

The metropolitan press: connections and competition between Britain and Ireland

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The relationships between the constituent nations of Great Britain and Ireland have complex histories. One key element of these relationships has been the longstanding connections between the press cultures of both islands which often manifested itself in the ease with which journalists migrated between capital cities and secured employment in their new homeland. The intricate web of connections within the press industry linking Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales at the turn of the nineteenth century was, unsurprisingly, a by-product of the political union of the four countries that was buttressed by the rise of the Irish Parliamentary Party as a potent political force from the 1880s onwards and the development of its associated press presence in Ireland and Britain. A very large number of the Irish Party's MPs were, at various times, editors and journalists and this created a network of relationships, the influence of which crisscrossed the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Among the most prominent were Edmund Dwyer Gray, proprietor of the Dublin *Freeman's Journal* and the *Belfast Morning News*, William Martin Murphy proprietor of the Dublin *Irish Independent*, Charles Diamond, who established the London *Catholic Herald*, and T. P. O'Connor who was a leading advocate of the new journalism (Larkin 2013: 127–29). But individuals also travelled in the other direction. In 1873 the Scottish entrepreneur John Arnott purchased the Dublin *Irish Times* and, although no formal link existed between the two titles, in the early half of the twentieth century the editor of the *Irish Times* automatically served as the Irish correspondent of *The Times* of London. An added cross-channel connection in this regard was that the *Irish Times*' most celebrated editor, R. M. Smyllie, was born in Scotland and migrated to Ireland when his printer father purchased a local newspaper, *The Sligo Times* (Oram 1983: 136–37).

Such connections, stemming primarily from the growth of the nineteenth century political press continued but were transformed in the decades that followed. While Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an 'imagined community' of newspaper readers stems from his work on the rise of print capitalism in the nineteenth century, it is equally relevant when looking at the twentieth century which was, more than any other, the newspaper century – a period in which newspapers became central to the daily life of an ever-growing mass population of readers. Throughout the twentieth century rising literacy rates, the extension of the franchise to females, the adoption of new technology such as the Linotype and rotary printing presses, vastly improved transport and distribution systems, and the rise of popular or 'new journalism' placed newspapers at the heart of public life as never before. Key to this position were the affordances of the 'new journalism' – that is to say the characteristics of the medium (the popular press), and the users (the ever expanding number of literate citizens). As key social and political groups emerged into the literate age specific newspapers emerged to cater for the ever growing demand for readable material that reflected the lived realities of readers. These titles reflected and shaped the political and cultural life of their readers over the course of the twentieth century. By purchasing and reading a specific newspaper each citizen was engaging, however subtly, in a political act by interacting with texts that constituted a forum for political debate. And newspapers would, notwithstanding the impact of radio and television on how journalism was practiced and how the public consumed news, hold that central position in public life from the late 1890s to the 1990s – that is, until the advent of the internet.

While newspapers helped to set the agenda and tone of political and cultural discourse on and between both islands there existed often opaque connections between the various locales and the newspaper markets that operated on and between both islands. This chapter

examines the metropolitan press in Britain and Ireland between 1900 and 2011 through that lens. For obvious reasons it does not seek to replicate the historical works on individual titles or historical surveys of the press that have been published over the decades. Nor does it seek to synthesise the autobiographies or biographies of influential proprietors, editors or journalists. Instead it seeks to illuminate the relationships and interdependencies between the different newspaper markets and illustrate how, as the twentieth century unfolded, the daily press developed amid the constant flow of people, knowledge, conventions, ideas, and technology between those markets.

The popular turn

It is beyond doubt that the interconnectedness of the British and Irish press which stemmed from the era of newspapers as the voice of political interests influenced the trajectory that the press took as the new century dawned. The push for Irish home rule in the 1880s had resulted in the development of a stark, frank tone of address among journalists keen to point out the deficiencies of the British administration in Ireland. And along with this new tone of address towards officialdom, came the tactic of exposing the private lives of officials in an attempt to embarrass the government. While most closely associated with the journalism of W. T. Stead, it has been argued that the investigative aspect of the new journalism appeared first in Dublin. While Stead's 1885 exposé of London childhood prostitution in the *Pall Mall Gazette* is often heralded as the first instance of scandal revelation that typified the investigative approach of the new journalism, Margot Gayle Backus has pointed out that William O'Brien's 1884 *United Ireland* exposé of the Dublin Castle sex scandal, which involved impropriety among senior government officials, predates Stead's series. She also notes that the failed libel suits that arose from the series would have been closely monitored by editors and journalists in London. Indeed, as a former MP O'Brien would have been well known in London journalistic circles. The timing of the failed libel suits, argues Backus, 'strongly implies a connection between . . . O'Brien's right to publish and the new mode of investigative scandal that Stead launched the following year'. Prior to O'Brien's series, Stead's actions, she concludes, 'would have been unthinkable' (Backus 2013: 62–63). Another Irish advocate of the new journalism was O'Brien's fellow Irish Party MP, T. P. O'Connor, who as editor of the London *Star* declared his intention to 'do away with the hackneyed style of obsolete journalism' in favour of condensed news and comment. Its radicalism lay not only in its layout and but in its declared intention to adjudicate government policies from the standpoint of 'the lot of the masses of the people' (Conboy 2002: 98). The marrying of the editorial tenets of the new journalism with the production of a daily newspaper aimed at a mass audience was, however, carried to its greatest heights not by O'Connor but by an Irish-born entrepreneur, Alfred Harmsworth.

Having contributed to George Newnes' *Tit-Bits* and witnessed the huge demand for readable material – as opposed to the long screeds of parliamentary debates published by newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* – Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) established his own publication, *Answers to Correspondents* in 1888, before producing a daily newspaper aimed at the newly emerging lower middle class. It was in May 1896 that Harmsworth's *Daily Mail* first appeared. What distinguished the *Mail* from O'Connor's *Star* was its use of popular appeal as a commercial imperative rather than as a platform for radical campaigning. Looking very similar to the established broadsheets, what differentiated it were its price and its editorial philosophy, both of which were encapsulated in the 'ear space' on each side of its masthead. On the left 'ear' it proclaimed itself 'a penny newspaper for a halfpenny'; on the opposite side it proclaimed itself 'the busy man's daily journal'. With a specific focus on the readability and relatability to readers the *Mail's* content offered condensed and well-presented news from parliament and the courts as well as a

magazine page with a dedicated women's column which soon expanded to one page. Serials, interviews, features, and competitions completed the editorial mix. As observed by Addison (2017: 38) the title's success rested on the fact that it was a newspaper produced for a mass readership which had not been catered for before, and despite being dismissed by Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, as a newspaper 'run by office boys for office boys' the *Daily Mail* heralded the arrival of the new journalism for the expanding lower middle class. Its circulation in its first year was 222,000 but exceeded over a million copies per day during the Boar War and the First World War – conflicts that caused an outbreak of pro-war jingoism at the *Mail* and the shelling by a German battleship of Harmsworth's house on the south-east English coast Addison (2017: 65). The *Mail's* success prompted Harmsworth to establish the *Daily Mirror* in 1903. Launched as a newspaper written exclusively by and for women, when this strategy did not work it became a picture paper before being sold to Harmsworth's brother, Harold, who sold the title in the 1930s when the novelty of printing photographs had spread to all newspapers. In the mid-1930s it was refocused as a working class newspaper with vivid and dramatic presentation of news, a vigorous and easily understood writing style, and a greater emphasis on sport, film, and popular entertainment. As the premier newspaper of the working class, daily circulation would exceed 5 million in the 1960s (Bingham and Conboy 2015: 14–15).

The *Daily Mail's* success prompted the emergence of many competitors. One such was the *Daily Express* which was established in 1900 by Arthur Pearson, who like Harmsworth, had begun his career at *Tit-Bits*. Its first edition declared it would 'not be the organ of any political party [and would] not provide a parade-ground for marshalling the fads of any individual' (Conboy 2002: 108) But with circulation hovering at the lower than expected level of 500,000 copies a day a controlling interest in the title was gradually amassed by Canadian entrepreneur, Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook). Aitken added its famous 'red crusader' emblem in 1933 as well as brighter design and an optimistic aspirational tone that appealed to readers looking to improve their lot. By the late 1930s it was as Addison (2017: 118) put it, 'faster, cleaner, crisper and sharper than the *Mail*'. In 1939 the *Express* sold 2.5 million copies a day compared to the *Mail's* 1.5 million (Addison 2017: 119). Success continued until the death of Aitken in 1964 after which the title began to lose its edge. In an attempt to stem its declining circulation it turned tabloid in 1977 but at this stage the *Daily Mail* was resurgent under David English. Also seeking the working class readership was the *Daily Herald* which began as a strike sheet in 1911 and was relaunched as a daily in 1919 with later backing from the Trades Union Congress. Its mission – to provide an alternative view of the world for its unionised working class readers – did not endear itself to advertisers. A change in ownership – on the understanding that the title would remain committed to the TUC's line on political and industrial news – in 1930 saw the title reorient its news values towards human interest stories and features and attain a circulation of over 2 million a day in 1937. Acquired by the Mirror Group in 1961, it was relaunched as *The Sun* in 1964 and was purchased and reinvented by Rupert Murdoch in 1969 (Chippindale and Horrie 1990: 7–8).

Besides the popular press, London was also home to longer established and more high-end titles such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. While *The Times*, established in 1785, has been described as 'an integral and important part of the political structure of Great Britain . . . its whole emphasis has been on important public affairs treated with an eye to the best interests of Britain' (Nevins 1959: 413–14), *The Daily Telegraph*, established in 1855, was a more readable version of *The Times*, providing not only coverage of sport and politics, but also of high profile court cases. After a price cut from two pence to one penny in 1930 its sales soared making it the upmarket leader (Tunstall 1996: 16). Both titles targeted and were consumed by educated and affluent readerships and covered politics, foreign affairs, and

economic news in far greater detail than the popular press: they also conferred an unquestioned legitimacy on institutions such as parliament, the courts, and the monarchy.

Outside the London dominated metropolitan press stood the *Manchester Guardian*. Established to further the cause of parliamentary reform in the aftermath of the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, it was editor and then proprietor C. P. Scott who determined that the title's independence could only be secured if normal commercial practice could be supplanted by an altruistic form of proprietorship that advanced the title as a public service. Initially this meant a company structure that restricted ownership of shares to family members with no dividends ever being paid and with any profits being reinvested in the company (Ellis 2014: 139). The establishment of the Scott Trust in 1936 followed and, in 1992, the Trust articulated its purpose as being to 'secure the financial and editorial independence of *The Guardian* in perpetuity: as a quality national newspaper without party affiliation; remaining faithful to its liberal tradition; as a profit-seeking enterprise managed in an efficient and cost-effective manner' (ibid: 157). A name change, to *The Guardian*, occurred in 1959 and a move to London five years later reflected the growing importance of national and international affairs in the paper, but also confirmed the necessity of being close to important sites of news, such as parliament, for it to be taken seriously as a national title (Taylor 1993: 63).

The principal metropolitan areas of Wales and Scotland also had their own, nationally oriented titles. In Cardiff, *The Western Mail*, describing itself as 'the national newspaper of Wales', was established in 1869 as a conservative daily title. During the numerous industrial disputes of the twentieth-century it was viewed warily by mine workers but since devolution in the late 1990s the paper has put an emphasis on the Welsh language and Welsh rugby as well as local services such as health and education (Davies et al. 2008: 616). For its part, Edinburgh was home to *The Scotsman*. Established in 1817 as a liberal weekly title, *The Scotsman* aimed to combat the 'unblushing subservience' of competing newspapers to the Edinburgh establishment by advocating an editorial policy of 'impartiality, firmness and independence' (*The Scotsman*, 25 Jan. 1817). Following the abolition of stamp duty in 1855 it became a daily title and in 1928 it became the first newspaper in Britain to send pictures by telegraph from Europe (*The Scotsman*, 25 Jan. 2007). It later adopted the motto 'Scotland's national newspaper' and, in 1968, with 'a series of exceptionally prescient editorials . . . kicked off the home-rule campaign' that resulted in a government commission that recommended directly elected Scottish and Welsh assemblies (Reid 2006: 9). However, the unsuccessful result in the 1979 referendum on devolution ended the 'golden age' at *The Scotsman* as many of its top staff, demoralised by the defeat, left for pastures new (Reid 2006: 22). Scotland's other metropolitan centre, Glasgow, was home to *The Glasgow Herald*, which, on its first day of publication in 1783 carried news of the Treaties of Versailles that ended the conflict between Britain and its now former colonies in America. Having begun as a weekly title it became a daily newspaper in 1858 and as Reid (2006: xiv) put it, established Glasgow 'as Scotland's media capital, a role it maintains to this day despite the siting of the new Scottish Parliament in the capital city, Edinburgh'. In the 1980s, it was *The Herald* (as it became in 1992) that led the renewed campaign for devolution as the title shifted 'sharply to the left' – a move that was well received since, as remembered by one journalist 'in Scotland, Thatcherism was detested and the Tories were in freefall' (Reid 2006: 36–37).

The two Irelands

In Ireland the metropolitan press was, in the early part of the twentieth century, characterised by the polarising views adopted by specific titles in relation to Ireland's changed constitutional relationship with Britain – a process that afforded the articulation of multiple political viewpoints, albeit strictly one political viewpoint per newspaper. Indeed, the Anglo-Irish War, partition, the Treaty of 1921 and the Irish Civil War all combined to create a

polarised political system that was very much mirrored in the newspapers produced in the major urban centres of Dublin, Belfast and Cork. In the aftermath of the independence conflict two longstanding titles, *The Freeman's Journal* and *The Daily Express*, that had provided a sense of political identity for supporters of constitutional nationalism and Dublin unionism respectively, ceased publication. These political positions had lost too much ground to the militant independence movement and the travails of publishing for ever diminishing returns – politically and financially – proved too much. *The Daily Express* ceased publication in 1921 while *The Freeman's Journal* followed three years later.

In the 1920s, newly partitioned, the two parts of Ireland – Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State – embarked on distinct processes of nation building in which the metropolitan press in both jurisdictions played a key role in guiding those nation building projects. In Belfast the readerships of the main newspapers, the nationalist *Irish News*, the unionist *News-Letter*, and the liberal-unionist *Belfast Telegraph*, were sharply demarcated along religious lines, which for many also came to indicate a political demarcation along unionist and nationalist lines. In 1970 a full 93% of the *Irish News's* readership was Catholic, 87% of the *News-Letter's* readership was Protestant, while the readership of the *Belfast Telegraph* was divided 68% Protestant and 32% Catholic. Circulation of outside titles was also limited: only 5% of the northern population read a Dublin newspaper while 32% read a British title (Rose 1971: 343–34). At the other end of the island, in the city of Cork, was published *The Cork Examiner*. Providing a successful blend of national news with a strong regional emphasis the title provided a political voice to those in the largest metropolitan region outside of Dublin and often spoke ‘with an independence born of not being of the capital’ (Trench 1987: 26).

In Dublin, for the vast bulk of the twentieth century, the metropolitan press consisted of three titles – all of which offered readers a distinct political prism through which to interpret political developments as the state found its feet as a newly independent entity. What might be termed the unfinished business of the Irish bid for independence – partition, continued membership of the British Empire, the British King being head of state – provided the backdrop to political and journalistic life in the nascent state. Politics, in the early decades of the state, were informed by a continuation of the civil war dispute over the terms of the separation from Britain. This was mirrored by the political positioning of the metropolitan titles – thus giving rise to the maxim of knowing how your neighbours voted by knowing what daily newspaper they read. While this close alignment between political parties and metropolitan titles gave people a sense of political identity and political participation it may also have contributed to the longevity of civil war grievances that were still being aired decades later. It also negated the presence of females: until the advent of the ‘Women First’ page in the *Irish Times* in 1968, all three national daily titles regarded female journalism as consisting of nothing other than cooking, cleaning and shopping tips.

Owned by former Irish Party MP, William Martin Murphy, the *Irish Independent* was the Irish title most influenced by Harmsworth's *Daily Mail*. Indeed, Harmsworth even advised Murphy on the reinvented *Irish Independent* as the successful formula of a low price, condensed news, serials, interviews, features, and competitions was implemented on the revitalised title. But Murphy ultimately stole a march on Harmsworth when, in November 1909, the *Irish Independent* published audited circulation figures – four years before the *Daily Mail* adopted the practice (Kenny 2012: 60). Conscious, however, that he was operating in a socially and culturally different market, Murphy adopted the elements of the new journalism that seemed safe – display advertising, condensed reportage, illustrations, and serials – but studiously rejected any element – gossip, scandal, crime reportage and investigative journalism – that might cause controversy or condemnation. In so doing, Murphy was mindful of the morality campaigns that had erupted, on both islands, in the wake of the new journalism. Thus the *Irish Independent* reflected Murphy's worldview – ‘intensely

Catholic, nationalist and conservative’ (Yeates 2014: 14). Politically, the *Independent*, having supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, backed – though was never formally associated with – the pro-Treaty party that formed the Free State’s government from 1922 to 1932. Thus the title represented the worldview of those who had pragmatically accepted the partial independence of Ireland and provided a voice to those who viewed the Anglo-Irish Treaty as the freedom to achieve greater freedom.

In stark contrast stood the *Irish Press* which was established in 1931 to articulate the political views of the defeated anti-Treaty side of the civil war, which, in the guise of Éamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil, took power in 1932. The role played by the *Irish Press* in bringing the party to power cannot be easily measured but it played a key role in countering the negative and relentless criticism in other titles of de Valera’s rejection of the Treaty in 1921. It also gave those of the anti-Treaty persuasion something to affiliate to, with many viewing the establishment of the title as an extension of their cause. As the voice of the political party that would, more than any other, hold power in Ireland over the course of the twentieth century, the *Irish Press* articulated that organisation’s views on Irish unity, the need to revive the Irish language, the primacy of rural living, anti-urbanism, and economic self-sufficiency and established these tenets as the dominant orthodoxies of Irish political life to which all other parties and newspapers had to react. It was also the first newspaper to put a keen emphasis on coverage of the native Irish sports of the Gaelic Athletic Association – a move imitated in due course by all other titles. Unlike its competitors, the *Irish Press* put news on its front page from day one (O’Brien 2001).

The third title, the *Irish Times*, was the oldest of the three metropolitan titles. Established in 1859 as a pro-union organ its circulation in the early decades of the Free State it did not have the same reach as the other two titles. While those titles sold widely in urban and rural areas, the *Irish Times*, as the voice of the southern unionist minority, was mostly confined to Dublin and other urban centres, particularly Cork, with its low circulation offset by guaranteed advertising by the Protestant mercantile class in Dublin. As the voice of that minority the title took its responsibility seriously and sought to highlight and possibly mitigate any legislation that it viewed as impinging on the civil rights of the southern unionist, Protestant community. Wary of the new state being influenced by those who might seek to overly ‘Gaelicise’ national identity or those who might seek to ensure that the majority faith took precedence in all legislative matters, in the 1920s it editorialised against the introduction of compulsory Irish in national schools, the prohibition of divorce, and the Censorship of Publications Act 1929. In the early decades of the Free State, the title supported the pro-Treaty faction of Irish politics simply because supporting the alternative – Eamon de Valera – was unthinkable. This support for the pro-Treaty side, now styled Fine Gael, lasted until 1949 when that party announced the inauguration of a republic and the withdrawal of the Free State from the British Commonwealth (O’Brien 2008: 133–36).

Keener competition

Despite Irish independence the longstanding connection between the British and Irish metropolitan press was, in the mid-twentieth century, characterised by large numbers of journalists crisscrossing the Dublin–London newspaper nexus. Among those who migrated east were Patrick Campbell (*Daily Express*), Alan Bestic (*Daily Telegraph*), Tony Gray (*Daily Mirror*), Brian Inglis (*The Spectator*), Desmond Fisher (*Catholic Herald*), John Horgan (*Catholic Herald*), Muriel Bowen (*Daily Express* and later the *Evening Standard*), Patricia Smyllie (*Daily Express* and later the *Daily Mirror*), Deirdre McSharry (*Daily Express* and later *The Sun*), Mary Kenny (*Evening Standard*), and Mary Holland (*The Observer*). Among those who travelled west were Honor Tracy – who is, perhaps most remembered for a celebrated libel case against her own employer, *The Sunday Times* – and

Michael Viney, who arrived in Dublin from London's Fleet Street to cast a cold and impartial eye on Irish society for the *Irish Times* throughout the 1960s (O'Brien 2017: 150–53).

While this interconnectedness was helped by two islands' common travel area, the flow of daily newspapers (as opposed to journalists) that had been impeded by Irish government duties in 1933 was reinvigorated in the wake of the 1966 Anglo-Irish Agreement which abolished those duties. In 1949 average daily sales of imported daily newspapers stood at 17,210 (Irish Parliamentary Debates, vol. 121, 31 May 1950): this, in the context of average daily sales in 1953 of 437,411 for indigenous titles, was a drop in the ocean (Irish Parliamentary Debates, vol. 137, 19 Mar. 1953). Nonetheless, by 1955 the Irish newspaper industry was expressing concern that it was 'in a state of great danger because of the terrific fight going on by British newspapers to capture Irish circulation' (Irish Times, 19 Nov. 1955). Indeed, throughout the 1960s the value of imported daily titles rose from £114,000 in 1964 to £409,000 in 1969 and it was estimated that between 1963 and 1969 the share of the overall newspaper market held by Irish newspapers declined from 88% to 82% (Irish Times, 7 Jan. 1971). The spectre of cultural imperialism was again rearing its head, prompted in part by a fear that a new generation of London media moguls was seeking to enter the Irish daily newspaper market. By 1976 concerns were being expressed by Irish publishers that 'British newspapers were being dumped on to the Irish market at a lower price purely to boost circulation figures for ABC audit purposes, which in turn, would help them sell more advertising' (Irish Times, 9 Nov. 1976).

Such developments were watched closely in Dublin. When, in 1962, Roy Thomson (who had purchased the *Sunday Times* in 1959 and would acquire *The Times* in 1967) visited Dublin the vice-chairman of the *Irish Times*, Tom McDowell felt compelled to visit government buildings to reassure the Taoiseach (prime minister) that 'the acquisition of the *Irish Times* is not contemplated by Mr Thomson' (Irish National Archives, D/T / 1987E/62). In 1969 the visit of Rupert Murdoch prompted a civil servant to observe that Murdoch's first newspaper acquisition – the *News of the World* – was characterised by an emphasis on 'sex, crimes and other sins'. No doubt referring to Murdoch's recent purchase and reinvention of *The Sun*, the civil servant described him as 'a most unusual animal in Fleet Street. He seems to be interfering at all levels in the newspapers'. The civil servant also took exception to *The Sun*'s take on the Northern Ireland Troubles. The paper's journalists, he surmised, needed 'a little education on Irish affairs as their leader, a couple of days ago, said that Ulster must solve its own problems with the aid of the British Government'. 'We must', he tartly concluded, 'point out to them that there is such a place as Dublin' (Irish National Archives, 2011/39/359). The civil servant's concerns about Murdoch's emphasis on 'sex, crimes and other sins' were well founded as by the 1960s the metropolitan press in Britain 'had significantly redrawn the boundaries between public and private and its content had become much more overtly sexualised' (Bingham and Conboy 2015: 139). This process had been intensified by Murdoch's reinvention of *The Sun*. From the early 1970s, that title 'expanded the amount of sexual content and increased the emphasis placed upon sexual pleasure, steadily moving away from what it regarded as an anachronistic attachment to educating the public. Titillating features became more brazen, with topless pin-ups, raunchy serials, and ever-more intrusive and speculative celebrity journalism'. By the late 1970s this editorial formula had triumphed commercially and 'the process of the sexualisation of the popular press was largely complete, and the journalism of subsequent decades was essentially variations on well-established themes' (Bingham 2012: 266–67). Over at the *Daily Mail*, the appointment of David English as editor heralded the transformation of the paper from a dull and dated broadsheet to a bright and breezy 'compact' in May 1971. Targeting the post-war middle class so beloved of advertisers the *Mail* was determined to avoid the term 'tabloid' so as to distinguish it from the downmarket, sensationalised, and sexualised titles such as *The*

Sun (Addison 2017: 154–55). English’s editorial philosophy – hard work, self-reliance, tradition values, and the primacy of marriage and family life – struck a chord in a Britain that would lean to the right under Margaret Thatcher’s premiership and would reach its zenith – on the issue of membership of the European Union – under English’s successor, Paul Dacre.

This revitalisation of the London newspaper industry driven by a new generation of proprietors was mirrored somewhat in Dublin. In early 1973 rumours abounded that Independent Newspapers was set to undergo a change in ownership and among those named as a prospective buyer was Rupert Murdoch. The prospect of the Ireland’s second largest newspaper company passing into Murdoch’s ownership prompted a government minister to declare that ‘a situation in which ownership or control of Irish newspapers passed into non-Irish hands would be unacceptable’ to the government (Irish Times, 24 Feb. 1973). Ultimately, it was local entrepreneur Tony O’Reilly who led the takeover. In an interview O’Reilly stated that his takeover was ‘primarily commercial’ and that his ambition was for the company to ‘continue its aggressive commercial standards and for reasonable commercial expansion, whether in Ireland or indeed abroad’ (Irish Times, 19 Mar. 1973). Part of that expansion involved acquiring a partial and then full shareholding in the London *Independent* which was later sold to the Russian oligarch Alexander Lebedev for a nominal sum. In contrast to the commercial imperative, the *Irish Times* reconstituted itself as a trust in 1974. The trust was tasked with ensuring that the title was published as ‘an independent newspaper primarily concerned with serious issues . . . free from any form of personal or of party political, commercial, religious or other sectional control’ (O’Brien 2008: 204–06). In contrast to the moribund *Irish Press* which would never escape its shadow identity as a party political newspaper and the *Irish Independent* which was essentially remodelled on David English’s *Daily Mail* (Breen 2014), the *Irish Times* broke most of the stories – police misconduct, planning corruption, and clerical scandals – that shook Irish society from the late 1970s onwards.

The technological turn

Alongside the new proprietors, from the early 1980s onwards rapid changes in how newspapers were produced. The ‘hot metal’ process that had been at the heart of newspaper production for almost a century was first slowly and then rapidly replaced by ever-evolving computerised processes that obliterated the need for a large printing staff – a new production process exemplified by Eddie Shah’s launch of the ill-fated *Today* as Britain’s first all colour newspaper in 1986. The technological turn played out differently in the various locales: in Dublin, industrial strife ensured the non-publication of some titles for a sustained period of time; in London the overnight relocation of newspaper production from Fleet Street to Wapping was bitterly resisted amid mass redundancies, but uninterrupted production continued. In Dublin it was the earliest adopter of new technology that suffered most. In 1984 the Irish Press Group announced plans to introduce direct input technology but, after much industrial trouble, publication of the company’s titles was suspended in May 1985 with the daily title ceasing publication for twelve weeks. The effect this had on readership and advertising revenue is incalculable and was the nearest to an Irish Wapping in terms of industrial bitterness surrounding the introduction of new technology. The group’s competitors, Independent Newspapers and the *Irish Times*, observed and learned from the travails of the Press Group and the bitterness engendered by Murdoch’s flight to Wapping. Both companies enacted, as one editor put it, ‘a long and tedious but strife free process’ of technological modernisation (O’Brien 2001: 194).

The computerisation of the industry also enabled greater competition. Just as the *Irish Press* relaunched itself as a serious tabloid in 1988, Independent Newspapers and Express Newspapers jointly launched, also in tabloid format, an Irish edition of the *Daily Star*. The

differences between the two titles could not have been starker. While the Press Group had enlisted newspaper design guru Larry Lamb to help conceptualise the *Irish Press* as a tabloid with serious content, the project was hampered by a lack of resources, most notably an inability to incorporate colour printing. In contrast, the *Irish Daily Star* was bright, breezy, had colour, and carried a lower cover price. As the *Star* (as it became known) added ever more Irish content, its sales increased while those of the *Irish Press* declined. Following the collapse of the Press Group in May 1995 there was a concerted effort by all Irish and British dailies to soak up some of the floating readership. For the British dailies this took the form of Irish, or hybrid, editions that generally consisted of six to eight pages of Irish news (politics at the front, sport at the back) that were wrapped around the rest of the newspaper which had already been produced for the British market. One sample of these papers in 1996 indicated that eleven of the *Irish Mirror*'s thirty-six pages had been produced in Ireland while the figure for the *Irish Sun* was seven out of thirty-six pages (Horgan 2001: 137). Sold at a lower price than indigenous titles the hybrids were hugely successful in attracting readers, even if, at times, the headlines in the different editions revealed sensitive localisation. For example, when, in 1988, the SAS shot and killed three IRA members in Gibraltar the headline in the British edition of *The Star* was 'SAS rub out IRA rats', whereas the Irish edition's headline was 'SAS shoot dead three IRA men' (*Irish Times*, 3 Sept. 1988). Similarly, on the eve of the introduction of the Euro, the British edition of *The Sun* was headlined 'Dawn of a new error' while the Irish edition was headlined 'Dawn of a new era' (*The Sun* and *The Irish Sun*, 2 Jan. 2002). By far the most successful hybrid was *The Irish Sun*: its daily circulation, buoyed by its keen sports coverage, increased from 30,000 in 1990 to 103,000 in 1999 (Horgan 2001: 191). In August 2013 it announced the decision to drop the 'Page 3' feature – a year-and-a-half before the feature was dropped from *The Sun*. In recent years ever more Irish content has been included in the multitude of localised editions – with the *Irish Daily Mail* leading the charge – and the claim of 'dumping a surplus print run with an Irish headline attached' no longer holds sway – even less so among those who now have a world of digital information at their fingertips.

As the twentieth century ended, the behaviour of several daily newspapers came under the spotlight. And, while no ownership structure is without its critics it is instructive that, on each island, it was a newspaper run by a trust that exposed questionable conduct within other, powerful, media outlets. In Britain it was *The Guardian* that revealed the 'phone hacking' scandal that resulted in the establishment of the Levenson Inquiry into the crisis of ethics in the British press. In Ireland, it was the *Irish Times* that revealed the financial row between Independent Newspapers and the Irish government that resulted in the *Irish Independent* publishing a front-page editorial on the eve of polling day in the 1997 general election that called on the electorate to vote for a change of government (O'Brien 2012: 179).

It is also interesting to note that it was these two titles that led the charge in relation to online activity. In 1994 the *Irish Times* was the first newspaper in Britain and Ireland to establish an online presence. As internet access became more widespread visitors to the site increased from 396,000 in October 1997 to 1,185,000 in March 2007 (*Irish Times*, 10 Feb. 1998 and 24 Nov. 1998). With this figure being divided almost equally between Irish and overseas visitors the days of the metropolitan press being solely for those within reach of a physical distribution system were at an end. In a similar vein *The Guardian* launched its website in 1999 with unique visitor numbers reaching 4.5m people in 2001 and hitting 40.9m monthly unique users in May 2013 (Ellis 2014: 182). With sales of print editions declining year-on-year how to make this wider, global, readership pay for content has proven to be an existential challenge for all newspapers. Many attempts at various forms of paywall systems have proven only modestly successful at attracting subscriptions from a generation that has grown up being most familiar with the notion of 'free content'. But, aside from this,

newspapers cannot survive on subscriptions alone and the online world has allowed entrepreneurs to target the low and high value advertising – from classified adverts and death notices to recruitment and property advertising – that had always been the financial mainstay of newspapers. While hindsight is a dangerous thing, could it be that newspapers should have led their online presence through an advertising first and editorial content second strategy? Should they have first secured their advertising base in the new online world before investing in putting editorial content online? While such an approach may have been anathema to most journalists, since the 1990s newspapers have been scrambling to again secure the advertising streams that they lost in the hurry to put news online. In 2006 the *Irish Times* spent €50m in purchasing Ireland’s leading online property website, *myhome.ie*; the following year it purchased 30% of *entertainment.ie*, the country’s premier social activities website. In a similar vein *The Guardian* simply would not have survived the online revolution without the ‘significant financial shock absorber’ of its very substantial and diverse investment portfolio (Ellis 2014: 145–87). It is, however, the *Daily Mail*’s online version – MailOnline – that is the world’s most visited English newspaper, with some 15 million unique visitors per month (Addison 2017: 361). But is it clear that, in the online world, just as it was in the print world, newspapers cannot survive on selling news alone. As the twentieth-first century unfolds the dilemma of how to create revenue to pay for news generation and how to resolve the issue of social media giants soaking up advertising revenue attracted to their sites by their millions of users redistributing expensive news content created elsewhere has taken on an ever greater urgency.

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