the queen of Spain was dying, or was dead, or had died but had a living foetus cut out of her stomach (an heir to the idiot Charles II), and that Louis XIV had died of boils and gout. Men laid wagers on the truth, only to discover days later that both Louis (who, unfortunately for the nations of Europe, had two more decades in him) and the Spanish queen (who lived until 1740) were still alive. On 17 June 1699, the *Flying-Post*, bearing news from the Continent, prematurely described the death of the duchess of Mazarin; in this case, the informants were only slightly ahead of the game since the duchess did in fact expire a week later.¹¹⁹ And in 1711, the *British Mercury* reported a tremendous defeat for the French that had never occurred.¹²⁰ This could happen, on a shorter time-scale, with domestic news as well. Thomas Benskin tried to take advantage of his paper's the *Domestick Intelligence* appearance on Thursdays to report on the Oxford trial and expected conviction of Stephen College, the 'Protestant Joiner' on

Wednesday 17 August 1681, but was defeated by College's own eloquence in his defence, which stretched the trial into the small hours of Thursday morning, too late for Benskin's paper.¹²¹

It is difficult to resist the hypothesis that by the end of the seventeenth century news and its readers existed in a love-hate relationship: the news was indispensable because it was now a critical channel by which individuals situated themselves within the social present. But neither could it be altogether trusted, whatever the medium. It is surely no coincidence that the trope of news's uncertainty became such a commonplace at about the same time that both writers and readers of history were beginning to have serious doubts about the status of the historical record, and even of such hitherto unimpeachable sources as the Bible. Sir Walter Raleigh, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was said to have torn up the continuation of his gargantuan *History of the World* in a Pyrrhonist pique after he observed two eyewitnesses to a recent event unable to agree in their accounts of it. Defoe, one hundred years later, defended *Robinson Crusoe's* claim to historicity – taken by at least one critic as a meretricious attempt to cover up a lie – by turning Raleigh's frustration on its head. In a passage anticipatory of Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, Hans Kellner, and the current 'linguistic turn,' Defoe pointed out that *no* story could be absolutely congruent with the events it purports to represent. 'Nothing is more common, than to have two Men tell the same Story quite differing from one another, yet both of them Eye-witnesses to the Fact related.'¹²²

Both of these occasions point to a fundamental problem that eighteenth-century historical thought would inherit: if no agreement is possible on the present through witnesses, if the news can be shown to be mere rumour, then how much stock can be placed in the accounts of more remote pasts by historians? This is nowhere better expressed than by Sarah Cowper, whose remarks on the close relation of news and history have already been noted. Cowper was a prodigious reader of history who also had her ear to the ground for the public events that she recorded in her diary (though she claimed, disingenuously, never to read printed news). She would comment in 1702 (with reference to disagreement among William III's physicians as to the condition of his body at his death a few days earlier): 'This age is enough to destroy the credit of history of remote past times, and places; when wee can scarce attain any certainty of things present near hand, and matters liable to demonstration.'¹²³

Conclusion

The availability of news reports, through oral, written and especially printed media, in the second half of the seventeenth century, had consequences for historical thought that we have not yet addressed. By focusing public attention on the present, and on the hinge whereby present became past, the news also occasioned interest in the converse: how the past evolved into or 'caused' the present. It is no coincidence that historians during and after the Civil War turned their attentions away from depicting long-dead medieval monarchs and toward

he study of very recent events, with news reports in many cases turning into verbatim fodder for their historical accounts. One further by-product of this attention to the contemporary was the restructuring of temporal connections between past and present. In medieval and humanist historical thought, these had been founded on similarity, comparison and metaphor rather than, as in the modern historical tradition, proximity, continuity, and metonymy. Historiography after 1640 also reveals the high degree of ideological fractiousness, the competing perspectives, that are the hallmark of the newsbooks, and which occasioned similar concerns about objectivity and truth.¹²⁴ These developments might well have occurred without the mid-century proliferation of news. It is probable that the Civil War would have found its aspiring Thucydides sooner or later: Clarendon, who came closest to that ideal, relied more on personal knowledge of the actors than on published reports. But it cannot be doubted that the obsession with the present that marks public discourse from the 1640s on helped to create a market for 'contemporary history,' a sub-genre that early Stuart historians had expressly avoided.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, the news had also generated an extended present of duration, not instant. Or, to put it another way, it had carved out a 'detemporalized zone' between past and future, a zone that offered a space for the discussion of current events analogous to Habermas' emergent public sphere. Within this zone, novelties cease to be mere 'marvels,' passively absorbed into the fabric of tradition like a stucco wall. They become matters of ongoing concern, actively discussed and engaged with, disruptive, anxiety-provoking, and potentially significant steps in the movement toward newness and modernity.¹²⁵ The monsters and marvels that feature in the news and in pamphlet literature of the 1640s and 1650s become signs of the times, not mere random instances of natural caprice or divine intervention.¹²⁶ As one modern psychologist has observed, 'a present orientation involves reflecting on the past and expecting the future.'¹²⁷ The discussions of foreign affairs in the 1620s and 1630s, and especially of the civil wars of the 1640s and early 1650s, dominated public discourse for an extended period. They thereby encouraged the spread of news on a regular basis and became the subject of that news. The evolving relationship between news and history, and the redefinition of the connection between past and present, is intimately connected to seventeenth-century people's considerably enhanced awareness of the moving currents within which they swam.

Notes

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- 1 J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York and London, 1990), p. 168. My interpretation of the relationship between contemporaneity and pastness, hence between history and other genres (including but not limited to prose fiction) has profited a great deal from Hunter's work though, as will be seen, I differ from him sharply in a number of respects. I have also found helpful the very different though not incompatible (with Hunter) account in Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore and London, 1987).
- 2 Hunter, *Before Novels*, p. 172.
- 3 The wideness of dispersal is crucial here: it was certainly possible for many people to experience the same event simultaneously in earlier times, in close proximity; the diaries of Renaissance merchants recording urban affairs being one example. But such common experience did not extend very far geographically.
- 4 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), pp. 65–7.
- 5 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger with F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1989; first published 1962), pp. 16, 21–2, 254n. In Habermas' study, Britain represents an 'ideal case' of the public sphere, and the regularity of news a crucial distinguishing mark separating news reports of the sixteenth century with those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While Habermas' historical analysis is often simplistic and occasionally misleading, I have none the less found his treatment of the public sphere very useful. An application of his ideas to French politics after the Estates General of 1614 can be found in J. Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1990). For a critique of Habermas which brings out the importance of print, see David Zaret, 'Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres of England,' in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 212–35.
- 6 Donald A. Norman, *Learning and Memory* (San Francisco, 1982), p. 10; compare M. Edlund, *Psychological Time and Mental Illness* (New York and London, 1987), pp. 11–12.
- 7 Pierre Janet, *L'Évolution de la mémoire et de la notion du temps* (Paris, 1928), pp. 321–4; cited and discussed in G. J. Whitrow, *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (Oxford, 1980; 2nd edn.), pp. 74–83.
- 8 It will be obvious from this that I do not agree with the more pessimistic analysis of C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (New York, 1996), which work nevertheless I have found a highly stimulating encouragement to my own thinking about news and time. Sommerville, operating in a tradition deriving from Walter J. Ong, and, beyond that, Marshall McLuhan (and ultimately Ben Jonson, for whom see further on) is of the view that the realities of daily information, and the need to produce news to fill daily newspapers, had an atomizing and disintegrative effect on the perception of reality. I would agree that this possibility existed but would argue that the results of daily flow were, to the contrary, socially and temporally integrative. My position on this is thus much closer to that of Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.
- 9 Orrin E. Klapp, 'Creeping Banality,' in his *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society* (New York and London, 1986), pp. 53–70. Geographical proximity is still, of course, a factor: the tragic crash of Swissair flight 111 in early September 1998, about fifteen miles from my house, was the present-defining event there weeks after it had faded from the front pages and first thoughts of places and people outside Nova Scotia.
- 10 My term 'flow' is thus comparable to the 'periodicity' that Joad Raymond argues rapidly became an expectation of 1640s' readers: Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641–1649* (Oxford, 1996), p. 120.
- 11 *The Tatler*, 164 (27 April 1710), ed. George Aitken (1898–9) 4 vols, iii, p. 268.

- 12 On the diary and its relationship to changing perceptions of time, especially daily, clock-influenced time, see, for the post-1660 period, Stuart Sherman's wide-ranging book, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries and English Diurnal Form, 1660–1785* (Chicago, 1997). On time, the press, and the decline of the chronicle, see my article, 'Genre into Artifact: The Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century,' *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988): 321–54.
- 13 Richard Cust, 'News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England,' *Past and Present* 112 (August 1986): 60–90; Kevin Sharpe, 'Crown, Parliament and Locality: Government and Communication in Early Stuart England,' *English Historical Review*, 101 (1986): 321–50; F. J. Levy, 'How Information Spread Among the Gentry, 1550–1640,' *Journal of British Studies* 21 (1982): 11–34; Andrew Mousley, 'Self, State, and Seventeenth Century News,' *The Seventeenth Century* 6 (1991): 189–204.
- 14 *The Memoirs of Robert Carey* (Oxford, 1972), ed. F. H. Mares, pp. 62–3; *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602–1603* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), ed. R. P. Sorlien, pp. 208, 247; John Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, his Royal Consort, Family, and Court; Collected from Original Manuscripts, Scarce Pamphlets, Corporation Records, Parochial Registers, &c.* (1828), 4 vols, I: 55–6. Nine decades of improvement in the transportation system improved the situation somewhat: the Reverend Thomas Brockbank, in the north-west, heard of Mary II's death in 1694 within twenty-four hours of its occurrence: *The Diary and Letter Book of the Rev. Thomas Brockbank 1671–1709* (1930), ed. R. Trappes-Lomax, Chetham Society, new series 89, p. 76.
- 15 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century: Volume I, The Structures of Everyday Life* (New York, 1979), trans. S. Reynolds, pp. 424–8; Gerhard Dohrn Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders* (Chicago and London, 1996), trans. T. Dunlap, pp. 324–50, especially p. 325, follows Braudel in minimizing the degree to which this situation changed prior to the eighteenth century.
- 16 Brian Austen, *English Provincial Posts* (Chichester, 1978), pp. 32–3; for more on the postal system and news see further below. On the varieties of news available in the earlier period, and their shading into printed news, M. A. Shaaber's *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England, 1476–1622* (Philadelphia, PA, 1929) remains highly useful.
- 17 *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (1834), ed. H. Ellis, I: 260; Norman J. G. Pounds, *Hearth and Home: A History of Material Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1990), p. 356.
- 18 *Barrington Family Letters 1628–1632* (1983), ed. A. Searle, Camden Society, 4th series, 28, pp. 235, 241 and n. 1; *The Diary of Thomas Crosfield* (1935), ed. F. S. Boas, p. 54. All dates in this section are old style, except where noted.
- 19 *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Oxford, 1955), 6 vols, ed. E. S. De Beer, III: 44; *Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers preserved in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1869–1970), 5 vols, II: 107.
- 20 The case for continuing contact is well made by David Cressy in *Coming Over: Migration and Communication Between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987).
- 21 *Diary of Samuel Pepys* (Oxford, 1970–81), 11 vols, eds R. Latham and W. Matthews, I, pp. 76, 83: more definite information came through the diplomatic grapevine on 8 March; Evelyn, *Diary*, IV, pp. 585–6; *London Gazette*, 24 May 1688.
- 22 *The Great Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire* (Record Society of Lancs and Cheshire, 1968–72), 3 vols, eds Frank Tyrer and J. J. Bagley, I: 93.
- 23 Jeremy Black, 'The British Press and Europe in the Early Eighteenth Century,' in Michael Harris and Alan Lee, eds, *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London, Toronto, and Cranbury, NJ, 1986), pp. 64–79.
- 24 Diplomatic dispatches had been a staple for newsletter writers such as John Pory from early in the seventeenth century; I am grateful to Sabrina Baron for reminding me of this point.

- 25 For country news during the Restoration, see James Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper and its Development* (Cambridge and New York, 1986), pp. 91–122; for foreign news, *ibid.*, especially pp. 130–3.
- 26 Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, p. 14. On the other hand, lack of news could also excite comment from the bored. William Adams of Christ Church, Oxford apologized to Thomas Tanner for his lack of significant news in 1699. 'If I could send thee a ream of paper full of news I would; but there is none here, but that Randal of Oriel has powdered his hair in order to be Bishop Talbot's chaplain': Adams to Tanner, 4 May 1699, Bodl. MS Tanner 21, fol. 39r-v.
- 27 Klapp, *Overload and Boredom*, pp. 53–70; M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (San Francisco, CA, 1975), pp. 35–6; compare Georg Simmel's classic study of the overload of sensation in urban life, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. K. H. Wolff (Glencoe, IL, 1950), p. 415. Michael Hobart and Zachary Schiffman, *Information Ages* (Baltimore, MD, 1998) is an incisive overview of the relationship between knowledge, its vessels, and human capacity, over several millennia; I am indebted to Professor Schiffman for sharing sections of the work with me prior to publication, and also for many conversations on this subject.
- 28 *Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599–1605*, ed. Dorothy M. Meads (Boston, MA, 1930), pp. 165, 193, 282–3 n. 524. As Meads observes, a high constable such as Pollard would be a 'mine of information' since he had to get regular information from the constables of each parish in his area to pass on to the Quarter Sessions.
- 29 *The Diary of Ralph Josselin*, ed. Alan Macfarlane (1976), p. 608.
- 30 Evelyn, *Diary*, I, p. 8; *The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme, the Yorkshire Antiquary* (1869–70), ed. Charles Jackson, Surtees Society, 54, p. 7.
- 31 As will be argued below, the newsletter, already commonplace during the Hundred Years' War, interacted with the chronicle in the Middle Ages. But by the mid-seventeenth century, it was the diary's turn. For an example, see John Evelyn's summaries or paraphrases of events culled from newspapers: *Diary*, iii, p. 361, account of translation ceremony of Gilbert Sheldon from London to Canterbury.
- 32 David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley, CA and London, 1989); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994).
- 33 *Records of the Borough of Leicester* (Cambridge, 1923), ed. Helen Stocks, p. 584.
- 34 *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1846), Parker Society, 27, p. 257; Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 22. Sir John Newdigate received the proclamation of the Parliament of 1628, of which he would be a member, as well as manuscript newsletters and other pamphlets from London, such as Thomas Scott's inflammatory anti-Catholic *Vox populi* (1622) during the 1620s: Vivienne Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth-Century Newdigates of Arbury and their World* (1995), pp. 161–3.
- 35 See especially the work of Dr Adam Fox, in particular, 'Aspects of Oral Culture and its Development in Early Modern England', Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1993.
- 36 Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 9–22. On libels and popular perceptions of political figures see a recent case study by P. Croft, 'The Reputation of Robert Cecil: Libels, Political Opinion and Popular Awareness in the Early Seventeenth Century,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991): 43–69; the subject is dealt with more generally by Adam Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England,' *Past and Present* 145 (1994): 47–83.
- 37 C. H. Firth, 'The Ballad History of the Reigns of the Later Tudors,' TRHS, 3rd series, 3 (1909): 51–124; *idem*, 'The Ballad History of the Reign of James I,' TRHS, 3rd series, 5 (1911): 21–61. Firth notes that ballads about contemporary events first begin to outnumber traditional ballads about the remote past under the later

- Tudors; both then and in the early Stuart era, however, ballads (in contrast to Jacobean and Caroline libels and newsletters), generally steered clear of discussing the monarch and his policies.
- 38 Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 9, 90.
- 39 A. J. Bellany, 'The Poisoning of Legitimacy? Court Scandal, News Culture and Politics in England' (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1995), pp. 32–166.
- 40 Bellany, 'The Poisoning of Legitimacy,' p. 163. Elsewhere (p. 150), Bellany points out that the copying habits of the gentry 'helped prolong scandals, transforming items that originally circulated as news into artefacts [*sic*] of recent history.'
- 41 For example, *Cheapsides Triumphs, and Cyrones Crosses Lamentation* in *The Pepys Ballads* (Cambridge, 1987), 5 vols, ed. W. G. Dray, facsimile vol. I: 66; *The Manner of the Kings Tryal at Westminster-Hall, by the High Court of Justice*, which verified the proceedings of the High Court of Justice: *ibid.*, facsimile vol. II: 204–5; *Englands Miseries Crown'd with Mercies* (one of several ballads on the Popish Plot), *ibid.*, II: 225. For other examples of such news ballads, see the brief selection in R. Palmer, *A Ballad History of England from 1588 to the Present Day* (1979). This remains the case today, since most people hear about an event at second hand and subsequently buy a newspaper or tune in to the evening news to find out about it in more detail. Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 156–8, points out that many mid-century newsbooks presented their materials in ways that imitated speech.
- 42 H. Roberts, *Englands Farewell to Christian the Fourth* (1606), in Nichols, *Progresses of King James*, II: 78.
- 43 *Diary of John Rous*, Camden Society, original series, 66, p. 122; *Diary of Abraham de la Pryme*, pp. 97, 122, emphasis mine.
- 44 See, for example, the complaints by Philip Gawdy to his father concerning carriers in the late sixteenth century. 'I knowe not whether the carryar hath performed his dutye or no, in that I heard not from any of your howse' (14 December 1587); and 'If any newes els there be either I have not heard of it, or els it hath escaped my memory. Some uncertayne speeches touching the poisoning of three or fower great Kinges and princes of late' (9 May 1588). *Letters of Philip Gawdy of West Harling, Norfolk, and of London to Various Members of his Family 1579–1616* (1906), ed. I. H. Jeayes, pp. 30, 36.
- 45 *The Letter Books 1644–45 of Sir Samuel Luke* (1963), ed. H. G. Tibbutt, Historical Manuscripts Commission joint publications, IV: 287, 578.
- 46 P. Fraser, *The Intelligence of the Secretaries of State and their Monopoly of Licensed News, 1660–68* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 28–34 and appendices; Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 30, 60; Steven C. A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1668* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 276–88.
- 47 The first postal 'system' dates back to Henry VIII's reign, and under several Tudor and early Stuart Masters of the Posts, six basic 'roads' or routes having been established by James I's reign, at which time a foreign postmaster was appointed for international posts. This system operated in parallel with informal measures such as private messengers and the 'common carrier.' The government system was not for private use initially but was opened to the public in the reign of Charles I, under whose regime standard rates for postage were first instituted and 'byposts' (subroutes off the main roads) first established under the direction of Thomas Witherings, a London merchant placed in charge of what was then called the Letter Office in 1637. See Kevin Sharpe, 'Thomas Witherings and the Reform of the Foreign Posts, 1632–40,' *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 57 (1989): 149–64; see especially pp. 160–1 for average postal times to or from major centres like Vienna, Brussels, and Naples. The first Post Office Act was passed by the second Protectorate Parliament in 1657, creating the first General Post Office; the measures in this Act were confirmed by the Convention Parliament in 1660. From 1678 through the eighteenth century the Post Office was housed on Lombard Street in London. For the development of the post, see the following: M. Ashley, *John Wildman: Plotter and Postmaster* (1947); *idem*, 'John Wildman and the Post Office,' in R. Ollard and P. Tudor-Craig, *For Veronica Wedgwood These* (1986), pp. 204–16. More general accounts can be found in J. C. Hemmeon, *The History of the British Post Office* (Cambridge, MA, 1912), pp. 3–33; H. Robinson, *The British Post Office: A History* (Princeton, NJ, 1948), pp. 3–112; and K. Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 1–8. A new study of the post in the seventeenth century would be welcome. The difficulties of and procedures used in the inland posts emerge from the document summaries (principally references to the State Papers and Acts of the Privy Council) in J. W. M. Stone, ed., *The Inland Posts (1392–1672): A Calendar of Historical Documents* (1987) and in R. M. Willcocks, *England's Postal History, to 1840* (1975); local posts are discussed, principally for Kent, in Austen, *English Provincial Posts*. For the use of the posts in the circulation of news into and out of London, and Muddiman's exemption, see Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, p. 92.
- 48 Shaaber, *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England*, pp. 35–64, on 'official' news under Elizabeth and its circulation into the provinces; L. Hanson, 'English Newsbooks, 1620–1641,' *The Library*, 4th series, 18 (1938): 355–84; Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Dramatists and Politics in 1623/24* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 6–7; Theodore K. Rabb, 'English Readers and the Revolt in Bohemia, 1619–1622,' in *Sefer hayovel le-Aharon Mosheh Rabinovits (A.M.K. Rabinowicz Jubilee Volume)* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 152–75. I am grateful to Ted Rabb for providing me with a copy of his article.
- 49 Joseph Frank, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper, 1620–1660* (Cambridge, MA, 1961), pp. 8, 13, estimates an initial circulation of between 250 and 500 copies of each number; a comparison of this with the figure of 6,000 copies per number of the *Gazette* alone (only one of many papers and not the most popular) in 1704, or of E. Dobrée's weekly *London Journal* (15,000 per week in its proprietor's 1722 estimate) is about as effective an illustration as can be found of the increase in news circulation during the seventeenth century: J. R. Sutherland, 'The Circulation of Newspapers and Literary Periodicals, 1700–30,' *The Library*, 4th series, 15 (1935): 110–24.
- 50 From the mid-seventeenth century, towns often kept newsbooks and papers available for the public: the chamberlain's accounts for Leicester contain numerous references to funds disbursed 'for newes bookes and other things,' generally at a cost of £3 17s or £4 a year: *Records of the Borough of Leicester* (Cambridge, 1923), ed. Helen Stocks, pp. 518, 534; when one John Ley provided the mayor with twenty-one newsbooks in 1661–62, he was paid 5s. 9d.
- 51 Folke Dahl, *A Bibliography of English Corantos and Periodical Newsbooks, 1620–1642* (1952); compare the bibliography of 1640s' newsbooks included in Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 324–35.
- 52 Frank, *Beginnings of the English Newspaper*, pp. 1–18; Stanley Morison, *The English Newspaper, 1622–1932* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 14.
- 53 *News from the New World Discover'd in the Moon*, in *Ben Jonson* (Oxford, 1925–52), 11 vols, eds C. H. Herford, P. Simpson, and E. Simpson, VII: 514–15; *The Staple of News*, I. v., 45–50 (*ibid.*, vi, p. 295); Mark Z. Muggli, 'Ben Jonson and the Business of News,' *Studies in English Literature* 32 (1992): 323–39.
- 54 P. R. Coss, 'Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood,' *Past and Present* 108 (1985): 35–79.
- 55 Levy, 'How Information Spread Among the Gentry,' p. 20 ff.; Bellany, 'Poisoning of Legitimacy,' p. 64. On the other hand, the transmission of such materials could be frustratingly slow, since it was dependent not only on the vagaries of transportation (worsened if cross-channel travel was involved), but on the speed at which the correspondent wrote. John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton on 6 March 1619, to convey the news of Queen Anne's death 'about four o'clock that morning, being the second of this month.' Carleton did not even commit his news to letter for four days

- after the event; it would be a week to ten days before Carleton, at the Hague, would receive it, at which time the event would no longer be, in any meaningful sense, 'current': *Letters of John Chamberlain* (Philadelphia, PA, 1939), 2 vols, ed. N. E. McClure, II: 219 (Chamberlain to Carleton, 6 March 1619). For More's letters to Anne, viscountess Conway, see *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642–1684* (Oxford, 1992; revised edn.), ed. S. Hutton (orig. ed. M. H. Nicolson).
- 56 Durham Record Office, Du 1421 (mayor of Durham's account book), sub. 1728.
- 57 *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, ed. Ellis, I: 298; *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More* (Princeton, NJ, 1927), ed. E. F. Rogers, p. 312.
- 58 John Lyly, *Euphues and his England (1580), Complete Works of John Lyly* (Oxford, 1902), II: 159.
- 59 Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, pp. 279–80; *idem*, '“Coffee Politicians Does Create”: Coffee Houses and Restoration Political Culture,' *Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995): 807–34, at p. 822. For an older account, see A. Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses* (1956).
- 60 *Journal of the Rev. Rowland Davies* (1857), ed. R. Caulfield, Camden o.s. 68, pp. 39, 48. In 1698, when the London owner of a parrot discovered that it was repeating oaths and curses heard in Billingsgate Street, he placed it in a coffee house on another street, where it learned to say 'Where's the news'; unfortunately, on returning home its old language returned. *Diary of Abraham de la Pryme*, p. 176.
- 61 *The Diary of a West Country Physician, A.D. 1684–1726* (1934), ed. Edmund Hobhouse, pp. 52–3 (23 May 1709); for other examples at the same time, see *The Diary of Dudley Ryder 1715–1716* (1939), ed. W. Matthews, *passim*.
- 62 César de Saussure, *A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I. & George II. The Letters of Monsieur Cesar De Saussure To His Family* (1902), trans. and ed. Mme van Muyden, p. 162. Saussure's ascription of news-hunger to the lower orders was already remarked on nearly a century earlier by Peter Mundy, who commented of London in 1639 that it was full of 'lords, knights, gentry posting and riding to and fro, some about business, butt most to see and hear news. For this latter purpose went multitudes off the common sort.' *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1608–1667* (1925), vol. IV, ed. R. C. Temple, Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, 55, p. 41.
- 63 Lewis Theobald, *The Censor* (1717), 3 vols, ii, p. 214. Further examples of the attendance of the lower orders at coffee houses and their engagement in discussion of politics are provided by Pincus, 'Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,' p. 825 and note.
- 64 John Cleveland, *The Character of a London-diurnall* (1647; first published 1644: Wing C4664), p. 1.
- 65 For example, *The Ordinary Weekly Curranto from Franckford* (1639, STC, newsbooks, 18507. 285, 283, 287 *et seq.*); F. S. Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476–1776: The Rise and Decline of Government Controls* (Urbana, IL, 1952), pp. 147–61; Joad Raymond, *Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England, 1641–1660* (London and New York, 1993), p. 18; G. A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society from Caxton to Northcliffe* (1978), pp. 6–11, an account vitiated to some degree by a weak grasp of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political and cultural context.
- 66 Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution* and 'The Politics of Propaganda: Charles I and the People in the 1620s,' *JBS* 29 (1990): 187–215; Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter*, Marvin Breslow, *A Mirror of England: English Puritan Views of Foreign Nations, 1618–1640* (Cambridge, MA, 1970); Godfrey Davies, 'English Political Sermons, 1603–1640,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1 (1939): 1–22.
- 67 Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 81 argues persuasively that the 1640s newsbooks were not the result of decades of censorship-restricted news hunger, nor the direct descendant of the corantos, but rather 'a response to something new' in the charged atmosphere of late 1641. I would agree, but would add that that something new included the sense of currency and immediacy to the events being captured therein.
- 68 A. D. T. Cromartie, 'The Printing of Parliamentary Speeches November 1640–July 1642,' *Historical Journal* 33 (1990): 23–44.
- 69 Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 108–11. Frank, *Beginnings of the English Newspaper*, pp. 21, 29, 67, 219. Like any new industry, the process of news publication had both winners and losers as many series fell by the wayside while others achieved greater stability: by 1653, under the stewardship of John Rushworth and Samuel Pecke, *A Perfect Diurnall* was able to rename itself *The Perfect Diurnall*. On Rushworth's later career as a transformer of the newsbooks into his *Historical Collections*, see Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 296–312.
- 70 Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 90–1 and *passim*.
- 71 For example, Bodl. MS Carte 228 (Wharton-Huntingdon collections), a set of newsletters to Philip, Lord Wharton, from various informants between 1656 and 1701; a set of these specifically devoted to news and in the same hand, from 1698 to 1701, is at fos. 253r–408v; BL MS Sloane 3925, fos. 1–356, collection of newsletters apparently intended for insertion in printed newspapers, 1690–92; BL MS Sloane 3929, newsletters collected by Henry Coley, 1670s–1680s.
- 72 Bellany, 'Poisoning of Legitimacy,' p. 679; compare Michael Mendle, 'De Facto Freedom, De Facto Authority: Press and Parliament, 1640–1643,' *HJ* 38 (1995): 307–32.
- 73 Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 233–38.
- 74 Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (1981), pp. 91–227; Raymond, 'Introduction' to his *Making the News*, p. 7.
- 75 Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678–81* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 156–92.
- 76 *A Proclamation for Suppressing the Printing and Publishing of Unlicensed News-books* (1680: Wing C.3428).
- 77 Fraser, *Intelligence of the Secretaries of State*, pp. 35–56; Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II*, p. 60. These works supersede the older study by J. G. Mudiman, *The King's Journalist 1659–1689* (1923).
- 78 Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper* is definitive on the papers of the period 1679–82; P. M. Handover, *A History of the London Gazette 1665–1965* (1965), pp. 9–51; Thomas O'Malley, 'Religion and the Newspaper Press, 1660–1685: A Study of the *London Gazette*,' in *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London, Toronto, and Cranbury, NJ, 1986), pp. 25–46 suggests that the *Gazette* included more domestic news than is usually thought and defends its value as a source, especially for official Anglicanism.
- 79 Morison, *The English Newspaper*, pp. 5, 43; Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, pp. 30–1.
- 80 Robert J. Allen, *The Clubs of Augustan London* (Cambridge, MA, 1933). For the coffee house as meeting ground for the exchange of news, and in particular for its blurring of the distinction between oral and written news, see Hunter, *Before Novels*, p. 173. Robert Darnton has advanced a similar argument with regard to the interplay between oral news, rumour, *libelles* and books in the two or three decades prior to the French Revolution, and I am grateful to him for a discussion on this point.
- 81 Morison, *The English Newspaper*, pp. 62–70.
- 82 Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 193, 269–312, quotation at p. 276 from Cleveland, *A Character of a Diurnal-Maker* (1654), p. 3.
- 83 *The Tatler*, 3 and 12 [16 April and 7 May 1709] (1898–9), 4 vols, ed. George Aitken, I: 31, 106. In this usage, 'history' is given a new meaning as the record of *current* events, like the 'chronicle' or 'herald,' while, conversely, the period of time worth historicizing in public is reduced to a week.
- 84 Morison, *The English Newspaper*, pp. 60–1.

- 85 R. M. Wiles, *Serial Publication in England Before 1750* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 61.
- 86 The first stamp duty, intended to reduce the number of newspapers as the Tory government of 1712 was bringing the War of the Spanish Succession to a close, imposed .5d on a half sheet or less and 1d on a whole sheet, with a duty of 1s on printed advertisements. The 1725 Act increased the duty to .5d on every half sheet, forcing a change in format from the standard six-page paper to one made of a single half-sheet of large paper in order to minimize the effect of the duty: Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, p. 32.
- 87 Italics in original, quoted from Wiles, *Serial Publication*, pp. 55–8, citing J. Wilford's *London Magazine*, the principal source for Budgell's own claims and the attacks on them.
- 88 Hertfordshire RO, DEP F 34 (Panshanger MSS), diary of Sarah Cowper, vol. 6, p. 269 (1 August 1713). Addison, ever a trick-mirror of contemporary cultural practices, was only half in earnest when he satirized the mayfly quality of news by making it into history, referring to descriptions of the War of the Spanish Succession as 'weekly historians.' *The Spectator*, no. 445 (31 July 1712), ed. Bond, IV: 63.
- 89 *The Frightened People of Clerkenwell* and *The Somersetshire Wonder*, in *The Pepys Ballads*, facsimile vol. IV, 343, 363; for ballads containing news of political events, which Pepys arranged chronologically under the rubric 'State', see *ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 201–374. The effect of this is to create a virtual ballad history of events from the execution of Charles I through the major crises of the next three reigns – Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, Rye House Plot, Monmouth's rebellion and Jeffries' Assizes, and the Revolution – culminating, at the end of Pepys's life, in William III's victories against Louis XIV.
- 90 Morison, *The English Newspaper*, pp. 59–60 for the merger of these two papers, without comment on this point; Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 185–6, 188.
- 91 On news and rumour, see Adam Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England,' *HJ* 40 (1997): 597–620, and *idem*, 'Aspects of Oral Culture,' ch. 5.
- 92 Love, *Scribal Publication*, brings this point out well; more recently, see the thorough debunking of the 'authority' and 'integrity' of printed texts in Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book* (Chicago, 1998).
- 93 *Craftsman* (17 July 1734), quoted in Black, 'British Press and Europe,' p. 65.
- 94 *The Diary of Dudley Ryder 1715–1716* (1939), ed. W. Matthews, p. 187; Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago, 1994); Shaaber, *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England*, pp. 236–42. The partisan politics of Augustan news, which contributed to distrust, are discussed by W. A. Speck, 'Politics and the Press,' in *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London, Toronto, and Cranbury, NJ, 1986), pp. 47–63. As Speck points out, the distrust was not unfounded, particularly on the reporting of parliamentary activities and elections. On the other hand, readers did not ignore newsbooks and newspapers written by those of differing opinions: Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 255 and *passim* offers several examples of readers deliberately seeking out the newsbooks produced by the opposing side.
- 95 *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford, 1902), 2 vols, ed. R. B. Merriman, I: 313, cited in G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution* (Cambridge, 1982; 2nd edn.), p. 242.
- 96 John Skelton, 'Against Venemous Tongues,' ll. 63–6, *Complete English Poems of John Skelton*, ed. Scattergood; *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich* (1974–5), ed. R. A. Houlbrooke, Norfolk Record Society, 43, p. 77.
- 97 *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, III, ii. 6–16, *The Plays of George Chapman: The Tragedies* (New York, 1961), 2 vols, ed. T. M. Parrott, I: 105.
- 98 *Diary of John Rous*, p. 44. Even if this were an overstatement, it is true that enquiries for news, to say nothing of relations of it, could illustrate religious attitudes. Father Robert Southwell complained in 1591 that any news or rumor directed against

- Catholics was 'currant, and goeth presently abrode *cum privilegio*,' adding that 'many poore printers and needy libellers make the best part of their living by our slaunders': *Letters and Despatches of Richard Verstegan* (1959), ed. A. G. Petti, Catholic Record Society, 52, p. 4.
- 99 *News from the New World Discover'd in the Moon*, in *Ben Jonson*, VII: 514.
- 100 *The Staple of News*, Induction and III, ii, 14–50, in *Ben Jonson*, VI: 328.
- 101 *The Tatler*, 155 (6 April 1710), iii, pp. 218–20.
- 102 McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, p. 50.
- 103 Gawdy to Framlingham Gawdy (February 1614). *Letters of Philip Gawdy*, p. 175; *The Spectator*, no. 625 [26 November 1714], (Oxford, 1965), 5 vols, ed. Donald F. Bond, V: 137.
- 104 Frank, *Beginnings of the English Newspaper*, p. 77. The protest of truthfulness and newness goes back beyond the 1620s newsbooks to their more sporadic Tudor precursors. Compare an Elizabethan title such as *Certayn and tru good nues, from the syege of the isle Malta* (STC 17213.5, 1565) with specimens from after 1620, e.g.: *The Last Newes* (STC, sub 'newsbooks', 18507.111, 113); *The Certaine Newes of this Present Weeke* (STC 18507.68, 72); *The 2 of September. Two great batailles very lately fought* (STC 18507.74).
- 105 Sir Walter Cope, 16 April 1614, *Proceedings in Parliament 1614 (House of Commons)* (Philadelphia, 1988), ed. Maija Jansson, p. 90.
- 106 Robert Crowley, 'Of Inventers of Straunge Newes,' *Epigrams* (1550), in *Select Works of Robert Crowley* (1872), ed. J.M. Cowper, Early English Text Society, extra series, 15, p. 38. False news could occasion major embarrassment. John Evelyn noted with some amusement in 1690 that Louis XIV, having heard the news that William III had been slain in battle in Ireland, held a magnificent triumph in Paris, only to have the disappointing truth of the matter brought to him in person by the defeated James II: *Diary of John Evelyn*, V: 32. Louis only heard of his army's defeat at Blenheim after a week's delay: John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV*, pp. 537–8.
- 107 Historical Manuscripts Commission [hereafter HMC] *Ninth Report*, II, p. 498: diary of Robert Woodford, steward of Northampton, 22 March 1639; J. Fielding, 'Opposition to the Personal Rule of Charles I: The Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637–1641,' *HJ* 31 (1988): 769–88.
- 108 I. Thornley, 'Treason by Words in the Fifteenth Century,' *EHR* 32 (1917): 556–61; J. Hawarde, *Les Reportes dels cases in Camera stellata, 1593–1609* (1894), ed. W. P. Baildon, p. 66.
- 109 *Commons Debates 1628* (New Haven, CT, 1977–83), 6 vols, ed. Robert C. Johnson *et al.*, iii, p. 276.
- 110 *Diary of Abraham de la Pryme*, pp. 15–16; Pryme believed such rumours had helped the cause of the Revolution, but he expressed amazement at their invention and the velocity at which they travelled.
- 111 *The Letters and Despatches of Richard Verstegan*, p. 39; *The Knyvett Letters (1620–1644)* (1949), ed. Bertram Schofield, p. 63; HMC, *Cowper*, i, 142.
- 112 Francis Wyndham to Nathaniel Bacon, 13 October 1572, *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, I, 1556–1577* (1978–9), ed. A. H. Smith *et al.*, Norfolk Record Society, 46, pp. 37–8.
- 113 *The Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, wife of Sir Robert Harley, of Brampton Bryan, knight of the Bath* (1854), ed. T. T. Lewis, Camden Society, original series, 58, pp. 118, 130.
- 114 Wallenstein was in fact killed, by imperial assassins, only in 1634. For these and other 'news' recorded by Rous, who complained of the quantity of 'foolish reportes' in 1628, see *Diary of John Rous*, pp. 1, 18, 25, 59.
- 115 *Diary of Henry Machyn*, pp. 35, 86; Helen Miller, *Henry VIII and the English Nobility* (1986), pp. 67–8.
- 116 *Letters of Philip Gawdy*, p. 10 (Gawdy to his mother, 8 February 1587); *The Diary of Thomas Crosfield*, pp. 64, 88. Crosfield also reports (*ibid.*, p. 83) the rumour, in January

- 1636, that the lord deputy of Ireland had been 'kild in ye feild by a muskater yt bare him a grudge, but it was another.'
- 17 Devon Record Office Z19403, Laphorne to Coffin, 19 February 1687/88; Bodl. MS Carte 228 (Wharton-Huntingdon collections), fol. 259v, anon. to Wharton, 5 January 1678/9.
- 18 The phrase is Sutherland's, *The Restoration Newspaper*, p. 135.
- 19 *London Gazette*, 31 August, 10 September; *Flying Post*, 1, 8, 12 September 1696; *Diary of John Evelyn*, V: 330; Evelyn records similar reports in the *Post-Man* for the same day.
- 20 Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, pp. 135–6.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 22 Daniel Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), quoted in McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, pp. 120–1.
- 23 Herts RO, DEP E29 (Panshanger MSS), diary of Sarah Cowper, vol. 1, p. 199 (12 March 1701/2); compare p. 129 for her comment about not reading printed news, a clear exaggeration given her references elsewhere to what the newspapers report.
- 24 For the shift in focus in historiography from the past to recent events, and the parallel advent of competing ideological perspectives in place of the consensual approach adopted by early Stuart historians, see the final chapter of my book, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (Toronto, 1990).
- 25 Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, dates the true emergence of the public sphere in England to the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution; Pincus, 'Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,' pp. 819, 833–4 endorses Habermas in general but pushes the emergence of the public sphere back into the Restoration, while nevertheless holding the pre-1640 news circulation insufficiently public and regular to meet Habermas' test for a public sphere. This is a view supported by Raymond, *Making the News*, p. 9, and one which I am inclined to endorse, without discounting the enormous weight of public dialogue over foreign affairs and court scandal in earlier decades.
- 26 On monsters and miracles during the same period see Jerome Friedman, *The Battle of the Frogs and Fairford's Fites: Miracles and the Pulp Press During the English Revolution* (New York, 1993).
- 27 Thomas J. Coombe, 'The Time of Youth,' in Gorman and Wessman, *The Personal Experience of Time*, pp. 163–89, at pp. 178–9.

Part II

The Continent

From Copenhagen to Messina, from Wittenberg to Madrid, from Vienna to Paris, the political information business spanned the Continent. The following chapters portray a world in constant motion, a context of rolling political and social turmoil, where information was fed by convulsive changes of rule — in Naples, in Catalonia, in Holland; and where communication persisted in spite of repressive censorship mechanisms in some of these places.

Was there a Continental model of political communication, in contrast with the English model, in the age of absolutism? Jürgen Habermas thought so. And the French and Spanish journalism discussed in the following section, respectively, by Jean-Pierre Vittu and Henry Etinghausen, seems to correspond closely to the type of celebratory rhetoric characterized by Habermas as a feature of the public sphere of absolutism. However, the chapters here offer a widely varied panorama of the media landscape of the age.

Thomas Schröder focuses on the birth of printed journalism in Europe, which occurred in the German-speaking cities of Wolfenbüttel and Strasbourg in 1609. Sparked by the demand for news about the events preceding the Thirty Years' War, these first attempts did not sweep away the pre-print genres at a stroke, but contributed to a many-sided menu including newsletters, handbills and newspapers, prose and poetry. At this early stage, government interest in the invention was negligible. A systematic survey of the contents of the first papers gives ample evidence of bias and error, but nothing systematic enough to indicate deliberate manipulation or intention to mislead. What purpose, then, did it serve? Since the news was rarely fresh enough or local enough to be of much practical use, Schröder suggests that it must have served chiefly to satisfy a growing curiosity about the world, as the press critics constantly complained.

In the Dutch Republic, beginning with the Amsterdam-based *Courante vyi Italien*, published from 1618, printed political information quickly became a main product of one of the most vital printing industries in Europe. Otto Lankhorst shows how municipal governments favoured the development of an information industry by making heavy use of newsletters and newspapers for their own needs. The States-General and the States of the Provinces refrained from pre-publication censorship, giving writers and entrepreneurs considerable freedom. However, strict laws governed what could and could not be said about