

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 30 – History
Title of case study: The birth of the newspaper: understanding new media
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The role of mass media in politics and society has in recent years been a subject of intense public debate, as well as lengthy legal investigation and repeated political intervention. Dr Jason Peacey's research on the earliest modern printed mass media and their relation to government and state at the time of the English Civil War illuminates the origins of the current situation, and has made a notable impact on public understanding, of the historical roots of the media's role in mediating between states and citizens in both the US and UK. This occurred through a major museum exhibition at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, as well as a range of public engagement and media activities in Britain.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Across a range of scholarly articles (including [a] and [b]) Dr Jason Peacey (Lecturer at UCL since 2006; Senior Lecturer since 2009) has explored the history of print culture and developed new ways of interpreting the development of political pamphleteering, the rise of a news industry, and the commercialisation and professionalisation of journalism in the seventeenth century. This has involved close scrutiny of the authors, printers and patrons of mass-produced pamphlets and newspapers, and of the ways in which politicians controlled and exploited these new media for their own purposes, and has enabled him to show that mechanisms of propaganda and censorship became an integral part of politics and government. This innovative methodology has made it possible to demonstrate not just that attempts to exert control over the media had the effect of politicising the public sphere but also that this sometimes undermined traditional attitudes towards political secrecy, paradoxically helping to enhance political accountability. As such, Peacey has been able to illuminate the origins and nature of the precarious relation between the power of the state and the power of the media that continues to be a source of much contention in the modern world.</p> <p>Central to this research has been an enhanced understanding of England's fledgling newspaper industry (including [c]), which rapidly became a focal point for political attention and for novel political techniques and strategies relating to 'news management'. This has revealed the complex competing forces which influenced the new medium, from commercial imperatives to factional tensions, and showed that these ultimately led to the integration of newspapers into a governmental system which combined spies and agents, a civil service secretariat and salaried journalists. But it also provided some of the clearest evidence that official responses to the print revolution (rather than just investigative journalism) also had the effect of enhancing political transparency.</p> <p>Peacey's research has gone on to analyse the impact of and response to the new print media beyond the level of the metropolitan political elite, which had been central to his earlier work. In a number of recent studies, culminating in his book <i>Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution</i> [f], he has investigated the audience for and reception of print, popular awareness of national politics, and the extent of participation in national political life. Peacey has assessed how various new print media were consumed and perceived across distinct social groups and different geographical areas; how contemporaries responded to ideas and information about political processes and proceedings which these media made available; and finally how print fostered and intensified political participation, not least through lobbying, protesting, electioneering and holding representatives to account. Again, a range of articles (incl. [d] and [e]) presented detailed case studies illuminating the social and geographical reach of print, the process of acculturation to genres as diverse as the handbill and the newspaper, the importance of non-commercial print culture, and the use of print to foster communication between MPs and their constituents. The recent monograph [f] presents the resulting synthesis: a major reassessment of the communications revolution of the seventeenth century, which shows that amid structural change</p>

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and conjunctural upheaval a dramatic re-shaping of the political nation occurred, as citizens from all walks of life developed new habits and practices for engaging in daily political life, and for protecting and advancing their interests. This process ultimately involved experience-led attempts to rethink the nature of representation and accountability and inspired the formulation of ideas which resonate to this day.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [a] 'The politics of British union in 1642 and the purpose of civil war pamphlets', *Historical Research*, 80.210 (2007), 491–517.
DOI: [10.1111/j.1468-2281.2006.00390.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2006.00390.x) Peer-reviewed journal.
- [b] 'Royalist news, parliamentary debates and political accountability, 1640-60', *Parliamentary History*, 26.3 (2007), 328–45.
DOI: [10.1111/j/1750-0206.2007.tb00698.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j/1750-0206.2007.tb00698.x) and available on request. Peer-reviewed journal.
- [c] 'Print culture and political lobbying during the English Civil Wars', *Parliamentary History*, 26.1 (2007), 30–48.
DOI: [10.1111/j.1750.0206.2007.tb00627.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750.0206.2007.tb00627.x) and available on request. Peer-reviewed journal.
- [d] 'Sir Edward Dering, popularity and the public, 1640–1644', *Historical Journal*, 54.4 (2011).
DOI: [10.1017/S0018246X11000355](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X11000355); submitted to REF2. Peer-reviewed journal.
- [e] 'Print, publicity and popularity: the projecting of Sir Balthazar Gerbier, 1640–1662', *Journal of British Studies*, 51.2 (2012), 284–307.
DOI: [10.1086/663837](https://doi.org/10.1086/663837); submitted to REF2. Peer-reviewed journal.
- [f] *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge UP 2013).
Submitted to REF2. Part of distinguished monograph series from leading academic publisher.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Peacey's research has had an impact on public understanding of the role of mass media in politics and society insofar as it has provoked discussion and reflection among large non-academic audiences in both US and UK. In the US, Peacey communicated the results of his research to the general public primarily through a major exhibition at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, the world's most important non-university centre for the study of the Age of Shakespeare. The impact of the exhibition was further enhanced by Peacey's appearance on National Public Radio (NPR), by blogs posted by visitors and above all by feature articles in the quality press: *The Nation*, *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. In the UK, Peacey has engaged with the general public via media appearances, on-line articles and public lectures, notably including senior staff of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

The Folger exhibition, *Breaking News: Renaissance Journalism and the Birth of the Newspaper* (25/9/2008–31/1/2009), co-curated with Chris R. Kyle (a historian of the early modern British parliament at Syracuse University), explored issues which have been central to Peacey's research (esp. [b–d] and [f]), including government censorship and manipulation of the news, the ways in which readers responded to journalists and their innovations, and the opportunities which newspapers offered to citizens in terms of facilitating political engagement and participation. This exhibition resulted from a formal proposal to the Library by the two curators, following informal encouragement from library staff, as well as successful bids for funding from an educational trust, the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, which contributed \$20,000. Its preparation involved the two curators sharing the responsibilities involved in undertaking research within the Folger collections, collaborating with a range of curatorial and conservation staff, and liaising with those involved in designing and publicising the exhibition and its catalogue. In addition to drawing on the Folger's own resources, the exhibition brought together materials from collections in New York, Boston and London, and involved the construction of a working full-scale replica of a seventeenth-century printing press, which the Folger Library continues to use for educational purposes.

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The (free) exhibition attracted c. 5,000 visitors, and was accompanied by a website and an audio tour, both of which are still available [1]. Also still available is the substantial exhibition catalogue, of which 384 copies have been sold to date [2]. Peacey outlined the key elements of the exhibition on National Public Radio [3], and the feature articles in the US press discussing the exhibition had a potential combined readership of hundreds of thousands: the daily print circulation of *New York Times* [4] is 779,731; the *Washington Post* [5] 2.12 million; and *The Nation* [6] 174,000. Adding coverage in minor printed media, such as the *Washington Examiner*, and the readership of blogs devoted to the exhibition [7], we may conclude that Peacey's key research findings reached up to 3 million people in the United States.

In the UK, Peacey presented elements of his research in three radio programmes with a combined audience of 1.19 million people. He was a contributor to *Killing the King* (Radio 3; 1 February 2009; audience 51,000), which discussed evidence about and interpretations of the trial of Charles I in 1649, not least the ways in which this key episode was politically managed as a media event. He acted as historical consultant and contributor to *The Long View* (Radio 4; 3 March 2009), where he offered the audience of 307,000 a historical perspective on political transparency and accountability – not least in relation to investigative journalism – during the recent scandal relating to MPs expenses. His largest UK audience were the 832,000 listeners of *Random Edition* (Radio 4; 7 May 2010) to whom he explained the role of a vibrant journalistic culture in the events leading up to the Restoration of the Stuart dynasty in 1660. More recently, he has communicated his research findings on the relationship between the print revolution and ideas about political representation through digital media, with an article on the official website of the Westminster Parliament to mark Parliament Week 2012 [8], and a contribution to a public history project based at Sheffield University's Centre for the Study of Democratic Culture [9], started up in early 2010.

Throughout, Peacey has also addressed wider audiences in person, giving public lectures to a range of societies and institutions: the Maidstone Museum (2008), Buckinghamshire Historical Association, Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute (2009), the Cromwell Association (2010), the Winchester Historical Association (2012), and, as noted, the Secret Intelligence Service (2009), where he spoke on intelligence gathering under Cromwell. These lectures had a combined audience of c. 400, including the Director General of MI6.

This impressive *reach* is complemented by clear evidence of *significance*: Peacey's audiences demonstrably learned from, and actively engaged with, the research findings that he presented to them. This is best illustrated by the response to the Folger Library exhibition. A nice indication of the difference made by research is the contrast drawn by both a newspaper reviewer and a blogging visitor between the Folger exhibition and an ostensibly similar exhibition on the history of newspapers in the nearby 'Newseum'. Barbara Krasnoff's *Live Journal* blog sums up the latter as provoking merely 'a shrug', whereas Peacey's exhibition is by contrast 'fantastic' [7]. What underlies her response is further articulated by E. Rothstein in *The New York Times* [4], who argues that the *Newseum* presents merely a glorification of the modern press, whereas the Folger exhibition showed how 'the genetic code of modern journalistic culture was laid down four centuries ago in England' and provoked serious reflection on the challenges now faced by print journalism. Indeed, Rothstein felt that the exhibition illuminated the much larger story of the emergence of 'an expanded sense of the importance of individual opinion' and ultimately 'the birth of the modern West' itself. In *The Nation*, Richard Byrne reported that the exhibition offered 'useful' and 'valuable' lessons for those who are concerned about the fate of the news media in the modern world, both because it showed how early journalism managed to overcome obstacles to its development, and because it explained the 'complex interplay between government and the press' [6]. Philip Kennicott in *The Washington Post*, stressing the exhibition's 'timely relevance' was struck by other modern resonances. As well as pointing out the 'stark and powerful' lessons to be drawn from the evidence for the use and ultimate failure of 'brutal' censorship, he noted that 'Folger exhibitions let you make your own connections' and proceeded to identify striking similarities between 'journalism when it was young' and 'our own anarchic and newly democratised age of the World Wide Web' [5]. The impact of Peacey's research here lies in its ability to stimulate reflection on the nature and potential of modern electronic media.

Not all feedback on Peacey's exhibition or other public engagement work is quite so articulate, of course, but it does uniformly testify to its 'engrossing' nature, as the *Washington Examiner* put it [10], and thus to its significant contribution to the intellectual life of a very large audience, who have been not only educated in the history of the printed media but also prompted to reflect on parallels with the position of mass media in the modern world and on implications for the currently controversial use of social media.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Exhibition website: <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=2793> including a link to the audio tour. Attendance figures provided by e-mail from Folger Library, available on request.

[2] *Breaking News: Renaissance Journalism and the Birth of the Newspaper* by Chris R. Kyle & Jason Peacey, University of Washington Press. ISBN: 9780295988733; see <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=3041>. Sales figures compiled from e-mails from Folger Library and the publisher, available on request.

[3] NPR radio interview with Sam Litzinger on *From the Nation's Capital*, January 2009. Podcast available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~newsctr/politics/podcasts.cfm>.

[4] Edward Rothstein, 'When the News was New', *The New York Times*, 24 January 2009, C1, C12, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/24/arts/design/24muse.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>). This article in turn inspired blogs on the subject of the development of the press, including <http://gypsyscholarship.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/breaking-news-birth-of-democratic.html> and http://www.onelastquestion.com/my_weblog/journalism/ (the latter, under 'Public Occurrences', links back to item [1]).

[5] Philip Kennicott, 'At the Folger Library, Old News with Timely Relevance', *Washington Post*, 5 January 2009, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-01-05/news/36918422_1_rival-paper-world-wide-web-reader-comments.

[6] Richard Byrne, 'Ranters and Corantos', *The Nation*, 12–19 January 2009, pp. 42–44, <http://www.thenation.com/article/ranters-and-corantos-renaissance-journalism#>; at http://www.jenniferhoward.com/blog/2009/01/ranters_and_courantos.html a blog discusses this article and links back to [1].

[7] Barbara Krasnoff's *Live Journal*, <http://barb-krasnoff.livejournal.com/28133.html>.

[8] 'Publicising parliament in the seventeenth century', www.parliamentweek.org/stories-of-democracy/stories/publicising-parliament-in-the-seventeenth-century/.

[9] 'Reviving political engagement the seventeenth century way' (The Comparative History of Political Engagement, website of the Centre for the Study of Democratic Culture), <http://www.historyofpoliticalengagement.dept.shef.ac.uk/2011/12/05/reviving-political-engagement-the-seventeenth-century-way/>.

[10] C. Klimek, 'At the Folger, Elizabethan Ink Makes a Splash', <http://washingtonexaminer.com/article/97045>.