

Rafter K Evil Literature: Why the *News of the World* was banned in Ireland  
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### **Evil Literature: Banning the *News of the World* in Ireland**

#### **ABSTRACT**

Much of the focus on the closure of the *News of the World* in 2011 was in the context of the newspaper as a national publication in the United Kingdom. The *News of the World*, however, had a significant history in Ireland. This article focuses on one aspect of that history culminating in the banning of the newspaper in 1930 at a time when it was the best selling title in the Irish market. The prohibition followed an almost two decade campaign against ‘dirty’ publications led by the Catholic Church and its supporters so as to safeguard sexual morality in Ireland against ‘alien’ influences. Understanding the rationale for targeting the *News of the World* and other popular British newspapers is central to fully considering the censorship campaign as well as the work of the government-appointed Committee on Evil Literature in 1927. Given the emboldened outlook of the Catholic Church following independence from the United Kingdom in 1922 the highly effective censorship campaign met little public or political resistance despite the popularity of the *News of the World*. Along with offering a deeper understanding of this specific censorship campaign against the press, this article also explores the role of British newspapers beyond their core domestic market.

**KEYWORDS:** censorship Ireland journalism *News of the World* newspapers

## **Introduction**

A desire to maintain the 'purity' of Irish Roman Catholics in the face of an increased presence of British popular newspapers underpinned a near two-decade campaign to prohibit access to publications such as the *News of the World* in Ireland. Throughout the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century a demand for Irish independence motivated militant organisations and other groups from cultural and sporting perspectives to agitate against British rule in Ireland. The Catholic Church lent its support to these nationalist political aspirations but it was equally keen to eliminate 'immoral' British values. From late 1911 onwards an organised campaign to ban the British popular press was pursued - initially without national success. In the post-independence period after 1922, however, the Catholic Church hierarchy and associated lobby groups ultimately pressurised the new Free State government to pass censorship legislation that was the basis for banning several British titles in 1930 including the market leader in Ireland, the *News of the World*.

This article focuses on the history of the *News of the World* in Ireland up to the 1930 period to show how the newspaper was the primary focus of Catholic campaigners motivated by a desire to protect their specific ideological outlook from 'being swamped by voices, music, words and images from all over the world' (Morash 39). The *News of the World* was a specific target not just because it carried birth control advertisements. Campaigners were critical of its extensive coverage of crime, sexual crime and divorce proceedings in Britain. This critical reception was not unique to Ireland. In the same period, there was 'an ongoing public debate' in the United

Kingdom about the content to the popular press (Bingham 9). Advocates for press restriction were, however, more successful in the new Irish Free State where the prohibition campaign realised its objective through a government-appointed Committee on Evil Literature, which sat from February to December 1926, and subsequent legislation, the Censorship of Publications Act, 1929. The legislation sanctioned the banning of printed works that contained indecent or obscene content as well as publications that advocated birth control or devoted ‘an unduly large proportion of space to the matter of crime’.<sup>1</sup>

The 1929 legislation is generally referenced in the context of bans on birth control advertisements and on works of literary fiction by authors including Samuel Beckett, Thomas Wolfe and Edna O’Brien, among many others. This latter concentration is not unsurprising given that, ‘the proscribed list read like an alphabet of modern literature’ (Murphy 53). Remarkably, however, in passages on the 1929 censorship legislation in two seminal works examining the history of twentieth century Ireland there is no mention of the censorship campaign’s targeting of newspapers - and particularly the sustained lobby to outlaw British popular titles such as the *News of the World* (See Lee 158-9; Ferriter 340-2). A similar perspective is evident in Whyte’s widely acknowledged authoritative work on Church-State relations in Ireland that also discusses a legislative focus on outlawing indecent literature and prohibiting the advocacy of birth control (39).

The priority of those campaigning for a stricter censorship regime - and lobbying for legislative change - was, however, firmly directed at certain British popular newspapers. In previous research on censorship in Ireland the British Sunday

newspapers were identified as the type of publication ‘most severely attacked’ (Adams 17) by campaigners who ‘concentrated first of all on imported newspapers, especially the Sunday press’ (Martin 60). From late 1911 a campaign of protest was organised while the submissions to, and evidence taken by, the Committee of Evil Literature clearly show a desire to ensure Irish readers did not have access to ‘objectionable’ British popular titles. From newspaper burnings in the pre-World War I period to a campaign of intimidation against newsagents - and effective political lobbying following the establishment of the Irish Free State - a singular focus was on the *News of the World*.

In section one the emergence of the popular Sunday newspapers is examined along with discussion of the reasons why the commercially successful *News of the World* attracted such opprobrium in its main markets in Britain and in Ireland. In section two the reaction to the increased market dominance of the *News of the World* in the first two decades of the twentieth century is explored with specific reference to the moral campaigns of agitation in Ireland. The article then focuses on how the Irish Catholic Church and its supporters waged a successful lobby campaign to secure political backing for a censorship regime, which had at its core a desire to remove the *News of the World* from the Irish newspaper market. By focusing on the history of the *News of the World* in Ireland in this period this article not just contributes to a deeper understanding of the impact of popular Sunday newspapers beyond their core British market but also offers an assessment of how moral censorship in Ireland in the 1920s was explicitly an attack on the press.

### **Sunday newspapers**

The market for popular Sunday newspapers opened up from the 1830s onwards following the start of reductions in newspaper duties (Chalaby 13). Promoters of these newspapers - clearly aware of the 'commercial potential of journalism' (Conboy 9) - saw the emerging working class as a potential market for a new type of newspaper (Anon. 2). Unlike, the established elite newspapers with their concentration on politics and the interests of the upper classes the new Sunday publications such as the *News of the World* and *Lloyds Illustrated* were focused on offering their readers' distraction and amusement (Williams 39; Bingham 16). This objective was achieved with a different editorial focus to the established newspapers including also being the 'pioneers of sports coverage' in the British press (Chalaby 91).

Having first published in 1843 the *News of the World* quickly established a strong market presence with a clearly defined raison d'être to provide, 'a clear, concise and objective summary of the week's news for manual workers and tradesmen who didn't read the daily papers' (Burden 50). Nineteenth century industrialisation in Britain alongside increasing standards of education - and higher literacy levels - 'contributed to the creation of a reading public' which was duly targeted by the popular press (Chapman 44). The transaction benefited both sides, the working class received entertainment, distraction and, indeed, news in a digestible and readable format while the owners of the popular Sunday titles secured market share and profit.

By the turn of the twentieth century - having changed proprietor three times - the *News of the World* was selling approximately 40,000 copies every Sunday (Burden 50). The populist press was about to embark upon a period of sustained circulation growth with the *News of the World* as the clear market leader. By 1930 the *News of*

*the World* was the best selling newspaper in the United Kingdom with a circulation of 3.4m copies each Sunday (Bingham 19). In the same year it achieved a similar circulation status in Ireland with weekly sales of more than 130,000 copies.<sup>ii</sup> Circulation gains were secured through an editorial focus that combined coverage of crime, sport and entertainment news.

More than any of its rivals the *News of the World* was defined by an editorial concentration on reporting the proceedings of divorce trials and criminal cases, particularly those involving sexual crime. It achieved commercial success due to a policy of 'headlining on sexual shenanigans and general misbehaviour - preferably of the rich and famous, or, failing that, of anyone who ought to have known better, or not' (Burden 51). According to one authority, 'the paper expertly squeezed every last drop from legal proceedings around the country: its coverage was more professional, more extensive, and more explicit than any of its rivals' (Bingham 127).

While a long way from the sensational red-top tabloid which it would become later in the century the title was already a controversial publication combining as it did 'salacious content... [with] a sober appearance' (Greenslade 30). The newspaper's official historians recorded that it offered readers, '...straightforward, sober reporting - a record of what was said in court, the sentence imposed by the judge and, hopefully, any denunciation of sin he might utter' (Bainbridge and Stockdill 91). With this editorial approach the *News of the World* was described as 'the least respectable of the mainstream national papers, and was widely agreed to exist in a category of its own' (Bingham 128); a newspaper in which 'tantalising headlines introduced stories which gave just enough detail to set readers' imaginations racing' (129); and a title

with coverage of crime and divorce cases that dared ‘to hint at details others omitted’ (132).

Senior political and religious figures in Britain united to criticise the popular press - and the *News of the World* in particular. Critics judged the content of popular Sunday titles ‘suitable only for “shop boys and millners’ apprentices” and unfit for ‘decent houses’ (Williams 39). The denunciation of the newspaper in Ireland was equally strong and ultimately more successful in dealing with the perceived threat presented by the content on the pages of the *News of the World*. In both jurisdictions there was a clash in attitude between a sizable reading public who favoured the popular press for news and distraction and those in authority who wished to limit the general public’s access to information about unsavory aspects of contemporary society and insights into how elements of the upper class lived. Certainly, if sales are judged as a measure of public demand then there was a strong appetite for this type of voyeuristic reporting which gave ‘insights into human interest stories that fascinated, entertained, and shocked readers’ (Bingham 125). Readers of the *News of the World* - in Britain and also in Ireland - were essentially being offered insights into aspects of society that many preferred was not known, not to mind discussed, in public. While newspaper reporting and public access to detailed information about divorce cases was ultimately limited in Britain, campaigners in Ireland achieved much greater success in restricting the alternative public sphere as represented by the popular press.

### **British popular newspapers in Ireland**

At the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 the newspaper market was served by several national titles including the *Irish Independent* and the *Freeman's Journal* - both nationalist publications - and the unionist *Irish Times*. But the newspaper reading public in Ireland also had access to British titles. The market for news had developed rapidly over the previous two decades and, according to Cullen, was 'led by the growing number of popular weeklies with an emphasis on entertainment and illustrations' (9). The press market was also defined by vocal opposition to imported Sunday newspapers primarily due to their reliance on crime reports and coverage of divorce proceedings (See Adams; Martin).

The popular British Sunday newspapers were reportedly selling between 80,000 and 120,000 copies every week in Ireland by 1910 with the *News of the World* 'the clear market leader and pacesetter' (Cullen 9). In this period before World War I the newspaper was said to have pioneered the expansion in mass weekly circulation ultimately leading to a dramatic increase in its Irish circulation (see Cullen 166). Throughout the 1920s leading British newspapers continued to sell strongly in the Irish market. Both the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* carried over their intense circulation battles from the British market into Ireland. The combined Irish circulation of these two British national dailies was 49,119 copies in 1926; five years later in 1931 the comparable figure was 60,707 (Morash 139). By way of contrast the leading domestic national daily newspaper - the *Irish Independent* - had sales in the region of 90,000 in this period. It was claimed in 1926 that British Sunday titles had sales of just over 220,000 copies in Ireland while the *News of the World* was selling more than 130,000 copies in Ireland every week - which would have made it the dominant newspaper among all the British editions on sale in the Irish Free State in this period

with a total sale that was larger than that of all the Irish morning newspapers combined ( Catholic Truth Society).

Improved transport channels meant that by 1911 the British Sunday newspapers were available in most parts of Ireland by midday or early afternoon on Sunday (Cullen 175). There were a number of national wholesale newspaper distributors augmented for the Sunday titles by an increasing presence of street and church door sellers<sup>iii</sup> Public demand for Sunday titles was in part driven by their having up-to-date racing and soccer results - which provided a competitive advantage over the weekly editions that went on sale on Fridays. Along with local demand, the Sunday popular titles were also purchased and read by the large number of British military personnel stationed throughout Ireland. Moreover, there was a voyeuristic attraction to the content of the popular press which indirectly in an era of widespread ignorance of sexual matters presented large numbers of working class people with 'an alternative arena for public discourse' (Örnebring and Jönsson 293).

Opposition to the popular British titles, and the *News of the World* in particular, came in two phases. First, in the period prior to World War I although without national success; and second in the aftermath of the creation of the Irish Free State with dramatic results. Both campaigns of opposition were led by influential - and conservative - Catholic Church organisations. A rigid authoritarianism defined the Irish Catholic hierarchy from the mid-nineteenth century (See Whyte), and by the early years of the twentieth century there was an enhanced desire to maintain - and strengthen - control over public and private spheres. The targets were wide and varied

- dance halls, books, newspapers and cinema theatres - all of which the Irish Bishops agreed 'tend to destroy the virtuous character of our race' (Keating 24).

British popular newspapers with their 'alien' influences, promiscuous values, British culture and obsession with crime (and sexual crime, in particular) were a cause of considerable concern. The *News of the World* was a significant focus of attention for groups and individuals intent on preserving and deepening Catholic moral values. For example, one influential Catholic Church lobby group argued that the *News of the World*, 'is devoted almost entirely to reports of murders, suicides, divorces, bigamy cases, indecent assault, incest, affiliation cases, and crime in general, and particularly sexual crime' (Catholic Truth Society 20).

Notwithstanding, a narrow editorial focus and orientation towards sensationalism Bingham has shown how in the early decades of the twentieth century - in a society in Britain defined by ignorance and secrecy about sexual matters - 'newspapers made a significant contribution to attitudes about sex and sexuality' (10). In the latter respect, the British popular press delivered the potential to widen the public sphere by offering an alternative forum for public discourse beyond the elite newspapers. In covering stories and aspects of life ignored by the elite press titles like the *News of the World* 'represented the only part of the public sphere where issues relevant to their daily life and work were reported, debated and discussed' (Örnebring and Jönsson 294). In an Irish context this alternative public sphere was perceived as ultimately having the potential to threaten Catholic moral values. Moreover, in challenging the status quo preference for a conservative elite-led society the popular titles were dangerous in that they 'destabilized the boundaries between public and private' (Bingham 11) which

again in an Irish context threatened to weaken Catholic Church control over its flock. Therefore, to protect Catholic moral values these publications had to be removed from the hands of their Irish readers.

This was the context for the formation of the Irish Vigilance Association (IVA)<sup>iv</sup> in November 1911 with the objective of ‘working in the cause of clean literature’<sup>v</sup> (National Archives Irish Vigilance Association, JUS 7/1/2). Among the newspapers the IVA had in its focus were the *News of World*, *Sporting Times*, *Empire News*, *London Mail* and *Health and Efficiency* - all were deemed as ‘objectionable and as unsuitable to the people of this country’. In its campaign in the 1912-13 period the pro-censorship lobby sought to ‘arouse public opinion’ about the dangers of these newspapers. The campaign strategy involved demonstrations, writing letters to newspapers, distributing handbills and publishing booklets and pamphlets. The IVA also engaged in direct action with shops which sold the targeted titles:

‘In the early stages numerous newsagents in Dublin were asked to sign a pledge against stocking or selling objectionable papers. This campaign was only partially [sic] successful, for the lure of gain overcame their sense of righteousness and the ‘dirty’ papers were sold sub rosa’<sup>vi</sup>

The campaign had the support of the Catholic hierarchy including when vigilantism was the tactic used (Martin 6). The first reported opposition to British Sunday titles was in Limerick on 22 October 1911 when 29 newsagents pledged not to supply ‘objectionable newspapers’ (Cullen 250). A large crowd was reported to have assembled at the station in Limerick to meet the train carrying the Sunday

newspapers. The protest passed off peacefully but the sales representative of one unidentified title left the city 'taking seventy dozen copies of his paper with him by the next train' (Cullen 251). Success obviously encouraged further action as a week later 500-people were said to have congregated on the city's train station where they seized the Sunday newspapers and then proceeded to a nearby public park accompanied by bands playing religious hymns.

Cullen has written about 'an ugly atmosphere of intimidation' further evident when soldiers who had purchased their Sunday newspapers had the copies seized before being 'torn into tiny small pieces, and pounded into the mud' (Cullen 251). The protests were successful as orders for the popular Sunday titles fell in Limerick. The sales representative of the *News of the World* told their Irish distributor: 'It seems an extraordinary thing that any agitation can be got up even in Ireland to stop English soldiers from buying any paper they want' (Cullen 252).

Around 100 vigilance committees against the popular Sunday newspapers were operating by mid-1912. In Dublin in 1913 campaigners claimed credit for the return of two tons of English newspapers, many in unopened bundles. (Martin 6). In the main, however, the activity of the pro-censorship groups was largely directed at putting pressure on local newsagents not to stock the popular titles. There was some intimidation with picketing of newsagents and windows broken. Protest activity was also national. A petition against 'pernicious' literature garnered 100,000 signatures (Cullen 256) while a meeting in the Mansion House in Dublin in July 1912 was addressed by the Lord Lieutenant and reportedly brought 20,000 people on the streets of the capital. The dip in sales was obviously of sufficient concern that the *News of*

*the World* explored alternative methods of distribution and sales. In December 1912 the newspaper's Irish distributor advised its local sales representative that, it would not 'be wise to take any special steps to push the sale of your paper at present' (Cullen 260).

Despite the strength of opposition, the campaign lost momentum possibly on account of rising tension over the Irish national question and the advent of World War 1. The wartime environment across Ireland in the 1918 to 1922 period made organisation problematic as the Editor of the *Irish Rosary* magazine acknowledged: 'the turmoil of the last four years [1918-22] has crippled the [vigilance] association's activities with the results that the banned [sic] Sunday papers now circulate almost as freely as ever' (Martin 30). It is worth noting that the campaign also failed to capture widespread and sustained public interest - and despite temporary distribution problems the sales of the *News of the World* in Ireland continued to rise. While opposition to the British newspapers was paused rather than concluded, pockets of opposition remained. For example, newsagents in Ballyhaunis in Co. Cavan in December 1921 signed pledges not to sell 'any publications calculated to lower the Catholic mind of the youth of the parish' while this stance was endorsed by some 38 Dublin newsagents (Cullen 261-62).

The pro-censorship lobby was re-energised following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The new government in the post-independence period was 'willing to use the power of the State to protect Catholic moral values' (Whyte 36). Moreover, the head of this government, W. T. Cosgrave, 'continued to court the Catholic Church throughout his tenure of office (Lee 157). We see evidence of this bowing to Catholic

Church authority in legislative changes including film censorship (1923), restriction on licensing laws for public houses (1924) and limitations of the number of licensed premises (1926) as well as measures to effectively outlaw divorce (1925) (See Adams; Martin; Whyte).

During the first decade of post-British rule, ‘the purging of indecencies and foreign influence was a fundamental building block in establishing Ireland as a spiritual model for the world’ (Keating 27). At the core of this Catholic Church strategy was a preoccupation ‘with the safeguarding of sexual morality’ (Whyte 30) underpinned by an intense focus on limiting exposure to popular British Sunday newspapers. The Catholic hierarchy set the tone. One bishop issued a pastoral letter deploring the growing craze for pleasure, and the slackening of parental control’ (Whyte 24). But the censorship campaign against the British press was driven by highly vocal organisations including lay groups such as the Catholic Truth Society, and religious bodies like the Christian Brothers. What we see is a situation where - in the words of Keating, ‘the purity lobby enjoyed a position of genuine power’ (26). Leading Catholic moral activists argued for censorship - as one priest put it: ‘to save the soul of the Nation, which was being steadily destroyed by filthy publications coming from England’ (Devane 3). As outlined in the next section, the *News of the World* was the primary target of increasingly confident lobby groups no longer content with merely applying pressure for voluntary restrictions on access but now intent on securing legislative change to have targeted publications banned outright. This campaign was a significant part of the ideological battle to impose a Catholic viewpoint on all aspects of society in the new Irish Free State.

### **‘Cartloads of filthy literature’**

The power of the censorship lobby is clearly evident in its success in securing political support for legislative change. Despite the renewed campaign from the Catholic Church and its lobby the Irish Minister for Justice Kevin O’Higgins (August 1922 - July 1927) was unconvinced that legislative change was necessary noting in November 1925 that existing censorship law was sufficient to deal with the sale and distribution of obscene literature (Martin 59). The reaction to O’Higgins’s intervention was intense, providing tangible evidence of the power of the censorship lobby. In January 1926 one senior civil servant recorded that:

‘The Minister for Justice is being subjected to considerable pressure from vigilance associations, the Catholic Truth Society, and bishops to introduce legislation giving more effective and definite power to the State to prevent the importation and distribution of indecent and meretricious literature and certain inventions of the contraceptive order. The whole subject is bristling with difficulties’.<sup>vii</sup>

The Catholic Church inspired lobby for censorship ultimately got its way when the Free State government established the Committee on Evil Literature in February 1926. With a membership of six laymen and two religious - one Roman Catholic and one Church of Ireland - the committee was tasked with determining, ‘whether it is necessary or advisable in the interest of the public morality to extend the existing powers of the state to prohibit or restrict the sale and circulation of printed matter’.<sup>viii</sup> The theme of committee’s work was immoral literature but as Horgan has noted ‘it focused, to a degree not mirrored in subsequent public or political discussions, on

journalistic and periodical literature containing information on contraception in particular' (1995: 64).

Submissions were received between February and May 1926 from organisations and members of the public. The tenor of the majority of submissions was for censorship legislation to restrict access to what the Catholic Headmasters Association called 'immoral publications'. The committee's files in the Irish National Archives show that the *News of the World* was the main target in both written submissions received and also in oral evidence taken.<sup>ix</sup> The Christian Brothers in Dublin submitted a list of 38 'objectionable papers & periodicals' with the *News of the World* first on the list. The submission referred to 'gilded filth; papers that publish answers to the letters of young men and women relating to sexual intercourse; papers and books containing advertisement of certain drugs and instruments which urge people to the most monstrous crime'.<sup>x</sup> The Catholic Writers Guild singled out two titles - the *Sunday Chronicle* and *News of the World* - which 'cater mainly for the morbid tastes and the unhealthy curiosity of the semi-illiterate by retailing the week's most unsavory tales of crime, most especially sexual crime and also the most unpleasant revelations made in the public courts and the divorce courts'.<sup>xi</sup> The Guild claimed the English titles were also lowering the standard of Irish newspapers and sought a ban on all crime reporting.<sup>xii</sup> Similarly in evidence to the committee on 21 April 1926 a school teacher and trade union representative noted that:

going to Mass on Sundays in Clarendon Street [Dublin] I find the streets are actually littered with these filthy papers [...] The News of the World has a circulation of 180,000 copies a week. If it were out of the way two decent Irish

Weeklies could be kept going [...] Thompson's Weekly and the News of the World are written for one purpose alone - for degrading people. [...] They suggest lasciviousness and licentiousness where they do not directly display it and they corrupt the thoughts of the readers.<sup>xiii</sup>

The establishment of the Committee on Evil Literature in February 1926, the publication of its report in January 1927 and subsequent parliamentary debates on the proposed censorship legislation provided renewed energy to organise public agitation against the perceived moral threat of certain British newspapers. Throughout this period pressure was maintained with seizures at train stations, newspaper burnings and intimidation of newsagents. As previously the *News of the World* was the main target and the newspaper was among Sunday titles burnt in Kanturk in Co Cork in March 1926 (Cullen 264). The most controversial episode occurred in Cork in February 1927 when amid 'stormy scenes' four members of a local Catholic protest group seized the *News of the World* among other Sunday newspapers. In this instance, legal proceedings were brought against the four men who were supported at public meetings, in a letter from the local bishop read out at masses and in court by a number of clergymen including one who in evidence admitted to carrying out similar actions himself:

'Passing up the quays a few Sundays ago I encountered a youth who was selling Sunday papers. I examined the papers; detached the copies of the News of the World and dropped them into the [river] Lee - the only congenial place for such filth' (Cullen 267).

The editor of Christian Brothers magazine, *Our Boys*, Brother J.C. Craven wrote to the Minister in December 1926 attaching a petition of 516-signed names obtained by students at the Christian Brothers College in Cork supporting censorship legislation. Craven's correspondence contained an explicit political threat that in the event of inaction by the government party then the public could turn to 'far safer men and far better men to guard the morals of the country'.<sup>xiv</sup> He clearly set out the rationale for action:

'And let me tell you that the reading of such papers as the News of the World has depraved the minds of the younger section of our community to such a degree that they are copying the manner of the robber, the murder, the scoundrel and the filthy beast, as recorded in that diabolical publication'.<sup>xv</sup>

Craven's correspondence with the Minister for Justice - which was copied to other members of Dáil Éireann, the national parliament - provides an important insight into the power of the Catholic censorship lobby campaign to secure political support for their agenda

The intent of the censorship legislation was clear during parliamentary debates in 1928 and 1929. The new Minister for Justice James Fitzgerald-Kenney observed: 'I think the most useful function this Bill will perform will be to prohibit the sale in this country of objectionable newspapers'.<sup>xvi</sup> The censorship legislation, the Censorship of Publications Act, 1929 allowed for banning of printed works that were:

- 'in... general tendency indecent or obscene';

- which included content that was ‘suggestive of, or inciting to sexual immorality or unnatural vice or likely in any other similar way to corrupt or deprave’;
- that devoted ‘an unduly large proportion of space to the matter of crime;
- and which advocated ‘the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage.’

During the final discussion of the legislation in May 1929 one member of the Upper House, Seanad Éireann, had observed, ‘If you pick up a paper nowadays you see the whole of the front page devoted to crime, misery and wretchedness, and if the Minister can alter that I hold that the House ought to agree to it at once.’<sup>xvii</sup> This observation prompted another Senator to reply: ‘I cannot agree with the Senator that all our papers are placarded with crime. I know the paper he has got in mind - *the News of the World*’.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The intent of the censorship campaign was to stop birth control advertisements and remove content deemed unsuitable from Irish readers. To achieve these objectives it was necessary to target British popular newspapers specifically, the market leader, the *News of the World*. Throughout this period the Irish newspapers primarily acquiesced with the campaign for censorship and offered little opposition to what effectively was an attack on journalism and freedom of expression and speech. For example, the largest selling domestic daily title, the *Irish Independent* in an editorial, when the Committee on Evil Literature was established, observed,

The very fact that the vilest newspapers are flaunted in the faces of the public every Sunday, while no prosecutions ensue, is evidence that the present law is powerless, unless, indeed, one assumes there is no desire to enforce it (Anon *Evil*)

Several British newspaper titles ran into immediate trouble with the new legislation. Indeed, it did not take long for the *News of the World* to come to the attention of the new Censorship Board. In a parliamentary reply in November 1930 it was revealed that several imported newspapers had been banned for publishing content that was ‘usually and frequent indecent’; for publishing advertisements promoting ‘the unnatural prevention of conception’; and for having ‘unduly large proportion of space devoted to the publication of matter reliant to crime’.<sup>xviii</sup> The *News of the World* was on this list for carrying too much crime reportage - although in truth, it was the nature of the crime coverage (and a focus on sexual crime) that deeply worried the Catholic leadership. The *News of the World* received its first prohibition order on 2 June 1930 - the ban lasted for three months (no appeal provision existed until 1946).<sup>xix</sup>

By this time the *News of the World* was the best selling newspaper in the United Kingdom with a circulation of 3.4m copies each Sunday (Bingham 19). The format established in previous years remained: ‘its standard diet of sex, crime, sport, and serial fiction was spliced with the memoirs of British and Hollywood entertainment stars and several series of articles by the out-of-office Winston Churchill’ (Tunstall 13). With estimated sales of over 130,000 copies every week in Ireland the loss of this revenue stream was an obvious setback to the owners of the *News of the World*. When

news of the first ban was confirmed, wholesaler Charles Eason was immediately contacted to facilitate meetings with authorities in Dublin. But, as Eason informed the circulation manager of the *News of the World*, ‘considering the history of the whole movement I think it would have been a very extraordinary situation if the News of the World had escaped. Rightly or wrongly your paper was selected for years as target of attack’ (Quoted in Cullen 272).

Representatives of the *News of the World* arrived in Dublin [ to meet the Minister for Justice and the Censorship Board in July 1930 so as to determine if the ban could be revoked (Cullen 272) but the lobbying was to no avail. While the newspaper reappeared in September 1930 when the initial three-month ban lapsed but a second prohibition order was issued on 4 November 1930.<sup>xx</sup> The censorship legislation stipulated that when a newspaper was banned a second time, the prohibition was permanent unless revoked by the Minister for Justice (no appeal provision existed until 1946).

The period of the newspaper’s Irish history under consideration in this article throws light on the significant market overlap between Britain and Ireland. It also shows that despite concerns about the content of the *News of the World* in the two jurisdictions, the Irish censorship lobby was more successful, in part due to the powerful position of the Catholic Church and its supporters in the new Irish Free State. This lobby secured further success when new tariffs were imposed on imported newspapers and magazines in 1933<sup>xxi</sup>, a measure which saw the value of imported newspapers decline by 54% between 1933 and 1934 (Horgan 2001)

The *News of the World* remained on the censorship list until 1961 when it officially re-entered the Irish market with a specific Irish edition that modified its content to take account of local sensitivities. The title closed in 2011 arising from the British phone hacking scandal and the ensuing controversy over the illegal interception of mobile phone messages of well-known public figures and victims of crime (See Watson). At that time in 2011 the Irish edition had weekly sales of 115,000 copies, making it the third best selling publication in the Sunday market. This circulation level accounted for some 12% of all Irish Sunday sales although by that time it was a very different publication to that banned in 1930.<sup>xxii</sup>

By re-examining the censorship campaign in Ireland up to 1930 this article has highlighted a neglected history in the narrative of journalism not just in Ireland but also in the United Kingdom. The banning of works by well-known writers has long attracted historical comment but the impact of the 1929 legislation on newspapers has been underwritten, most likely because the main newspaper to suffer at the hands of the censor was a salacious British title, albeit a popular one with significant numbers of Irish readers every week. In a related respect the research in his article also offers a wider appreciation of British newspapers beyond their core national markets. *The News of the World* was a significant part of Irish journalism history up to 1930, as it would become again thirty years later when it reappeared in the Irish market.

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<sup>i</sup> Censorship of Publications Act, 1929.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Submission from Catholic Truth Society' (1926) to Committee on Evil Literature (hereafter CEL), (1926), National Archives of Ireland (NAI), JUS 7/2/4.

<sup>iii</sup> 'Documents circulated to Members of the Committee', submission from Charles Eason, NAI: CEL: JUS 7/1/2.

<sup>iv</sup> This organisation was established in 1911 by the Dominican religious order.

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- v 'Summary of evidence, Irish Vigilance Association (1926) NAI: CEL :JUS 7/1/2 .
- vi Correspondence from Irish Vigilance Association to CEL, 11 March 1926, NAI: CEL: JUS 7/1/2
- vii Letter from Einri O'Frighil, Secretary to Department of Justice to James McNeill, High Commissioner Irish Free State, London 21 January 1926, NAI: CEL: JUS 7/1/4.
- viii 'Documents circulated to Members of the Committee' NAI: CEL: JUS 7/1/2.
- ix See for example 'Catholic Headmasters Association Submission and Evidence (1926)' NAI CEL, JUS 7/2/3,: 'A start might be made by putting the 'Sporting Times' and the 'News of the World' on a black list'. See also 'Summary of evidence, Irish Vigilance Association (1926) NAI: CEL :JUS 7/1/2 where newspapers considered 'objectionable and as unsuited morally to the people of this country' included the *Sporting Times; News of the World; The Empire News; London Mail; Health and Efficiency*.
- x 'Submission of Christian Brothers April 1926' NAI: CEL: JUS 7/2/7
- xi The Guild was an organisation representing Catholic writers and artists.
- xii 'Statement from Mr. P. de Burca, Catholic Writers' Guild, [1926]' NAI: CEL:JUS 7/2/5.
- xiii 'Evidence of Mr. W.B. Joyce, Headmaster and representative of Irish National Teachers Organisation, 21 April 1926' NAI: CEL: JUS 7/2/12.
- xiv The leaders - who opposed the 1922 settlement established a new party, Fianna Fáil, in March 1926 - indicated their support for the aims of the censorship campaign.
- xv Letter to Minister for Justice, 10 December 1926, NAI: CEL: JUS 7/1/5.
- xvi Dáil Éireann vol. 26 col.18, October 1928.
- xvii Seanad Éireann, vol. 12 col. 587, 15 May 1929.
- xviii Dáil Éireann vol. 36 col. 720, 28 November 1930.
- xix Dáil Éireann vol. 36 col. 720, 28 November 1930.
- xx Dáil Éireann vol. 36 col. 720, 28 November 1930.
- xxi Dáil Éireann vol. 47 col. 7, 10 May 1933.
- xxii National Newspapers of Ireland, See <http://nmi.ie/data-centre/circulation/> (7 September 2013).