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The deleterious dominance of *The Times* in nineteenth-century scholarship

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Abstract

The Times was a mid-nineteenth-century newspaper phenomenon, defeating rival London newspapers through its skilful management, advanced technology, greater editorial resources and access to powerful politicians. Its authority enabled it to make and break governments. However, the uniqueness of *The Times* limits its usefulness as a historical source. This article begins with a brief history of *The Times,* before analysing how the newspaper remains centre stage in the historiography of journalism and of nineteenth-century culture more broadly, despite the digitization of provincial and other London papers. Over-dependence on *The Times*, it argues, has exaggerated the significance of London daily newspapers and underplayed the importance of weekly papers, particularly those published outside London. *The Times* was unusual because it was a metropolitan rather than provincial paper, with a focus on political news and a dearth of lighter, broader content, or news of events around the United Kingdom. Using quantitative analysis of recent scholarship, the article demonstrates that unwarranted conclusions are still drawn from over-use of this source and from a wider view that it was representative of nineteenth-century newspapers in general. The conclusion

urges a more geographically and culturally nuanced approach to Victorian newspapers, beyond a metropolitan-focused political and cultural history.

Keywords:

The Times; newspapers; London newspapers; provincial newspapers; scholarship; historiography; digitization; national; provincial; local; metropolitan

[1]

> The history of *The Times* for half a century has become the history of the English press and ... that is why we may save ourselves time and space by taking the course of its development in some detail, leaving room only for the most recent history of other journals, which have more or less followed its example.[2]

George Dibblee wrote the passage above in 1913, and the brilliance of *The Times* still dazzles historians and literary scholars a century later, distorting our view of Victorian journalism and producing some over-generalized conclusions in political, social and cultural historiography.[3] This article begins with a brief history of *The Times,* before demonstrating the central place the

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[2] George B. Dibblee, *The Newspaper* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1913), in Internet Archive <http://archive.org/details/thenewspaper00dibb > [accessed 7 May 2012], pp. 166-67.

[3] Over-use of other metropolitan publications such as *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News* has had similar effects; see Henry Miller, 'The Problem with *Punch', Historical Research* 82 (2009), 285-302 < 10.1111/j.1468-2281.2007.00457.x>

newspaper has been given in the historiography of journalism and of nineteenth-century culture more broadly. Detailed evidence is provided of the exceptionalism of *The Times,* which limits its value as a historical source, and examples are offered of some unwarranted conclusions drawn from over-use of this source. The reasons for over-reliance on one unusual source are explored, and the conclusion supports a more geographically and culturally nuanced approach to Victorian newspapers.

1. A brief history of *The Times*

The Times was established in 1785 as the *Daily Universal Register.* In a front-page manifesto, its founder, John Walter I, wrote that his aim was

> to facilitate the *commercial* intercourse between the different parts of the community, through the channel of *Advertisements;* to record the principal occurrences of the times; and to bridge the account of debates during the sitting of Parliament.[4]

Although at its inception advertising took priority over news, the advertising content of *The Times* has received little attention, despite its importance to readers - an example of the highly selective perception of this newspaper which has coloured wider views of the press. In 1792, *The Times,* as it was now known, set up its own foreign news service, marking the beginning of its supremacy.[5] By 1801 it already sold more than rival London morning papers,

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[4] John Walter, *Daily Universal Register* 1 January 1785, p. 1, in *Times Digital Archive 1785-1985* [accessed 8 February 2012]; all references to *The Times* are from this source.

[5] Oliver Woods and James Bishop, *The Story of The Times* (London: Joseph, 1983), p. 14; the following brief account of the paper is taken from this semi-official history.

but was still only one among many, competing with the *Morning Herald*, the *Morning Advertiser,* the *True Briton,* the *Oracle,* the *Morning Chronicle,* the *Public Ledger* and the *Morning Post.* During the Napoleonic Wars it was outsold by evening papers such as the *Courier*.

In 1810 John Walter II's harsh response to a printers' strike gave *The Times* another advantage, a tradition of flexible, non-union labour. Walter prosecuted 21 striking printers for conspiracy (one man died in prison). The paper was boycotted by the printers' union, forcing it to employ non-union labour and thereby enabling it to introduce technical innovations more easily.[6] In a virtuous circle, technical advances in production and a larger staff improved the quality of the product, which attracted more readers and advertisers, which funded further advances; no other paper operated at a scale for such investment to be worthwhile.[7] By 1821 the main rivals of *The Times* -- the *Morning Chronicle*, *Morning Advertiser, Morning Herald, New Times* and *Morning Post* - were each selling less than half the *Times*'s 7,000. [8]

The Times gained its nickname 'the Thunderer' in 1832, from a leading article in support of the Reform Bill. Under its editor Thomas Barnes, the paper seemed to capture the spirit of the age, representing the newly powerful commercial middle classes and their demands for political and fiscal reform.

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[6] Woods and Bishop, *Story,* p. 32.

[7] Lucy Brown, 'The British Press, 1800-1860', in *The Encyclopedia of the British Press: 1422-1992*, ed. by Dennis Griffiths (London: Macmillan, 1992): 24-32 (p. 26).

[8] Alfred P. Wadsworth, 'Newspaper Circulations, 1800-1954', *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society* (1955): 1-40 (p. 7).

In 1834 Barnes, a mere newspaper editor, helped to install a new government, by his support for Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington.[9] Such direct influence wielded by a newspaper was utterly new and very shocking. *The Times* showed that it could not only make governments but break them, when its editorials, alongside the journalism of other newspapers, forced Lord Aberdeen to resign over the mishandling of the Crimean War in 1855.

The power of *The Times* was resented by rival newspaper publishers, and by politicians who did not benefit from its favours and saw it as a threat to the authority of government. In 1836, during negotiations over the reduction of Newspaper Stamp Duty, Whig ministers allied with Radical campaigners to urge a tax regime in which papers with less capital could compete on price. While the bungled reduction of duty from 4d to 1d met one of the legislation's aims of encouraging low-priced papers, especially outside London, it also provided *The Times* with cheaper postal distribution across the country.[10] The newspaper's circulation rocketed from around 10,000 in the mid-1830s to 60,000 by 1855, leaving its competitors standing.[11] In the early 1850s, it boasted that 'its gross income was equal to that of the most flourishing of the German principalities' and defended its market dominance – justifiably -- as

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[9] See also Tom Morley, '"The Arcana of That Great Machine": Politicians and *The Times* in the Late 1840s', *History* 73 (1988), 38-54 < 10.1111/j.1468-229X.1988.tb02145.x>

[10] Stanley Morison, *The History of The Times,* vol 1: '*The Thunderer' in the Making, 1785-1841 (*London: Times, 1935), pp. 318, 328-29.

[11] Woods and Bishop, *Story,* p. 55.

'the monopoly of nothing but the first place, won by fair fighting and held against all comers on the same terms'.[12]

The abolition of stamp duty in 1855 brought the golden age of *The Times* to an end, when at last a 'free trade in newspapers' was enabled, opening the market to penny morning papers modelled on *The Times*, especially outside London. The official history of the paper is not alone in seeing repeal as a measure partly aimed at reducing the power of *The Times.*[13] High editorial costs prevented a reduction of the cover price below 3d to compete directly against the new provincial dailies such as the *Manchester Guardian* and *Liverpool Daily Post,* or London's *Daily Telegraph* and *Standard.* The abolition of stamp duty also ended cheap postal distribution, adding to the declining circulation of *The Times*, particularly outside South-East England. It was now less a 'national' paper and more a metropolitan one. However, profits continued to increase, despite the stagnating circulation apparent in Table 1.[14] For the rest of the century only past glories maintained *The Times*'s

[12] James Hatton, *Journalistic London: Being a Series of Sketches of Famous Pens and Papers of the Day* (London: Routledge, 1882), p. 75, in Internet Archive <http://archive.org/details/journalisticlond00hatt> [accessed 1 March 2012]; *Times* second leader, 11 February 1850, p. 4.

[13] Stanley Morison, *The History of The Times,* vol 2: *The tradition established, 1841-1884 (*London: Times, 1939); James Curran, 'The Ugly Face of Reform' in *Power without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain,* ed. by James Curran and Jean Seaton (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 27; David George Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the Reappraisal of a Concept', in *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. by David George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (London: Constable, 1978), p. 24.

[14] Woods and Bishop, *Story,* p. 97.

reputation. It was 'scooped' by its rivals in the war of Italian liberation (1859-60) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71); its reporting of the American Civil War (1861-65) was inadequate; and in 1886 it was duped into publishing forged letters in the Parnell case. Circulation halved, from 71,000 in 1866 to 35,000 in 1903. From the 1880s onwards the newspaper was outsold by many provincial morning and evening papers (Table 1).

Table 1. Circulation of *Times* and selected London and provincial dailies (thousands) 1866-1902

	Times	Daily Chronicle	Daily Telegraph	Daily News	Manchester Guardian	Glasgow Herald	Middles-brough Gazette	Yorkshire Post
1866	71							
1870	62			150		30		15
1874	63		176					
1878	61							
1882	52		241					
1886	47	130						47
1890	41			93	41	42		
1894	38			72	43	44	61	
1898	36			56	49	45		
1902	37				42	52		

Sources: Brown, *Victorian,* pp. 52-53; Lee, *Origins,* p.292; 'The Times, result of the issue at 1d', *Times* 8 May 1914, 9; Wadsworth, 'Newspaper Circulations', p.p. 20-21.

2. *The Times* and press history

Given this history, *The Times* deserves its pre-eminent place in the historiography. It was unparalleled at its peak in the second quarter of the nineteenth century – in its management, its technology, its editorial content, volume of advertising, political influence, sales, readership and national distribution. These enabled it to dominate the market and to challenge the

power of governments. Likewise, it has dominated press history until very recently: five chapters are devoted to *The Times* and other London dailies by James Grant (1870), and five chapters to *The Times* alone by Charles Pebody (1882).[15] One of two chapters on 'the rise of the London daily press' in James Symon (1914) is entirely devoted to *The Times* and more than one fifth of Derek Hudson (1945) is about the paper.[16] In Harold Herd (1952)*, The Times* is the sole subject of a chapter entitled 'The independent newspaper emerges', and even in recent histories such as Dennis Griffiths (2006)*,* the paper has its own chapter.[17]

Aled Jones argues that the Whiggish narrative of progress towards the liberty of the press, evident in all the early newspaper histories, was a conscious project to surround newspapers with tradition and dignity.[18] The idea that

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[15] James Grant, *The Newspaper Press: Its Origin, Progress and Present Position,*3 volumes (London: Routledge, 1871-72) in Internet Archive <http://archive.org> [accessed 1 March 2012]; Charles Pebody, *English Journalism, and the Men Who Have Made It* (London: Cassell, 1882) in Internet Archive <http://archive.org/details/englishjournali01pebogoog> [accessed 2 March 2012].

[16] James David Symon, *The Press and its Story*: A*n Account of the Birth and Development of Journalism* (London: Seeley, Service, 1914) in Internet Archive <http://archive.org/details/cu31924027503238> [accessed 8 March 2012]; Derek Hudson, *British Journalists and Newspapers* (London: Collins, 1945).

[17] Harold Herd, *The March of Journalism: The Story of the British Press from 1622 to the Present Day* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1952); Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street: Five Hundred Years of the Press* (London: British Library, 2006).

[18] Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996).

newspapers had an unwritten constitutional role as a 'Fourth Estate' became journalism's foundation myth, and *The Times* was its hero, regardless of the fact that the most important principle of freedom of the press - the right to criticize governments without fear of prosecution - had been established by the radical and working-class press before the ascendancy of *The Times*.[19] At mid-century, *The Times*'s depiction of itself as representative of the Fourth Estate was challenged by those who pointed out that diversity was essential to this function of the press: when 'one single journal has so far distanced its competitors as virtually to have extinguished them ... [t]he "republic of letters" then becomes a despotism'.[20]

Recent press histories, especially those written by academics rather than ex-journalists, are more sceptical of the Fourth Estate concept, and hence devote less space to *The Times*.[21] Yet its ghost still haunts the broader scholarship on the nineteenth century. Too often it is assumed that the typical newspaper was a London daily and, consequently, the majority newspaper press – the weekly and bi-weekly newspapers of the provinces receives only occasional notice. The importance of the increasing 'dailiness' of journalism was exaggerated by Victorian journalists, who found it all rather exciting, and

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[19] William H Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819-1832* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928).

[20] [Reeve, Henry], 'The Newspaper Press', *Edinburgh Review* 102 (1855) 470-98 (p. 492) in *British Periodicals* [accessed 6 May 2012]. Cobden made the same point; see Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers (*London: Longman, 1957), p. 97.

[21] The classic argument for the press as Fourth Estate is made in two *Times* leaders of 6 and 7 February 1852. For a concise critique, see Boyce, 'Fourth Estate'.

historians have accepted this exaggeration. Readers were more measured in their response - for the first few years after the *Manchester Guardian* went daily in 1855, its sales on Wednesday and Saturday (its previous days of publication as a bi-weekly) were twice those of its sales on the other four days of the week. Some of the high-circulation, prestigious provincial weeklies and bi-weeklies were in no hurry to become daily after this became economically possible in 1855. The *Liverpool Mercury* and *Newcastle Chronicle* waited until 1858, while the *Newcastle Journal, Manchester Courier* and one of the greatest provincial papers, the *Leeds Mercury,* only became daily in 1861.[22] Weekly titles - some produced in London but chiefly those published outside the capital - still accounted for three-quarters of newspaper sales in 1855, according to an anonymous writer in the *Westminster Review.*[23]

While some current scholarship acknowledges these problems, a preoccupation with *The Times* and other London dailies persists. The best histories of the Victorian newspaper - the monographs of Alan Lee, Lucy Brown and Aled Jones, and many chapters in the collections edited by Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein and by Joan Shattock and Michael Wolff – synthesize the London and provincial press, address it as a cultural product and not merely a political one (Lee less so), and include weeklies alongside dailies.[24] However, three significant monographs on Victorian journalism – by

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[22] Wadsworth, 'Newspaper Circulations', pp. 19-21.

[23] Anon, 'The London Daily Press', *Westminster Review*, October 1855, p. 516.

[24] Lee, *Origins*; Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Jones, *Powers of the Press*; *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake,

Jean Chalaby, Mark Hampton and Joel Wiener – show how a limited range of

metropolitan sources often produce limited conclusions applicable only to the

minority of London newspapers. Of these, more later.[25] Recent histories of

journalism and the newspaper treat *The Times* proportionately, although

Martin Conboy's brisk history of journalistic discourse focuses almost

exclusively on London.[26] He is unusual in acknowledging this fact, and

explaining why (shortage of space). The 2009 print edition of the monumental

Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism is strong on periodical and

metropolitan newspaper journalism, less so on the provincial press, but this is

being addressed in subsequent additions to the online version (more than half

of the 100-plus new entries are on non-metropolitan topics).[27] Stephen

Donovan and Matthew Rubery's 2012 anthology of Victorian investigative

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Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990); *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982).

[25] Jean Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[26] Keith Williams, *The English Newspaper: An Illustrated History to 1900* (London: Springwood, 1977); Martin Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History* (London: Sage, 2004); Kevin Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day! The History of Mass Communication in Britain* (London: Arnold, 1998); Kevin Williams, *Read All About It! A History of the British Newspaper* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[27] *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (London: British Library, 2009); the online edition is currently part of Chadwyck-Healey's *C19: The Nineteenth Century Index* subscription database <http://c19index.chadwyck.com/marketing/aboutdncj.jsp>..

journalism makes a convincing case for a distinctive British variant on American muck-raking, but – for good editorial and archival reasons - is gathered almost exclusively from the metropolitan press.[28]

Two important discussions of the relationship between Victorian fiction and journalism are based almost entirely on metropolitan evidence, but draw conclusions that are also applicable to the journalism consumed by the majority of Victorians, the local paper. Dallas Liddle's *The Dynamics of Genre* and Matthew Rubery's *The Novelty of Newspapers* both highlight how novelists incorporated or interrogated journalistic form and content from mid-century onwards, with Liddle taking a more ambitious and conceptual approach based on Bakhtin's theory of genre, likely to prove tremendously fruitful in its ability to integrate work across many different types of writing, journalistic and non-journalistic.[29] Liddle includes the 'higher journalism' of the periodicals in his discussion of journalism. Yet he default newspaper for both Liddle and Rubery is a London daily – although fictional representations of local papers are acknowledged in passing, and Liddle mentions George

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[28] *Secret Commissions: An Anthology of Victorian Investigative Journalism*, ed. by Stephen Donovan and Matthew Rubery (London: Broadview Press Ltd, 2012); Matthew Rubery, pers. comm., 16 April 2013.

[29] Dallas Liddle, *The Dynamics of Genre: Journalism and the Practice of Literature in mid-Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction After the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For an excellent discussion of Liddle's stimulating book, see Leslie Howsam, Linda K Hughes and Dallas Liddle, 'Book Review Forum: Dallas Liddle's The Dynamics of Genre', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44 (2011), 291-300.

Eliot's early essays in the *Coventry Herald and Observer*. It may be that the strategic choice to focus on canonical novelists leads Rubery and Liddle towards 'national' themes and the London daily newspapers fictionalized by those novelists. However, all five journalistic narrative conventions examined by Rubery are found as often in the provincial press as in the metropolitan, except perhaps the coded personal ads, which were too risky in small communities. And while one could question Liddle's choice of the anonymous review essay as 'the Victorian journalistic genre par excellence', his familiarity with the period's range of journalism and his scepticism of journalists writing about journalism ensures that his conclusions are not geographically limited.[30]

Some of the best recent scholarship on the Victorian press deals with provincial newspapers as a national phenomenon, almost as an aside (a thoroughly evidenced aside, nonetheless), whilst tackling significant ideas or developments in Victorian culture and society. Graham Law's detailed work on serialized fiction in the provincial press highlights how syndication of novels relied on the national structure of the local and regional newspaper network.[31] Michael de Nie's study of British representations of Irishness also demonstrates the networked nature of regional and local newspapers, and his heavy use of the provincial press enables him to draw genuinely national conclusions.[32] Similarly, Simon Potter's work on colonial press systems

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[30] Liddle, *Dynamics,* 35, 36.

[31] Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

[32] Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

emphasizes the decentralized nature of international relationships and the limited relevance of London titles to most newspaper readers, while his theorization of newspaper systems and networks is a major step forward, and can be fruitfully applied to the domestic provincial press.[33] The physical network of cables studied by Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb and Roger Neil Barton are equally revealing of the geography of the Victorian press.[34] Their economic approach to news as a commodity necessarily gives a major role to the provincial press, in order for them to satisfactorily explain the market in telegraphic news. Credit should also be given to the annual Print Networks volumes, which are steadily amassing a wealth of valuable if atomised research on provincial print culture, including the Victorian local paper.[35]

However, the more balanced view of *The Times* in some current media history and literary scholarship has had limited impact on most peer-reviewed Victorian scholarship in academic journals. *Times* letters and leaders are too

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[33] Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System 1876-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); Simon Potter, 'Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007), 621–646. For an application of Potter's model, see Andrew Hobbs, 'When the Provincial Press was the National Press (c.1836-c.1900)', *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 5 (2009): 16-43.

[34] J.Silberstein-Loeb, 'The Structure of the News Market in Britain, 1870-1914', *Business History Review* 83 (2009), 759-88. Roger Neil Barton, 'New Media: The Birth of Telegraphic News in Britain 1847-1868', *Media History* 16 (2010), 379–406.

[35] See for example *Periodicals and Publishers: The Newspaper and Journal Trade, 1750-1914,* ed. by John Hinks, Catherine Armstrong and Matthew Day (London: British Library, 2009).

often cited without explanation or context, like biblical texts, their use implicitly appealing to an authority which the newspaper often lacked. An analysis of the newspapers cited in 152 articles published by nine leading academic journals since 1980 found more journal articles citing *The Times* than articles citing the tens of thousands of provincial newspapers put together (Table 2; see Appendix 1 for details of this analysis). Although Victorian newspapers are being used more readily, the imbalance between use of *The Times* and provincial papers has increased, as seen in a comparison of the 1980s with the ten years to 2012 (Fig 1). De Nie's 2004 comment, made before any provincial papers were digitized, still stands: 'some scholars have used *The Times* and other major London newspapers as if they spoke for the entire British press'.[36]

Table 2. Journal articles citing newspapers, by type of newspaper, 1980-2012

Times	Other London	Provincial/local
89	112	83

Journal articles are counted more than once if they cite more than one type of newspaper.

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[36] De Nie, *Eternal Paddy*, p. 27; see also Adrian Bingham, 'The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians', *Twentieth Century British History* 21 (2010): 225-231 (p. 229).
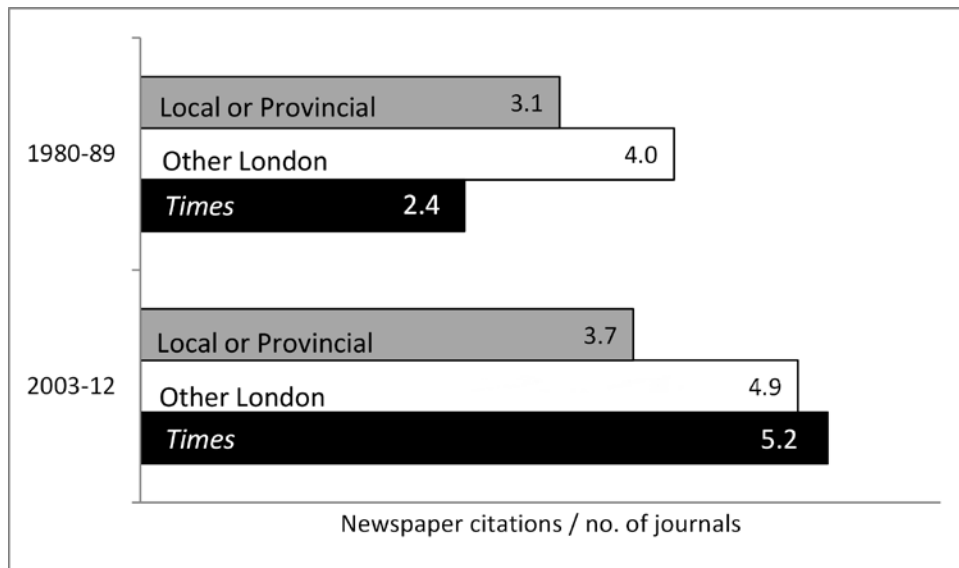
Fig 1. Journal articles citing newspapers by type of newspaper, 1980-89 and 2003-12

Digitization of Victorian newspapers appears to have had no impact on scholarship. Oddly, use of *The Times* appears to decline after the launch of its digital archive in 2003 (Fig. 2), and there is little sign yet of increased use of searchable digitized provincial papers after the launch of *19ᵗʰ Century British Library Newspapers Part I* in late 2007 (containing 29 provincial titles), followed by a further 20 provincial titles in *Part II*, published in Spring 2010. Nevertheless, Bob Nicholson (whose own research shows what can be achieved by a synoptic view of the nineteenth-century press) is optimistic about their use::

> whilst researchers may once have chosen to privilege the voices of
> national papers, keyword searches carry fewer prejudices and
> return results from the *Whitstable Times* and the *Hampshire
> Telegraph* ahead of their London namesakes … Keen observers

will already have noticed these publications … cropping up in the

footnotes of an increasing number of academic articles.[37]

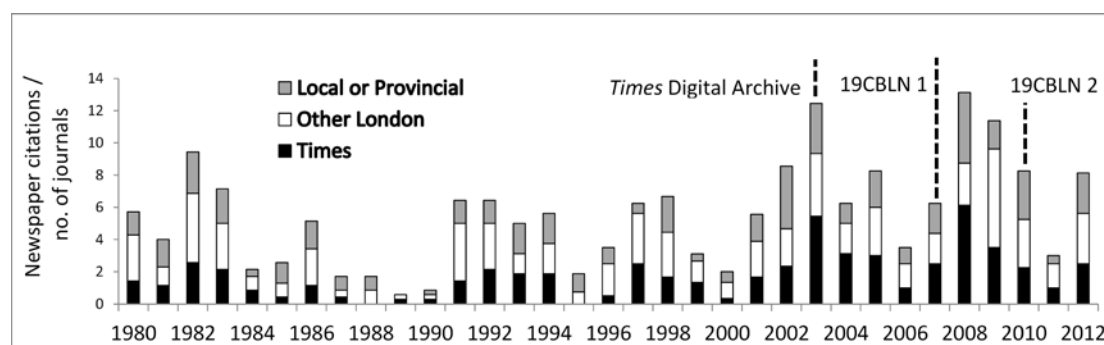But not in the nine journals surveyed here.

Fig 2. Journal articles citing newspapers by type of newspaper, 1980-2012

New generations of historians, too, are encouraged to believe that *The Times*

is the first and best newspaper source.[38] In an otherwise excellent

introductory text on the use of historical documents for A-level and

undergraduate students, the only newspaper sources are five examples from

The Times and one from a Sussex local paper.[39] A more recent textbook,

whilst offering a sophisticated understanding of newspapers as sources, gives

the same implicit message – *The Times* as default – in its use of the paper as

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[37] Bob Nicholson, review of Lisa Peters, *Politics, Publishing and Personalities: Wrexham Newspapers, 1848-1914*, in *North American Journal of Welsh Studies* (forthcoming).

[38] For teaching, see Jane Secker, 'Newspapers and Historical Research: A Study of Historians and Custodians in Wales' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1999), p. 195.

[39] John Fines, *Reading Historical Documents* (London: Simon & Schuster Education, 1990).

its only newspaper case study.[40] The short Higher Education Academy guide on using newspapers in research is an honourable exception.[41]

This is all perfectly understandable. *The Times* at its high-point became the very definition of a newspaper, the archetype; in the words of Morison, official historian of *The Times,* 'the classic nineteenth-century morning paper' – a daily broadsheet full of classified advertisements, high politics, diplomacy and commercial news.[42] In fact, *The Times* was not an archetype, it was unique. The vast majority of nineteenth-century newspapers were not like *The Times* and were part of parallel traditions: the unstamped and Chartist press, Sunday newspapers, local and county-wide provincial weeklies, halfpenny evening papers and the extinct but once popular regional weekend miscellanies such as the Sheffield *Weekly Telegraph*. If we study the history of *The Times* we do not gain a grasp of nineteenth-century press history; we gain a grasp only of *The Times.*

3. *The Times's* exceptionalism

[40] Stephen Vella, 'Newspapers', in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from 19th and 20th Century History,* ed. by Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (London: Routledge, 2008).

[41] Melodee Beals with Lisa Lavender, *Historical Insights: Focus on Research - Newspapers* (Coventry: Higher Education Academy History Subject Centre, 2011).

[42] Stanley Morison, *The English Newspaper, An Account of the Physical Development of Journals Printed in London from 1622 to the Present Day (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932); see also Boyce, 'Fourth Estate'; Williams, *Dangerous Estate,* p. 22.

The Times was unrepresentative in many ways. It was published in London, whilst most contemporary papers were published in the provinces (Table 3). The weekly or bi-weekly provincial paper, not the London daily, was the typical Victorian newspaper. There were never more than 20 London morning papers at any one time until the 1890s, while provincial weeklies and bi-weeklies could be counted in their hundreds and – after 1855 – their thousands. In terms of copies sold, the provincial press leapfrogged the London press in the last four decades of the century. By 1864 Edward Baines, the well-informed owner of the *Leeds Mercury*, could claim that, of a total annual newspaper circulation of 546 million copies, 340 million were provincial publications.[43] Lists of newspapers taken in libraries and reading rooms confirm this lasting preference for the local and regional press.[44]

Table 3. Numbers of English newspaper titles by place of publication, 1837-1900

	1837	1854	1867	1872	1882	1892	1900
London newspapers	132	248	222	265	441	543	472
Provincial newspapers:	243	589	867	1185	1554	1841	1947
Mornings	0	6	22	48	70	75	70
Evenings	0	0	0	15	79	86	101
Weekly/ bi-weekly		306	615	844	943	1108	{ {1304

[43] Edward Baines, *Extension of the Franchise: Speech of Edward Baines on Moving the Second Reading of the Borough Franchise Bill, in the House of Commons, on the 11th May, 1864* (London, 1864), p. 22, cited in John Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party, 1857-1868* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.95.

[44] Andrew Hobbs, 'Reading the Local Paper: Social and cultural functions of the local press in Preston, Lancashire, 1855-1900' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Central Lancashire, 2010).

Special interest	29	8	13	21	29	{

Sources: Alan J. Lee, 'The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press, 1855-1914' in *Newspaper History,* ed. by Boyce et al; *Newspaper Press Directory* (London: Mitchell, annual); Stamp Duty returns in *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* [accessed 1 September 2010]; *Waterloo Directory of English Periodicals and Newspapers, 1800-1900,* ed. by John North <http://www.victorianperiodicals.com> [accessed 6 February 2012]. Place of publication was taken from the publication's title, or from the *Waterloo Directory*. Catalogues, price lists and trade reports were omitted.

The Times was also unusual in its content, with its high volume of advertising, narrow focus on foreign and commercial news and relative lack of non-political news, features and arts coverage. In contrast, its contemporaries (particularly provincial ones) included fiction, literary extracts and reviews, history, biography, geography, women's columns, travel writing, satire and a wide variety of other non-news content.From the early decades of the century other newspapers incorporated maps, portraits, diagrams and local views, both urban and rural, in their advertising as well as their editorial columns.[45] Figs 3-6, summarising snapshot content analysis of *The Times* and four comparator newspapers between 1835 and 1895, show how distinctive and atypical *The Times* was, with more advertising, business and foreign news (although *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper,* a popular Sunday title, occasionally rivalled and even exceeded the foreign coverage of *The Times*), and fewer

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[45] Brown, *Victorian News* p. 108.

non-political news reports, arts coverage and feature articles (see Appendix 2). [46]

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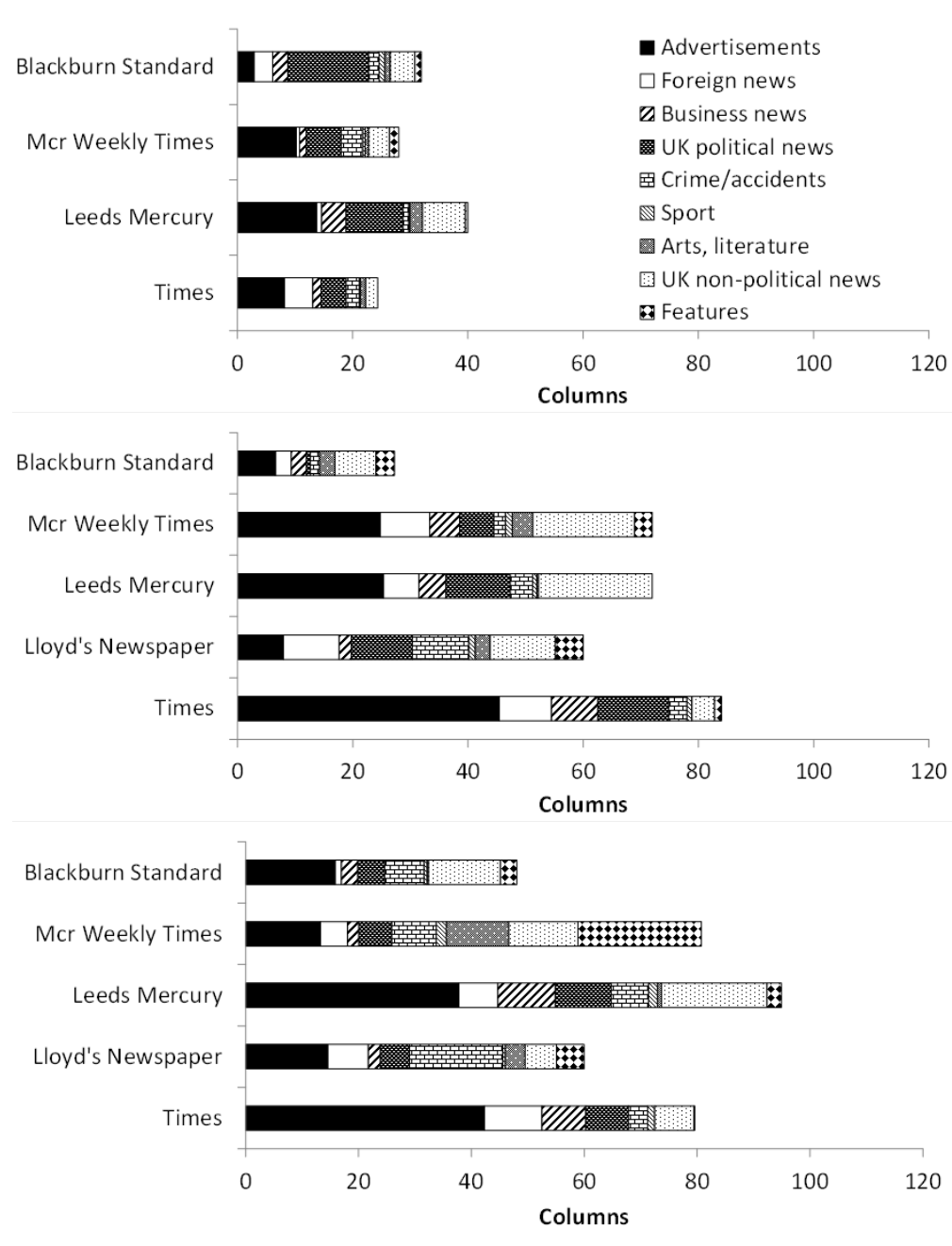
[46] The large amount of political news in the 1835 issues of the *Blackburn Standard* and *Leeds Mercury* was mainly concerned with the resignation of Sir Robert Peel as Prime Minister and his replacement by Lord Melbourne.
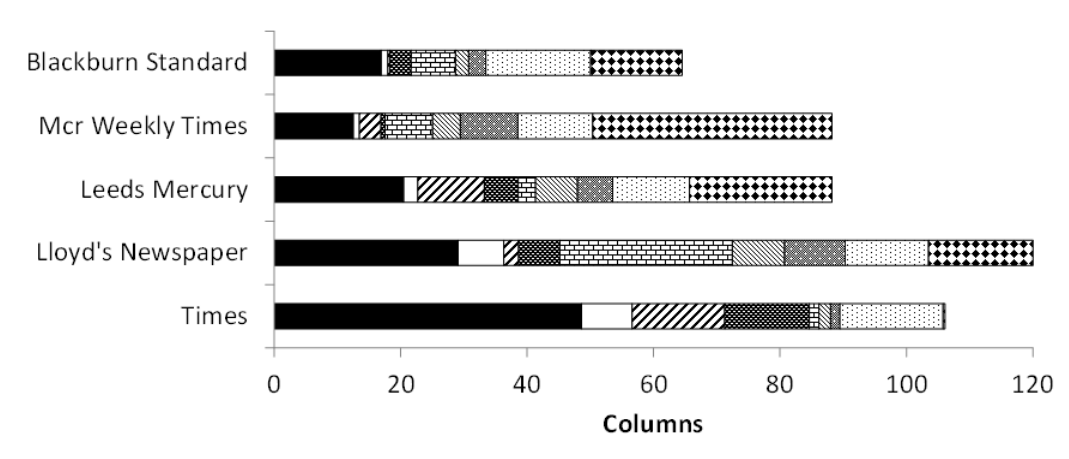
Figs 3-6. Newspaper content, selected titles, 1835, 1857, 1875 and 1895

In three out of the four years for which content was analysed, *The Times*
carried far more advertising than other papers; its readers were immersed in
page after page of small ads (sometimes accounting for more than half the
newspaper), but this was not the majority experience among Victorian
newspaper readers. *The Times* differed in the quality as well as the quantity of
its adverts, carrying few illustrated display ads found in Sunday, evening and
weekend miscellany papers. Other London dailies, particularly the *Daily
Chronicle* and the *Daily Telegraph* were better known than *The Times* for their
employment advertising, while products and services advertised across the
country in the provincial press reveal differences in local and regional
cultures, economies and demographies.[47]

[47] For commentary on London dailies see Frederick Knight Hunt, *The Fourth Estate: Contributions
Towards a History of Newspapers, and of the Liberty of the Press*, (London: David Bogue, 1850) in
Google Books
<http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Fourth_Estate.html?id=rOZRAAAAcAAJ&redir_esc=y>
[accessed 31 May 2013]; John Hilson, *The Newspaper Press, in Nine Papers* (Kelso: A Murray,
Chronicle office, 1858) in Google Books <

The Times usually carried more foreign news than other newspapers. The only exception in the sample years was in 1857 when the sensationalist Sunday newspaper *Lloyd's* gave more space to the Indian Mutiny, with headlines such as 'Six hundred people strangled' …' and 'The Butchery at Sealkote'. Even then, the smaller page size of *Lloyd's* probably means that *The Times* had more column inches of foreign news. Like other Sunday newspapers and publications aimed at working-class readers, *Lloyd's* carried more reports on emigration than did *The Times*. While London papers selected, presented and interpreted foreign news according to their political standpoint and their readers' class, local and regional coverage of foreign affairs differed according to local trading links, traditions of migration and proximity to barracks, seaports and naval bases. On the whole, *The Times* carried more business news than other papers, although the *Leeds Mercury* had more coverage in two of the four years sampled. Other alternatives to *The Times* included specialist financial and commercial publications in London and some provincial cities throughout the Victorian era, and detailed coverage of each trade and industry can be found either in specialist periodicals or provincial newspapers serving particular local economies and in some regional trade publications.

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http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=CJUIAAAAQAAJ&dq=hilson+newspaper+press+9+papers&source=gbs_navlinks_s> [accessed 31 May 2013]. Henry William Massingham, *The London Daily Press* (London: Leisure Hour Library, 1892) in Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/londondailypress00massuoft> [accessed 31 May 2013].

The Times was distinctive too in what it did not cover – non-political news, arts, literature and the theatre, and magazine-style feature articles. While provincial papers in particular carried extensive reports of expanding local government bodies, churches, voluntary organizations and other aspects of associational culture, this part of Victorian life was largely absent from *The Times,* particularly in the first part of the century. In contrast, the quotidian stuff of social history is much more plentiful in the local and regional press, and in other London dailies, such as the *Morning Chronicle* of the 1850s, with its 'commissions of enquiry' into 'London labour and the London Poor' or the *Daily Chronicle* towards the end of the century, with its focus on working-class life in London. *The Times* carried few or no reviews of plays, exhibitions and literature in the years analysed, and certainly far less than other types of newspaper. Although *The Times* published some poetry, the *Morning Post* published more, the *Daily News* was known for its theatrical news, and the *Daily Chronicle* had a substantial daily literary supplement in the 1890s, while there were plenty of specialist periodicals and newspapers, such as the theatrical newspaper *The Era* (now digitizedFewer general interest feature articles appeared in the Times, compared with papers such as the *Leeds Mercury* which included topics like 'Professor Duncan on the antiquity of man', 'Overwork and insomnia' and 'Arctic exploration'. Neither were there women's or children's columns or serial fiction, staples of the New Journalism found in the 1895 Saturday supplement of the *Leeds Mercury,* the news-miscellanies such as the *Manchester Weekly Times* or Sunday papers like *Lloyd's.* As Law has established, regional news miscellanies pioneered many feature elements of New Journalism, before London newspapers. In 1875, these formed 27 per

cent of the content in one such miscellany, the *Manchester Times* , while *Lloyd's* had only eight per cent. *The Times*, like some other London dailies, was unaffected by the populist changes of the New Journalism, even in 1895. Intriguingly, the widespread assumption that *The Times* was a typical Victorian newspaper may have led to an exaggerated distinction between newspapers and periodicals. Sunday newspapers and provincial weeklies such as the *Blackburn Standard* carried a smattering of magazine-style feature material throughout the Victorian era, and many smaller provincial weekly papers began life as monthly magazines.

The Times was less distinctive in its coverage of sport, crime, accidents, and politics, although even here it appeared to march to the beat of a different drum. Sports coverage increased sharply at the end of the century in all papers analysed except *The Times,* while political coverage decreased, again with the exception of *The Times*. Its coverage of 'accidents and offences', however, followed a similar trajectory to its contemporaries, declining from its more sensational Georgian approach to crime into utter respectability. In this category, *The Times* operated as a local or regional newspaper, drawing its reports of crime and calamity almost entirely from London and the South-East, with little attempt at national coverage.

Although no other newspaper in this analysis matched the profile of *The Times,* the closest was the 1875 *Leeds Mercury*, representing a genre - the provincial morning paper - which imitated *The Times* and other London

dailies. Significantly,ly, the morning paper has received more attention from historians than any other provincial genre.[48]

Content analysis confirms, therefore, that *The Times* was not 'national' in the way we understand that term today. It could be described as part-national, part-regional, just like its provincial contemporaries. In coverage of non-political news, crime, accidents, sport and the arts, all newspapers – London and provincial – favoured their locality. As Table 4 shows, *The Times* was no better, and sometimes worse, than avowedly provincial papers in its small proportion of news from outside its region, South-East England. Indeed, the figures for 1835 and 1875 may overstate the amount of non-metropolitan news in *The Times*. Most of that category in 1835 was taken up with reviews of the Yorkshire Music Festival, noteworthy for the attendance of the then Princess Victoria. Similarly, the 1875 coverage is largely accounted for by a four-column report of a collision in the Solent involving the royal yacht. Both events could be considered national events, due to their royal connections. A similar content analysis by Brown found that 'news which was not related to the interests of Londoners ... was treated perfunctorily'.[49] Her study revealed that news of events beyond the Home Counties (excluding by-elections and market trends) made up between two and four per cent of the content of three London dailies, *The Times, Standard* and *Daily Telegraph,* in the 1860s and 1890s. My analysis finds higher proportions, but the point remains that, in

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[48] See for example Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain,* Vol.1*, The Nineteenth Century* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981).

[49] Brown, *Victorian News,* pp. 257-58.

some years, the *Leeds Mercury* or the *Blackburn Standard* were more 'national' in their reporting than *The Times*, if we take national to mean 'covering all parts of the national territory'. This point has misled many historians, particularly those who have elided London with Britain.[50] Henry Miller's description of *Punch* applies to *The Times:*, 'The provinces, which were so important in Victorian Britain, are largely absent'.[51] The semi-'national' status of *The Times* has encouraged the anachronistic concept of 'national' newspapers for a period when there was no national press as we know it. In fact, the closest thing to a national press was the national network of local papers, which shared content with each other, drawn from news agencies and from the publishers of pre-printed pages.[52] London papers could not provide the content that most readers across the country required, as shown by their meagre sales in early newspaper centres. In Manchester, London papers sold less than 2,000 copies daily in 1846, while the *Manchester Guardian* alone (then a bi-weekly) sold 9,000.[53] From mid-century onwards:

> the Liverpool man cared nothing for *The Times* – he had his *Daily Post* ... the Scot had his *Scotsman*, well suited to his needs; the Mancunian his *Guardian*, his *Examiner & Times*, or his *Courier*, the Sheffielder his *Courant*, his *Independent*, and his *Telegraph*; the

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[50] Koss, *Rise and Fall,* vol. 1, p. 93.

[51] Miller, 'Problem with *Punch*', p. 289.

[52] Hobbs, 'Provincial Press''.

[53] David Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London: Collins, 1971), p.93.

Leeds man his *Mercury* and his *Leeds Times*.[54]

Kellett made this point in 1963, echoing many nineteenth-century commentators. Yet in 2011 Wiener could still mistakenly claim that a 'London-centered "national press" existed from the outset of the nineteenth century'.[55] *The Times* is the ideal nineteenth-century source for the type of historiography in which, as James Vernon has argued, 'power is seen to emanate from the centre to the periphery', rather than being more widely distributed and networked.[56]

Table 4. Non-political editorial content from outside region of publication, as a proportion of total editorial content

%	1835	1857	1875	1895
Times	11.8	9.8	13.5	7.2
Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper		10.7	16.3	4.7
Leeds Mercury	15.5		29.5	6.5
Manchester Times	8.9		10.6	4.4
Blackburn Standard	12.3		6.5	2.7

See Appendix 2 for details of analysis.

4. Unwarranted assumptions

[54] E.E. Kellett, 'The Press 1830-65', in *Early Victorian England, 1830-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), ed. by George Malcolm Young, pp.37-38; see also Anon, 'British Journalism', *London Quarterly Review* 38 (1872): 87-123 (p. 113).

[55] Wiener, *Americanization,* p, 7.

[56] James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture c.1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

Times-inflected ideas of a single, dominant type of nineteenth-century

newspaper – daily, metropolitan, full of news and politics, masculine - can be

seen in two books that have shaped recent scholarship - Jean Chalaby's *The

Invention of Journalism* (1998) and Mark Hampton's *Visions of the Press in

Britain, 1850-1950* (2004) – and in the more recent *Americanization of the

British Press* by Joel Wiener (2011).[57] Chalaby's contribution is to identify the

genres that coalesced to create a distinctive post-Stamp Duty discourse of

reporting (not to be elided with the broader category of journalism). But this

discourse was present before the mid-nineteenth century, and it was not the

first distinctively journalistic discourse. Chalaby's contrast between pre-

Repeal political 'publicists' and post-Repeal commercial 'journalists' is

unsustainable once a wider range of newspapers is included as evidence,

beyond his two chosen genres of the London radical press of the 1820s and

1830s, and the London dailies of later decades. Both genres are atypical of

the newspaper press of their times, with the latter in particular dominated by

the example of *The Times*. Individual biographies, particularly in the provincial

press, challenge the simplicity of Chalaby's narrative of publicists leaving their

politics behind to embrace the market. Many politically committed journalists

and publishers combined profit and principle throughout the century: Edward

Baines of the *Leeds Mercury*, G.W.M. Reynolds, novelist, Chartist and

publisher of the *London Journal* and *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, and Abel

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[57] Chalaby, *Invention*; Hampton, *Visions*; Wiener, *Americanization*.

Heywood, the radical Manchester publisher and wholesale newsagent, to name but a few.[58]

Hampton develops Jones's approach by studying representations of the press, but only in 'elite' sources.[59] From these he identifies two competing theories: the 'educational', based on ideas of the public sphere; and the more commercial, less democratic and empowering 'representative' theory. These theories co-existed, with the educational dominant until the 1880s, when the representative became more popular. His argument is otherwise persuasive if its qualifications are borne in mind – that these are the views of a minority of elite commentators (journalists pronouncing on journalism), who were discussing a minority (until the 1930s) of the newspaper press, that which was published in London. It is significant that more index entries are devoted to the *The Times* than to any other publication (as in Liddle and Rubery), and that Hampton describes Grant's monumental work (1871-72) as a 'two-volume history of the press', when there was a third volume, with most of its 564

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[58] David Thornton, *Mr Mercury: The Life of Edward Baines 1774-1848* (Chesterfield: Merton Priory, 2009); *G.W M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James; Brian E. Maidment, 'The Manchester Common Reader -- Abel Heywood's "Evidence" and the Early Victorian Reading Public' in *Printing and the Book in Manchester, 1700-1850,* ed. by Eddie Cass and Morris Garratt (Manchester: Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 2001), 99-120.

[59] Hampton, *Visions,* p. 6.

pages devoted to the provincial press.[60] However, as Jones and the valuable bibliography of Eugenia Palmegiano demonstrate, when a wider range of commentary is consulted, Hampton's narrative of perceived decline is harder to sustain.[61] Readers, for example, and those who provided libraries and reading rooms for them into the early twentieth century, believed that newspaper-reading could be an educational activity.[62]

Wiener's wide-ranging narrative, from the 1830s to 1914, synthesizes two national histories of the newspaper to explain how journalism in Britain and the United States evolved into the populist forms of the late 1890s. However, Wiener's limited range of sources – journalists on journalism in elite metropolitan periodicals similar to those used by Hampton, alongside journalists' memoirs and some reference to the newspapers themselves – lead him to concentrate on London in his discussion of British journalism. This is based on the anachronistic view that 'national' newspapers were published from London throughout the century. The focus on London dailies enables Wiener to set up a false dichotomy between old-fashioned news-dominated London dailies and the racier, more populist New York press. He thereby

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[60] Hampton, *Visions,* pp. 58-59; J Grant, *The Newspaper Press: Its Origin, Progress and Present Position, Vol.3. The Metropolitan Weekly and Provincial Press* (London: Routledge, 1872) <http://www.archive.org/details/newspaperpressit03granuoft> [accessed 15 April 2013].

[61] Jones, *Powers of the Press*; Eugenia M. Palmegiano, *Perceptions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals: A Bibliography* (London: Anthem, 2012).

[62] Andrew Hobbs, 'The Reading World of a Provincial Town: Preston, Lancashire 1855-1900', in *The History of Reading, Volume 2: Evidence from the British Isles, c.1750-1950* ed. by Katie Halsey and W.R. Owens (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 121-38 (p.128).

omits the more numerous and widely read provincial press - which developed

many aspects of the New Journalism – and the 'magazinification' of British

dailies.[63]

Beyond the historiography of the press, over-reliance on *The Times* has led

some historians into serious errors. Three examples make the point.

Schwoerer claimed the Victorians were not interested in the bicentenary of the

'Glorious Revolution' in 1888. However, her dependence on *The Times* led

her to ignore metropolitan papers of differing politics and provincial papers full

of reports of local celebrations.[64] Many historians have concluded that public

opinion was against a prolonged search for the Franklin expedition to find the

North-West Passage, because they only looked at *Times* leading articles.

Other newspapers reveal, as Cavell has shown, that opinion was divided.[65]

Dobson's study of late eighteenth-century strikes concluded there was more

industrial unrest in the South than in the North, but he based his analysis on

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[63] For the provincial press and New Journalism see Law, *Serializing Fiction*; Andrew Hobbs,

review of Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914: Speed in the

Age of Transatlantic Journalism,* 'Reviews in History'

<www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1273>.

[64] Lois G. Schwoerer, 'Celebrating the Glorious Revolution, 1689-1989', *Albion* 22 (1990): 1-

20. For an opposing view using wider newspaper evidence see Edmund Rogers, '1688 and

1888: Victorian Society and the Bicentenary of the Glorious Revolution', *Journal of British

Studies* 50 (2011): 892-916.

[65] Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative: Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture,

1818-1860* (University of Toronto Press, 2008).

reports in *The Times*, which gave fuller coverage to the Home Counties than to the rest of the nation.[66]

Why are some scholars misled by *The Times?* There are at least four reasons: the myth-making nature of journalism; the traditionally high status of political history in Britain; unconsidered resort to well-known but inappropriate sources; and easy availability of *The Times*. First, journalists have always been good at telling stories, particularly about themselves, and much of today's received wisdom about the nineteenth-century press is based on journalism history written by its practitioners, and on politicians' memoirs, diaries and correspondence in which the glamour of *The Times* ensured its over-representation.[67] As an institution '*The Times* has never been wanting in a sense of its own importance'.[68] The newspaper's official history, in five volumes, is of course the biggest and best of any individual paper.[69]

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[66] C.R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations, 1717–1800* (London: Croom Helm, 1980). I am grateful to Humphrey Southall for this reference.

[67] F.M. Leventhal, 'Changing Fortunes in Fleet Street' (review of *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain. Vol. 2: The Twentieth Century* by Stephen Koss), *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985), p. 492; Secker, 'Newspapers and Historical Research', , p. 32.

[68] J.S.R. Phillips, 'The Growth of Journalism. § 7.

[69] Should there be quote mark here? This is a sub-section of a chapter. *The Times;* The Walters', In *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes* Vol XIV. The Victorian Age, Part Two. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907–21) <http://www.bartleby.com/224/0407.html> [accessed 1 March 2011]; Herd, *March of Journalism,* p. 6.

Second, the nature of the discipline of history in Britain, which has traditionally focused on Parliament and national politics, may have encouraged historians to turn to a newspaper read by powerful politicians and influential in Parliamentary politics. The taken-for-granted notion that *The Times* continued to be 'influential' across the whole century has meant that less overtly political papers have been neglected. Yet assumptions about influence and the 'authority' of *The Times* are now challenged by more recent scholarship.[70] Journalism history which begins with the reader rather than the text is discovering that readers' uses of newspapers were often far removed from the lofty Fourth Estate functions promoted by journalists, and more akin to 'attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed'.[71]

The third reason for the distorting focus on *The Times* is the habit of making the research task more manageable by focusing on a limited set of seemingly representative phenomena, at the expense of greater numbers of less orderly sources. These 'representative' phenomena tend to be central rather than distributed, creating a type of historical synecdoche which is taken too literally, in which the part that stands for the whole (in this case *The Times*) is remembered, while the whole (nineteenth-century newspapers) is forgotten. The careful choice of representative cases is part of the historian's craft, but

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[70] Glenn R Wilkinson, 'At the Coal-Face of History: Personal Reflections on Using Newspapers as a Source', in *Studies in newspaper and periodical history: 1995 annual*, ed. by Tom O'Malley and Michael Harris (London: Greenwood, 1997), p. 213.

[71] James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 20; Hobbs, 'Reading the Local Paper'.

too many scholars have mistaken fame and prestige for representativeness in the case of *The Times*. Word-searchable digitized sources, including newspapers, should both make the selection of representative cases easier, and sometimes reduce the necessity for such choice, by enabling rapid analysis of many more individual sources and cases than was previously possible.

Fourth, the fact that *The Times* is indexed, unlike other newspapers, has understandably steered historians towards it, when an estimated 125,000 newspaper and periodical titles were published in England alone in the nineteenth century.[72] Palmer's index to *The Times* was not the first when it appeared in 1868, but it soon became the most well known, and is still available in most libraries. In these same libraries, the only microfilmed nineteenth-century London newspaper was often *The Times*. This made it the most accessible newspaper for historians.[73] In the digital age, *The Times* continues its dominance, becoming the first British newspaper to be digitized, and the most heavily searched individual title among digitized newspapers in universities (see Table 5).

Table 5. Searches of digitized newspapers in four universities, 2011-12

	UK university A	UK university B	UK university C	US university

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[72] John North, 'The Scope of this Series', in *Waterloo Directory* <http://www.victorianperiodicals.com/series2/TourOverview.asp> [accessed 6 February 2012].

[73] Secker, 'Newspapers and Historical Research',, pp. 214, 218.

	Jul-Sept 2012	Oct-Dec 2012	Jul-Sept 2012	Oct-Dec 2012	Jan-Dec 2012	Jan-Mar 2013	Jul 2011- Jun 2012
Times Digital Archive	59,425	212,258	970	3,192	8,735	2,787	1,328
19th Century British Library Newspapers	2,034	389	408	263	1,113	130	369
British Newspapers 1600-1900	1,055	2,304	223	36	406	216	131
Ratio, Times: Other papers	19.2	78.8	1.5	10.7	5.8	8.1	2.7

Source: Cengage, via individual universities.

Overuse of *The Times* highlights another problem in journalism history: too many histories are written backwards, from what has survived. Just as *The Mouse Trap* may be the longest running play in theatre history, longevity in journalism should not be confused with significance. While some titles, such as the *Yorkshire Post,* have lasted into the twenty-first century, despite never having been the most popular or profitable in their market, other more significant titles like *Reynolds's Newspaper* or the *News Chronicle* have disappeared.[74] Survival is more proof of historical contingency than significance, and a focus on what has survived produces an unbalanced view of the past in which change is downplayed and continuity over-emphasized.

5. Beyond *The Times:* Making the most of Victorian newspapers

Challenging the deleterious dominance of *The Times* can improve Victorian scholarship: by following good scholarly practice, taking advantage of newspaper digitization, and using provincial and other London newspapers. Scholarly good

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[74] Stephen Caunce, 'Yorkshire Post Newspapers Ltd: Perseverance Rewarded', in *Leeds City Business 1893-1993*, ed. by John Chartres and Katrina Honeyman (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1993).

practice includes such principles as taking nothing for granted, challenging unexamined default positions, methods and sources, and avoiding anachronism. Every historical source we use requires justification and context. When Dallas Liddle uses 'distant reading' of the *Times Digital Archive* to examine the newspaper as information storage device, he justifies his choice of title because of its status as an early adopter of new technology.[75] It is easier than ever to quickly contextualize a Victorian newspaper, thanks to the *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism* and the *Waterloo Directories* of newspapers and periodicals, both available online and in print. Understanding our sources can help us avoid anachronistic assumptions that nineteenth-century newspapers are like their twenty-first-century descendants, for example in the distinction between 'local' and 'national' papers. Context also includes the readers. As David Paul Nord argues, 'how readers read the newspaper suggests what the newspaper is'.[76] A newspaper is merely raw material when it comes off the press. Readers complete the manufacturing process, giving cultural meaning to the material object. Starting from the readers also helps us root our research in contemporary culture, and leads to questions such as 'how did they use this reading matter?' 'what else did they read?' and 'what were the circumstances of their reading?' The last two questions are linked, since much newspaper reading, until the end of the

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[75] 'Dallas Liddle, 'Reflections on 20,000 Victorian Newspapers: "Distant Reading" The Times Using The Times Digital Archive', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012), 230–237 (p.231) <doi:10.1080/13555502.2012.683151>

[76] David Paul Nord, 'Reading the Newspaper: Strategies and Politics of Reader Response, Chicago, 1912-1917', in *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and their Readers*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p.247.

century, took place in public, in pubs and reading rooms, where many other newspapers and periodicals were available, and where conversation was normal. Reading aloud, in public reading places and in the home, was commonplace. In my own research, starting with the reader led me to the provincial press, which was the preference for most of the population. Finally, good practice also applies to editorial work and teaching. Referees for journals and book publishers should challenge any unexamined or unexplained default use of *The Times,* as they would for other sources, and lecturers should emphasize that the Victorians read other papers besides *The Times.*

Newspaper digitization has made good practice easier, and 'the availability of a swathe of nineteenth-century newspaper titles means that *The Times* should *never* again appear as an isolated authority for historical events or trends'.[77] All UK universities and many in other countries have access to *19th Century British Library Newspapers,* containing Chartist titles, London papers and 49 carefully selected provincial weeklies and dailies, giving good geographical coverage of the entire nation. This enables us to build a national picture from many local sources, rather than relying solely on the more restricted views emanating from metropolitan titles. Other sources of digitized British papers include the open-access *Nineteenth Century Serial Edition* of six publications, and the commercial *British Newspaper Archive*, charging relatively modest fees. 'These digital resources offer us the chance to re-engage with media history, returning the newspaper to its central place in

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[77] Laurel Brake, 'Half Full and Half Empty', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012), p. 222.

nineteenth-century print culture', as James Mussell writes in the introduction

to this journal's excellent Digital Forum on 'Nineteenth-Century Newspapers in

the Digital Age' in 2012, and there is little to add to the three essays that

follow his introduction.[78] I commend Bob Nicholson's three-step method to

quantitative 'distant reading' of digitized Victorian newspapers, and endorse

his warning that digital resources still require context, and familiarity: 'it is

necessary to immerse onself in the language of the period and to rigorously

check the accuracy and suitability of keywords'.[79] Digitized newspapers can

be used as an index or finding aid to related material in what could become an

'offline penumbra', the majority of undigitized newspapers, stored in local and

central libraries.[80]

Now that a small but representative sample of provincial newspapers has

been digitized, it is puzzling that so little scholarship based on them has been

published. This sector of the press has many unique features that can enrich

our research. They are steeped in what the Germans call Heimat, what the

French call terroir, and what we more prosaically describe as sense of place.

The related regional and local differences are fascinating in themselves, but

enable the synthesis of truly national histories, in the same way that scholars

such as James Secord and W.B.Stephens used a similar spread of other

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[78] James Mussell, 'Nineteenth-Century Newspapers in the Digital Age', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012), p.221.

[79] Bob Nicholson, 'Counting Culture; or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012), 238–246. Please include issue as well as volume numbers for all jnl articles

[80] Patrick Leary, 'Googling the Victorians', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 10 (2005), p. 82.

sources.[81] Examining the provincial press means using the reading matter of the majority, enabling us to draw wider conclusions. These newspapers provide access to readers who never encountered London papers directly. The greater variety of non-news content in provincial papers, including literary reviews, feature articles and 'human interest' stories, makes them more valuable sources for many aspects of social and cultural history, while the extra vocabulary of place –literally so, when dialect was used – has received little attention in media history. Since these newspapers have been sidelined in Victorian studies, it is easier to find and say something new. Other London newspapers have also been under-used, and have much to offer.

6. Conclusions

The Times was a phenomenon, and no survey of nineteenth-century politics, society or culture can be written without it, either as a source or as an object of study in itself. However, the myth of *The Times* has led some scholars to believe, wrongly, that most newspapers were equally humourless, news-oriented and male; that, anachronistically, *The Times* was a 'national' newspaper; and that, after the abolition of stamp duty, metropolitan newspapers were more popular or influential than provincial papers. It may also have exaggerated the differences between newspapers and magazines.

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[81] James A Secord, *Victorian Sensation: the Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); W.B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society, 1830-1870: The Geography of Diversity in Provincial England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

The Times is an obvious and superb source for many topics, such as Westminster politics, particularly for studies of parties, politicians and diplomats who were close to the *Times*. For the Reform movement of the 1830s, or any question of high politics in the 1840s and 1850s, it is a necessary source – alongside many others, including different newspapers, if only for verification. It spoke for some sections of society, as 'an organ of the common, satisfied, well-to-do Englishman', in Matthew Arnold's words. If a campaigner chose the letters page of the *Times* as a platform, then a focus on this newspaper is appropriate. It was an innovative news organization, and so studies of media developments such as growing independence from political subsidy, or the development of journalistic genres such as the leading article, will naturally involve the *Times*. Its weaknesses are that it can tell us little about broader public opinion, about news events around the nation, about the lives of the vast majority of the population or about the majority of political activity in nineteenth-century Britain.

Scholars such as Chalaby, Hampton and Wiener have drawn bold conclusions in their attempts to tame a shapeless mass of Victorian newspaper data. However, the field may not be ready for a coherent narrative of the nineteenth-century press. More primary research is needed, before we can weave together the disparate activities of publishers and journalists on the one hand and readers on the other to create a rounded picture of Victorian

newspaper production and reception.[82] Within those two stories are the

contradictory and dynamic sub-plots of the London newspaper market, the

provincial market, the unstamped and Chartist press, Sunday newspapers,

New Journalism, a score of literary/textual genres, journalism as activity or

occupation, the role of women, rising literacy, the widening franchise and the

growth of the state, nationally and locally. The deleterious dominance of *The*

Times in Victorian accounts of the press has encouraged recent narratives to

be built on a narrow minority of the nineteenth-century press. Many narratives

of nineteenth-century journalism seem to slide from Stamp Duty repeal in

1855 to the New Journalism of the 1880s, unable to account for the high point

of provincial journalism or the sad decline of *The Times*.[83] Fortunately,

digitization enables us to take up Joad Raymond's challenge to return to

primary sources 'in such a way as to allow a new, post-Victorian big picture to

develop from the sources themselves, and not a reinterpretation of the old

story, however sophisticated'.[84]

The history of journalism is more than a branch of political history. Too few

historians have taken up the calls of Schudson and Nord for social and

cultural histories of the press, or developed the multi-dimensional approaches

of Lee, Brown and Jones, or applied the techniques of 'book history' to

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[82] Joad Raymond in Martin Conboy, Joad Raymond, Kevin Williams and Michelle Tusan,
'Roundtable Discussion of Martin Conboy's *Journalism: A Critical History', Media History* 12
(2006): 329-51 (p. 334).

[83] For example Chalaby, *Invention* and Wiener, *Americanization*. Liddle makes the same point
in a different context: *Dynamics of Genre,* p.165.

[84] Raymond in Conboy et al, 'Roundtable', p. 334.

newspaper history.[85] The deleterious dominance of *The Times* needs to be replaced by a more geographically sophisticated, more reader-oriented, more social and cultural approach to the history of journalism, and to the role of the newspaper within Victorian culture.

[85] Michael Schudson, 'Toward a Troubleshooting Manual for Journalism History', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 74 (1997), 463–476; Nord, *Communities of Journalism*; Lee, *Origins;* Brown, *Victorian News;* Jones, *Powers.*

Appendix 1: Analysis of newspapers cited by academic journals

Nine journals featuring significant numbers of articles on the Victorian era were selected, using Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports impact factor rankings for history journals, plus the author's own selection of leading journals in the field of Victorian studies (Table 6). Only the first research or review article covering the Victorian period and citing a newspaper was analysed, in each annual volume. Relevant articles were identified using the search term 'newspaper'. If no relevant article was found in that volume, the search continued in the next volume. This produced a total of 152 articles from 257 volumes.

Table 6. Academic journals analysed

Journal	Publishing history since 1980	No. of articles analysed
Albion	1980-2003	7
English Historical Review	1980-	18
History Workshop Journal	1980-	17
Journal of British Studies	1980-	18
Journal of Victorian Culture	1996-	17
Media History	1993-95, 1998-	11
Nineteenth Century	1980-	22

Literature		
Victorian Periodicals Review	1980-	31
Victorian Studies	1980-	11
		152

All citations of newspapers in the 152 articles were counted and classified as either:

- *The Times*

- other London newspapers – both daily and weekly, but excluding financial newspapers and weekly reviews such as the *Saturday Review,* or

- provincial papers – both daily and weekly, including Scottish, Irish and Welsh papers, London local papers and titles that launched in the provinces even if they later transferred to London, such as the *Economist* and the *Northern Star*.

Initially, citations for these three categories were simply totalled (Table 7). However, this gave a misleading impression, as a handful of articles with many citations of provincial papers skewed the results (more than half the provincial citations – 897 – were found in just 12 articles).

Table 7. Total citations by type of newspaper

Times	Other London	Provincial/local
740	1181	1624

Instead, rather than counting citations, I counted journal articles citing at least one newspaper, and noted whether they cited *The Times,* other London papers or a provincial paper, regardless of how many citations each journal article contained (Table 2).

To measure change over time, I averaged the number of journal articles citing newspapers for the first ten years (1980-89) and for the last ten years (2003-12) of the analysis period (Fig 1). I controlled for the varying numbers of journals analysed each year (due to the differing publishing histories of some journals), by dividing the number of articles citing newspapers by the number of journals published in each year

Appendix 2: Content analysis of *The Times* and comparator newspapers

The content of *The Times* and four comparator newspapers was analysed, in two editions of each paper, roughly every 20 years. The comparator papers represented some (but by no means all) newspaper genres other than the London daily:

- a London Sunday newspaper (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper,* 1842-1931)

- a provincial city daily (*Leeds Mercury,* 1718-1939*)*

- a provincial weekly miscellany-newspaper (*Manchester Weekly Times,* 1828-1922), and

- a small-town weekly (*Blackburn Standard,* 1835-1909).

Digitized newspapers were used, from *19th Century British Library Newspapers* and the *Times Digital Archive* [accessed 5 March 2011 and 5-9 April 2013].

The newspapers were analysed in:

- 1835 – when *The Times* was at its height

- 1857 – a mid-way point between the 1830s and 1870s, when the newspaper ecology was rapidly adjusting to the new economic environment created by the 1855 abolition of Newspaper Stamp duty

- 1875 – the high point of the provincial press

- 1895 – the era of the New Journalism.

These years were chosen to avoid major wars, although the 1857 editions were published during the Indian Mutiny. One edition during Parliament (the

first week of March), and one edition when Parliament was not sitting (early or mid-September) was selected, to 'control' for Parliamentary coverage. This produced a total of 38 newspapers (*Lloyd's* was not published in 1835).

Content was classified according to the following categories, with columns and fractions of columns counted and estimated by eye:

- Advertisements

- Foreign news

- Business news – including market prices, stocks and shares

- UK political news – reports of Parliamentary business, speeches by well-known politicians

- UK non-political news – 'human interest' stories, birth/marriage/death announcements, reports of churches and friendly societies, and of local government bodies.

- Crime/accidents - including criminal and civil court cases

- Arts, theatre, literature – reviews, literary extracts, gossip, poetry

- Sport

- Features – serialized fiction, women's and children's columns, gardening and magazine-style general features.

Leader columns and readers' letters were categorized according to their content.

Results were expressed as total number of columns, and also as percentages of total content, the latter to allow comparisons between papers of different size. This is an important difference, as the number of columns devoted to a

particular type of content may increase, while decreasing as a proportion of total content, for example. Here, both methods produced similar results. The figures in the text show total columns, while tables and graphs using percentages of total content are included in the spreadsheet available here [hyperlink].

For analysis of news from outside the region of publication (Table 4), I analysed only September editions of *The Times* and other papers. My definition was broader than Brown's, including market reports and by-elections, as well as news from Ireland, shipping, crime/accidents, business, arts/theatre/literature and features.[86] I excluded Parliamentary committees of enquiry into constituency malpractice, and meetings of national institutions such as the British Association held outside London. A few figures from other papers have been included for comparison. The figures in Table 4 are percentages of total editorial (excluding advertising).

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[86] Brown, *Victorian News,* pp. 257-58.