



Newspapers and Family History

A stamp duty on newspapers was introduced in 1712 rising to four pence by 1815; this meant that effectively only the rich and ruling classes could afford newspapers. The *Manchester Mercury* was the first newspaper published in Manchester by Joseph Harrop, book publishers, but it never had a large circulation and ceased publication in 1830. It contained 4 closely printed sheets, no pictures and mostly stuff copied from the London Newspapers. The back page contained some Manchester news. A local researcher, Ian Haynes in his series of Cotton Mill publications, used the advertisements that appeared in the *Mercury* for a lot of the early information about local cotton mills. *The Manchester Mercury* is available on microfilm at **Manchester Central Library** and the originals at **Chetham's Library**.

By 1819 six newspapers were circulated in Manchester, all with a Tory and Church of England bias. After Peterloo in 1819 laws were passed to make it even more difficult to publish anti-establishment views. A group of nonconformist industrialists in Manchester got together to found the *Manchester Guardian* which was launched in 1821 as a weekly newspaper, then twice weekly and daily by 1851.

From the 1820s hundreds of illegal newspapers and pamphlets were circulated advocating political and industrial reform, mostly published on an underground basis avoiding stamp duty.

Richard Carlile had been scheduled to be one of the speakers at **Peterloo** on 16 August 1819. He had started a publishing business in London in 1817, and after Peterloo he escaped and was hidden by friends, caught the first stage coach to London and published his eye witness account in the *Sherwin's Weekly Political Register* on 18 August. The Government responded by closing down his newspaper and confiscating his printing presses. Undaunted, he started his new publication *The Republican* and was up and running again by 27 August. He continued to publish pamphlets, spending several periods in prison and died still working at Fleet Street. Several editions of the *Republican* and a later publication *The Lion* have been bound up and published in book form. (Look him up in Wikipedia – very interesting)

In October 1831, **Henry Hetherington** began to distribute the *Poor Man's Guardian*, advocating radical doctrines, which led to his arrest on several occasions. Between 1831 and 1835 Hetherington also published the *Republican, or Voice of the People*. One reel on microfilm of *Voice of the People* covering 1831 survives.

Between March 1848 and November 1849, **Joseph Rayner Stephens** published his *Ashton Chronicle*, editions of which have been bound into a book. This makes very interesting reading about his views on local Mill Owners, Industrialists, Poor Law Guardians and locally elected Representatives.

The stamp duty on newspapers was not repealed until 1855. This paved the way for mass circulation of newspapers and this is when most local newspapers came into being. All had advertisements on the front page until about 1880 and some right up until the 1950s. Most Local Studies Library and Repositories have a large collection of microfilms of local newspapers and some specialist newspapers with local interest like the *Cotton Factory Times* (1885 – 1948).

It can be quite hard to find reports of local events before 1855, since I believe many early years are missing from the *Chester Courant* (1747-1982) and *Chester Chronicle* (1775-date) you would need to check with Chester Record Office.

Local newspapers included reports from the Workhouse, from the Petty and Quarter Sessions, but you won't find much information in the form of Obituaries and Birth, Marriage and Death Notices much before 1885. Most local newspapers didn't have pictures before the 1930s. Some marriages in the early 20th Century gave lists of all the guests and the present they gave. The front pages were covered adverts. It can be hard on the eyes trawling through newspapers on

microfilm because they were very close printed and without the headlines of today. It's also very time consuming, because I don't know anyone who doesn't get distracted by reading unrelated articles as they wind the film on. ☺

NEWSPLAN 2000 database

NEWSPLAN 2000 was a joint project between the British Library and the English regions, which over the past 10 years has recorded all collections of local and regional newspapers in libraries and other repositories in the UK and Ireland. It has noted the state of their preservation and prioritised their transfer to microfilm. In 1999 NEWSPLAN was awarded £5 million to establish NEWSPLAN 2000 to preserve and microfilm 1300 newspaper titles, including many from the North West. The collection in my local library almost doubled because of this project

Newspaper Websites On-line:

In partnership with Bright Solid the British Newspaper Library plans to make 40 million pages searchable on-line. Launched last year with three million pages it is adding thousand of new pages a week and is now more than 21 million pages. It is a pay site and also available with an additional subscription at Genes Reunited. Now available via Find My Past for their full UK subscription: <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/> - scroll to bottom of page and click on Digital Archive. You can search the Guardian from 1821 and the Sunday Observer from 1791 - both up until 2000. This is also a pay site costing for various timed passes from £7.95 - £49.95. It is, though, free to search on-line from any Manchester Libraries, but not from home.

http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/500140/library_online_services/110/24_hour_library you can join the Manchester Council 24 Hour Library for free and have access to several reference sources including the Times Digital Archive 1785-1985 and the Manchester Guardian and Sunday Observer. Similarly the Times Digital Archive is available via Cheshire Library membership.

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/> - Most public appointments, army promotions and medals, company insolvencies, church and parliamentary appointments, post office appointments and society announcements etc. Free Site