Women and Manuscript News Culture in Early Modern England

Between 1691 and 1710, hundreds of manuscript newsletters were sent to Madam Pole of Radbourne, Derbyshire. The letters, held jointly by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, represent one of the largest collections of manuscript newsletters addressed to a woman in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[1] While women have been largely overlooked as recipients of news, Pole's newsletters demonstrate that women could be dedicated consumers of current affairs. This article will explore the ways in which receiving the news allowed Pole to participate in politics from her rural home in Derbyshire, by keeping up to date with events both in London and abroad, and argue that by exploring women's subscriptions to manuscript newsletters we can discover another facet of female political participation.

The Pole collection has been largely neglected by scholars, with the exception of Rachael Scarborough King, who used the Clark Library's newsletters to discuss the continued influence and presence of the manuscript form in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century news transmission, as well as the involvement of women in parliamentary politics.[2] In this article, I will consider what they can tell us about women's interest in and consumption of the news, arguing that they demonstrate a sustained and active appetite for national and international current affairs, and that this interest in news reading can be an important part of a woman's self-fashioning and identity construction.

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[1] There are also a few newsletters addressed to Pole in the Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock, where the Pole family papers are held. See D5557/3/22, D5557/3/25, D5557/3/26.

[2] Rachael Scarborough King, "The Manuscript Newsletter and the Rise of the Newspaper, 1665-1715," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2016): 411-437; King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore, 2018); King, "'~~Sir~~ Madam': Female Consumers of Parliamentary News in Manuscript Newsletters," *Parliamentary History* 41, no. 1 (2022): 119-134.

Women in the history of news reading and consumption are generally conspicuous only by their absence. Kate Loveman and David Randall have demonstrated the importance of news reading to a seventeenth-century gentleman's identity, examining the importance of news to masculinity, but the same is rarely done for femininity.[3] Cultural discourse in the early modern period had many strictures about what women should and should not read, but news was rarely mentioned as part of that conversation.[4] Conduct book writers railed against women's romance reading, arguing that it could lead to licentious behaviour, and conversely praised devotional reading as a sign of women's piety.[5] However, news reading is not mentioned in most conduct books that gave prescriptions for women's behaviour. Richard Allestree gives perhaps the only mention of news reading in *The Ladies Calling*, asking his readers that "this Discourse may not be taken only as a Gazet for its newness, & discarded as soon as read," and instead suggesting they return to his book year after year, in order to better absorb its lessons.[6] This shows a general disdain for the fleeting nature of news reading (as printed news is discarded as soon as it is read), but does not appear to be particularly gendered – there is no clear suggestion that news was an inappropriate genre for women readers.[7]

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[3] Kate Loveman, *Samuel Pepys and his Books: Reading, Newsgathering, and Sociability, 1660-1703* (Oxford, 2015); David Randall, "Joseph Mead, Novellante: News, Sociability, and Credibility in Early Stuart England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 293-312.

[4] Sasha Roberts neatly summed up the distinctions that "orthodox patriarchal discourse" made between male and female readers and noted the "restricted range of texts" that were open to women, including pious works and "light fiction." See Sasha Roberts, "Reading in Early Modern England: Contexts and Problems," *Critical Survey* 12, no. 2 (2000): 2-3.

[5] See, for example, Jacques du Bosc, *The Accomplish'd Woman. Written Originally in French, since made English, by the Honourable Walter Montague, Esq.* (London: Printed for Gabriel Bedell and Tho. Collins, at the Middle Temple Gate in Fleetstreet, 1656); Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman, drawne out to the full body: Expressing What Habilliments doe best attire her, What Ornaments doe best adorne her, What Complements doe best accomplish her* (London: Printed by B. Alsop and T. Fawcet, for Michael Sparke, dwelling in Greene Arbor, 1631); William Whately, *A Bride-Bush, Or a Wedding Sermon* (Printed at London by William Iaggard, for Nicholas Bourne, and are to be sold at his shop at the entrance into the Royall Exchange, 1617).

[6] Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling. In Two Parts. By the Author of the whole Duty of Man, The Causes of the Decay of Christian Piety, and The Gentlemans Calling* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1673), 235.

[7] There was a general concern in the seventeenth century about the unprofitability of news reading, and the fact that it might excite the passions, but this again does not appear to have been gendered. See Joad Raymond, "Irrational, Impractical and Unprofitable: Reading the News in Seventeenth-Century Britain," in *Reading,*

The absence of representations of women reading the news has perhaps led to a misapprehension that they did not do so. In an article about manuscript transmission of the news in the seventeenth century, Ian Atherton suggested that "it is possible that women may have been less interested in the news. Female correspondents very rarely included even a line of news in their letters, where their male counterparts rarely let a letter pass without some mention of the events of the day."[8] He does then go on to acknowledge a problem inherent in discussions of early modern news, the 'tendency to call reports from men "news" and those from women "gossip",' and that women had a role in producing, selling, distributing and reading the news, but his statement reflects a common assumption about women's lack of interest in the news; or the fact that there is a lack of evidence for that interest, at least in comparison to male news readers.[9]

Women's subscriptions to manuscript newsletters, however, demonstrate a flaw in this argument. We cannot, of course, know for sure that women did read the newsletters they received - unfortunately, there is no record of if or how Pole read her newsletters, or of her response to them. She did not annotate or mark them in anyway. However, I would argue that the sheer volume and regularity of them, as well as the financial cost of receiving them (manuscript newsletters were more expensive than most printed news), indicates a desire in Pole to follow the news.[10] This may be genuine interest, or they may have been a status symbol due to the elevated cost (or both), but Pole clearly valued her subscription. Pole is only one example of a number of women who received manuscript newsletters, often on a

Society and Politics in Early Modern England, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Cambridge, 2003), 185-214.

[8] Ian Atherton, "'The Itch grown a Disease': Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century," in *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Joad Raymond (London, 1999), 49.

[9] For more on early modern gossip and gender, see Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003); Heather Kerr and Claire Walker, ed., *Fama and her Sisters: Gossip and Rumour in Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2015).

[10] Harold Love, "Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 9, no. 2 (1987): 141.

regular basis.[11] This article will use her newsletters as a case study but consider them within the broader context of women's interactions with the manuscript news genre. Women clearly engaged with political events both in England and overseas through their newsletters, despite being physically removed from places and institutions of political power.

Women's interactions with politics have long been recognized in other areas of early modern history. Scholars have shown that women's writing often engaged with "news-worthy" themes, and that women's political participation often occurred behind the scenes.[12] Women prophets have received attention for their intervention in the public sphere, as have Quaker women, whose effective use of print has been demonstrated by Kate Peters.[13] Historians such as Ann Hughes have examined women's more explicit political participation in the Civil War period, demonstrating the extent to which women had an active role in the conflict, taking part in military operations, defending their homes and influencing the political discussion.[14]

However, women's reading as a form of political participation has often been overlooked. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker have argued for viewing "reading as political experience and performance."[15] They mostly focused on "active reading": on reading which leaves a mark, often in the form of marginalia. However, they also connected this political reading to questions of identity, suggesting that the process of reading was one of identity creation (be

[11] Other examples include Temperance Gell and Barbara Clopton, discussed here, and Mrs Hobson/Mrs Newey. See King, "All the News that's Fit to Write."
[12] Elaine Chalus has done valuable work on women's many and varied ways of participating in politics in eighteenth-century England, arguing for a re-framing of the 'political' arena. See, for example, Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005).
[13] For work on prophecy, see Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992); Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1646-1688* (London, 1988); Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1998); Manfred Brod, "Politics and Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England: The Case of Elizabeth Poole," *Albion* 31, no. 3 (1999): 395-412; Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women's Writing and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 2004). For work on Quaker women and politics, see Kate Peters, *Print Culture and Early Quakers* (Cambridge, 2005); Catie Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650-1700* (Aldershot, 2005).
[14] Ann Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution* (Abingdon, 2012).
[15] Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, "Introduction: Discovering the Renaissance Reader," in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Cambridge, 2003), 18.

that political or religious identity), concluding that "we are what we read."[16] This, surely, is an important form of political engagement and indeed action.[17] Active reading has often been associated with evidence of activity, of reading for use.[18] However, I argue that reading that leaves fewer traces on the page, but which allows for a person to consider their own self-representation, is just as "active". While we do not have any clear evidence for Pole actually reading the newsletters, as discussed above, this argument can be extended to cover her subscription to and possession of them, particularly in light of the fact that she evidently chose to preserve them. As indicated by the Richard Allestree quote earlier, news publications were often discarded after reading. We have some clear examples of news collectors, but most people would not have made an effort to preserve their newsletters, which indicates the value that Pole attached to her subscription.[19] As Amanda Vickery has argued, "possessions [are] crucial props in self-fashioning."[20] Therefore, in receiving the newsletters and choosing to keep them, Pole was creating an identity for herself, something which is in itself a form of political activity.

This identity was multifaceted. Pole's position within her family, her socio-economic standing, and her interest in being informed about politics and the wider world are all demonstrated through her possession of these manuscript newsletters. This article will

[16] Sharpe and Zwicker, "Introduction," 23.
[17] King has discussed this in relation to women's participation in a news community, using Pole as an example; however I would argue that this moves beyond parliamentary politics, and that a case can be made for women as political actors in a broader sense. See King, "'~~Sir~~ Madam'," 124.
[18] The most obvious example of this is Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton's formulation of 'goal-oriented' active reading, although subsequent scholars such as William Sherman and Helen Smith have endeavored to broaden this definition of activity. See, for example: Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy," *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 30-78; William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, 1998); Helen Smith, *'Grossly Material Things': Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2012).
[19] George Thomason and Narcissus Luttrell were both keen collectors of news, but this was a relatively rare pastime. See Noah Millstone, "Designed for Collection: Early Modern news and the Production of History," *Media History* 23, no. 2 (2017): 177-198.
[20] Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven, 2009), ch. 4, accessed 15 December, 2020, https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt5vkxx9

explore these various aspects of her identity, and consider how this can help us to understand the political participation of her and of other women who received manuscript news.

A Family Affair?

Anne Pole lived in the hamlet of Radbourne, a few miles away from Derby. She was born Anne Newdigate, daughter of Sir Richard Newdigate, the politically and religiously moderate lawyer and landowner.[21] In 1650, she married Sir German Pole (1626-1683) and lived at the Pole family seat of Radbourne Hall until her death in 1710. German was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1647 and acted as patron for his father-in-law when Newdigate became a serjeant-at-law in 1654.[22] German went on to become Sheriff of Derbyshire in 1679.[23] After German died in 1683 without issue, the estate passed to Samuel Pole, his closest male relative. Anne remained at Radbourne for the rest of her life, and this appears to be when she first subscribed to the newsletters.

Pole's news reading gives us clues as to her place in the family, and her relationships within both her childhood and marital homes. It is not clear how Pole developed her appetite for current affairs. It was, however, a family pursuit. She came from a political family, albeit one that was not always consistent about its allegiances. Her father, Sir Richard Newdigate, first baronet, was a moderate parliamentarian, serving somewhat reluctantly under Cromwell as

[21] The identification of "Madam Pole" as Anne Newdigate Pole is somewhat speculative, as there were other Anne Poles alive at the time, but given the fact that the newsletters stop almost exactly at the date of her death, and that there is extensive evidence of her visiting the Newdigate seat of Arbury Hall, she seems by far the most likely candidate. For more on the Newdigate family, see Steve Hindle, "Below Stairs at Arbury Hall: Sir Richard Newdigate and his Household Staff, c.1670-1710," *Historical Research* 85, no. 227 (2012): 71-88; Vivienne Larminie, "Fighting for Family in a Patronage Society: The Epistolary Armoury of Anne Newdigate (1574-1618)," in *Early Modern Women's Letter-Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (London, 2001), 94-108; Larminie, "Marriage and The Family: The Example of the Seventeenth-Century Newdigates," *Midlands History* 9, no. 1 (1984): 1-22.

[22] Joseph Foster, *The Register of Admissions to Gray's Inn, 1521-1889, together with the register of marriages in Gray's Inn Chapel, 165-1754* (London, 1889), 243; Vivienne Larminie, "Newdigate, Sir Richard, first Baronet," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004. Accessed December 10, 2020. https://www-oxforddnb-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20002?rskey=dlDYzJ&result=1

[23] "A List of the Sheriffs of the several Counties appointed for the Year ensuing," *The London Gazette*, issue 1355, Nov 11, 1678, 2.

serjeant-at-law, a position he was persuaded to take by royalist friends.[24] Pole's brother Richard, the second baronet, was an avid collector and reader of news, something Barber attributes to him spending a great deal of time at the family estate in Warwickshire, rather than in London.[25] Newdigate had a short-lived political career in Westminster, but his Whig leanings and his 'tangential' connection to the Rye House Plot in 1683 led to his early retirement from public life, remaining at Arbury Hall almost constantly from 1681 until his death in 1710.[26] A significant collection of manuscript newsletters belonging to the Newdigate family, numbering nearly 4,000 items, is now held in the Folger Shakespeare Library, shows Newdigate's continued passion for the news.[27]

Pole evidently shared her brother's interest. She even received her own newsletters when she was visiting her family at Arbury, despite Richard's own subscription to scribal newsletters.[28] Perhaps she preferred her own particular newsletter, or wanted to ensure she received her news independent of her brother. Pole had to inform the scribe of her change of address, although this information did not always get through in time. On one occasion the scribe added a note saying "Madam. Being absent I rec^{d} your Letter of the 28 yesterday so my Thursdayes Letter went for Radbourn, & my next will goe to Arbury, if I doe not rec^{d} your order to the contrary."[29] The effort she made to redirect her newsletters, even for a short trip, are one of the best indications that she took an active interest in them, and did read them regularly, as it seems unlikely that she would have them sent to Arbury if they were only a status symbol or occasional pursuit.

[24] Larminie, "Newdigate, Sir Richard, first Baronet."
[25] Barber, "'It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition,'" 297.
[26] Hindle, "Below Stairs at Arbury Hall," 71.
[27] Newdigate family collection of newsletters, Folger.MS.L.c.1-3950, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.
[28] See, for example, August 28, 1694, box 3, folder 67, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[29] September 2, 1693, box 1, folder 80. MS.1951.021, Clark Library.

The siblings were not receiving identical newsletters. For example, on September 1, 1694, when Pole was staying with her brother, they both received letters. They were, however, written by different scribes, and were not replicas of each other. Pole's newsletter, for example, began "this afternoon arrived 2 fforeign Mailes with these following paragraphs," and goes on to report news from Madrid and Vienna.[30] The letter to Richard, however, began with news from Edinburgh.[31] This is probably because they were receiving newsletters from different providers. Newdigate was receiving newsletters from John Dyer, amongst others, a successful newsletter writer who appealed to Tories and high churchmen, although who nonetheless attracted readers from across the political spectrum.[32] Pole does not appear to have patronized Dyer, although there are similarly tentative glimpses of her political allegiance: from 1695 she subscribed to *The Post Boy*, sent alongside her manuscript newsletters (see below), which was one of the main Tory news publications in a print market dominated by the Whigs.[33]

There are letters to two other of Pole's family members in the collection held at the Clark Library. Three newsletters addressed to German Pole, Anne's husband, are included, dating from the early 1680s. They were sent in 1682 and 1683, just before German's death. There are also thirteen newsletters addressed to Samuel Pole, German's heir, in the Clark Library collection, dating between 1704 and 1706.[34] It is probable, then, that Samuel and Anne Pole were both receiving newsletters at the same time, although there are no extant newsletters addressed to Anne for the same dates as those addressed to Samuel. She did not receive

[30] September 1, 1694, box 3, folder 68, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[31] Newsletter received by Richard Newdigate, Arbury, September 1, 1694. L.c.2366. LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collection.
[32] Barber, "'It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition,'" 303.
[33] Barber, "'It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition'," 299.
[34] Box 2, folders 89-98, 106, 112; box 5 folder 9, MS.1951.021, Clark Library.

newsletters at the same time as her husband, possibly indicating that they did share the letters, or that her own interest in the news was not sparked until several years after his death.

While there may be relatively few traces of Pole's response to the newsletters, there is some evidence of her life before she was widowed. She and her husband appear to have had a close, loving relationship. She frequently wrote to him when they were apart, always opening her letters with "Deare love."[35] On one occasion in 1653 Anne, staying in London at the time, wrote to German "I often wish wee were together."[36] Her letters to him are full of affection, giving him news of the family's health; however, there are no discussions of political matters or national news. Indeed, German's own politics are hard to determine. He was only sixteen when the Civil War broke out and there are no records of him playing a significant part in the conflict, unlike men from neighboring gentry families such as the (initially) parliamentarian Sir John Gell or the Catholic royalist Rowland Eyre.[37] He did later become involved with local politics and governance, however, acting as High Sheriff of Derbyshire. Given their affectionate relationship, and German's evident interest in the news during his lifetime, it is possible that Pole decided to take the newsletters as a reminder of her late husband. However, she did not start receiving them (or did not start preserving them) until eight years after his death. She did not simply continue his subscription but instead took out one of her own, independent of her husband's interests.

This independence is somewhat unusual in the historical record, and underlines the importance of Pole in the history of news reading. Jason Peacey, when looking at the private circulation of printed news, argues convincingly that "gentry women were enthusiastic

[35] Letters written by Madam Pole. D5557/2/18/1-49, Derbyshire Record Office.
[36] D5557/1/18/1, Derbyshire Record Office.
[37] See, for example, Rosamond Meredith, "A Derbyshire Family in the Seventeenth Century: The Eyres of Hassop and their Forfeited Estates," *British Catholic History* 8, no. 1 (1965): 12-77. There is relatively little correspondence remaining from the Pole family for the Civil War years. A letter from German to his mother in 1647 only communicates news about friends and family members, not touching on political matters. See D5557/2/4, Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock.

readers and distributors of topical material, who gained access to 'printed papers' even in remote parts of the country," suggesting that they often received such material from their husbands.[38] This is certainly supported by the evidence from some seventeenth-century letter collections, such as that of the Barrington family, in which numerous references are made to women being sent newsbooks by male relatives.[39] This was a significant way in which women accessed information; however, women not only received their news through the mediation of other family members but could be recipients themselves, as in the case of Anne Pole. While it is possible (I would argue probable) that Pole read news received by her father, brother and husband earlier in her life, once she was widowed she began to subscribe under her own name, thereby consuming the news in her own right.

Her widowhood is key to her news reading. Many scholars have seen women "operating at [their] most independent" following the death of a spouse, as they became legal entities in their own right.[40] Pole did not subscribe to the newsletters until eight years after German's death, when she was living alongside Samuel Pole and his wife (also called Anne, née Mundy), and crucially she took out a subscription in her own name. As a widow, she would have had more leisure time, relieved of her duties running the household when Samuel took possession of the estate. She was also a more independent figure. The fact that the newsletters address her specifically is significant – these letters, and the information contained within them, belonged to her.

Whatever her reasons for subscribing to the newsletters, Pole was surrounded by politically-engaged family members. The Newdigates' interest in following the news is well-documented, and the Poles were no doubt similarly aware of the need to remain up-to-date

[38] Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013), 69.
[39] Arthur Searle, ed., *Barrington Family Letters, 1628-1632*, Camden Fourth Series Volume 28 (London, 1983).
[40] Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, "Introduction," in *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cavallo and Warner (Abingdon, 2014), 1.

with current affairs. This may have also played into Pole's identity construction: the newsletters represented her social status and her family's values, providing a link to her father, brother and husband.

An 'Elite' Form of News

Newsletters could also provide evidence of social status beyond the family, with the circumstances surrounding their production and their content conferring a level of socio-economic cachet. The business of manuscript newsletter writing was booming by the late seventeenth century. It is difficult to determine how many newsletter writers were operating in this period, as they rarely signed their work, but there was a significant increase in the number of newsletters circulating in the years of the Popish Plot.[41] Joseph Williamson and Henry Muddiman were key figures in the establishment of *The London Gazette*, but were also heavily involved in the lucrative business of the confidential private newsletter.[42] These manuscript newsletters had a large number of subscribers. Among them, according to James Sutherland, were "peers and members of parliament, postmasters and country booksellers, clergymen and doctors, army officers, merchants, innkeepers and other, mostly living in England, but some in Scotland and Ireland, and even a few abroad."[43] They were so popular with certain social groups that Sutherland notes that many gentlemen continued receiving manuscript news even after the expansion of the newspaper press under Queen Anne, as they believed they were able to receive some news not permitted in the printed version.[44]

Manuscript newsletters were often perceived to provide news that printed sources could not – even if this is not entirely true, the perception was important. Scholars have posited that their

[41] Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, 8.
[42] Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven, 2014), 239.
[43] James Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper and its Development* (Cambridge, 1986), 7.
[44] Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, 8.

manuscript, epistolary nature kept them from being censored in the same way as the printed press in the earlier seventeenth century, although it is debated how effective and influential these regulations were in the latter half of the century.[45] Alex Barber has noted that "elite participants read scribal news to attain information about government, court and parliament," that could not be found in many forms of printed news, which had to focus on events abroad due to censorship laws.[46] This was aided by an assumption that they were essentially private documents: Sabrina Baron has suggested that it was possible that newsletters "could not be divorced from the fact that they were formatted and transmitted in the same way as all letters, making them personal rather than public."[47] The perception of privacy and the subsequent freedom from censorship meant that they were a prized commodity, conferring a specialized knowledge to the subscriber that could not be found elsewhere.

This is particularly evident in the Pole collection through references to printed news publications, often *The London Gazette*, the paper published twice weekly from 1665 by the office of the Secretaries of State.[48] The Gazette had a long relationship with manuscript newsletters, as Natasha Glaisyer has demonstrated; it was often sent alongside scribal newsletters and acted as a "shared point of reference" for many correspondents.[49] The newsletter frequently supplements or corrects the account given in the *Gazette* with its own information, displaying an evident reliance on Pole reading the newspaper as well.[50] Erin

[45] Sabrina A. Baron, "The Guises of Dissemination in Early Seventeenth-Century England: News in Manuscript and Print," in *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron (London, 2001), 47. This suggestion of greater freedom from censorship has been convincingly disputed by King, but the perception of a more exclusive product is the key point here. See King, "The Manuscript Newsletter and the Rise of the Newspaper," 420.
[46] Barber, "'It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition,'" 296; Atherton, "'The Itch grown a Disease'," 42; Joad Raymond, "Introduction," in *Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England* 1641-1660, ed. Joad Raymond (Gloucestershire, 1993), 3
[47] Baron, "The Guises of Dissemination," 47.
[48] Natasha Glaisyer, "'The Most Universal Intelligencers': The Circulation of the *London Gazette* in the 1690s," *Media History* 23, no. 2 (2017): 256.
[49] Glaisyer, "'The Most Universal Intelligencers'," 262.
[50] Glaisyer has noted that this expectation was a common feature in manuscript newsletters. See Glaisyer, "'The Most Universal Intelligencers'," 262.

Keating has argued that this way of referencing printed publications indicates the position of the manuscript newsletter within the news genre, and the social status of their readers. She has suggested that the newsletter writers "clearly position their information as supplementary to the public news, as information meant for a more elite class of reader who can be trusted with sensitive details both with respect to the political events outlined in the papers but also with respect to the gossipy anecdotes."[51] In choosing to subscribe to manuscript news, therefore, Pole was ensuring that she was provided with information only available to a select group. Not only was she making an effort to stay up to date with current affairs, but she was accessing a level of knowledge not open to most readers of newspapers and pamphlets.

The relationship between Pole and the newsletter writers also underlines the more elitist nature of the newsletters. There were multiple scribes acting at different times, as several different scribal hands appear. The direct communication between them and Pole, although infrequent, was always marked by a level of deference. There was evident concern to keep Pole updated, and to ensure that she was getting a good product for her money. Methods of payment were discussed, showing the some of the mechanics behind the newsletter-writing business. In January 1694 one John Sims (the only time that the scribe is named) addressed Pole directly, discussing the terms of his employment in a note added on to the end of the letter:

> Madam I was ordered by M^{r} Smith to send you this Letter allso acq^{t} you that 4^{l} p[er] annum is the price that all men have that desire to live and perform their buisness dillegently I shall continue the Letter unless I receive an order to the contrary pray

[51] Erin M. Keating, "The Role of Manuscript Newsletters in Charles II's Performance of Power," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 41, no. 2 (2017): 38.

> order y[r] Letter directed for me to be left at the Widow Humphreys Coffee house in S[t] Peters alley Cornhill I am y[r] Ladyshipps most humble servant – John Sims.[52]

This is the only evidence we have in the whole collection as to the writer's identity, and while we do not know anything more about John Sims, it gives an insight into his profession and the cost of doing his job. It seems that the newsletter writer could negotiate directly with individual recipients about his fee, indicating a degree of autonomy, although the reference to Mr Smith suggests that Sims was in someone else's employ. There was clearly no physical space to house the business, but instead payment was sent to a coffeehouse in Cornhill, a ward in the City of London and a popular location for the city's coffeehouses.[53] This indicates the link between coffeehouses and scribal newsletters writers, who often had rooms above coffeehouses in which to write, allowing them to make use of the gossip and news exchange going on below. In early eighteenth-century slang, newsletter scribes were even referred to as "coffee-men."[54] "Widow Humphreys" was probably one of several women who took over their husband's coffeehouse after their death, such as in the case of Bowman's coffeehouse, which Widow Bowman took on in the early 1660s.[55] It was likely a small establishment in comparison to well-known coffeehouses such as Bowman's or Garraway's, as there are few references to it in contemporary sources.[56] The price of £4 per annum was around the norm for manuscript newsletters, with Henry Muddiman charging £5 a year for

[52] January 25, 1693/4, box 3, folder 55, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library. Pole clearly did not issue any contradictory orders about pay, as Sims continued writing to her until 1695.
[53] Brian Cowen, "The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered" *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2004): 33.
[54] Barber, "'It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition,'" 305.
[55] Markman Ellis, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London, 2004).
[56] Several of the most prominent coffeehouses are mentioned in 'Old and New London', including Garraway's and Bowman's, but there is no mention of Widow Humphreys, or indeed any other coffeehouses in St Peter's Alley. See Walter Thornbury. "Cornhill, Gracechurch Street, and Fenchurch Street," in *Old and New London: Volume 2*, (London, 1878), 170-183. *British History Online*, accessed December 16, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol2/pp170-183. 'Humphrey's Coffee-House' was mentioned in *The Flying Post* in 1697, as a place where people could buy Mr Read's "Cathartick Pills," which purported to cure a diverse array of ailments - see "News," *The Flying Post, or the Post-Master*, issue 401, Dec 7, 1697.

his newsletters.[57] This is certainly more expensive than the price of the *Gazette*, for example, which was sold at around 1d per copy in the mid-1690s.[58]

Most of the scribes addressed Pole directly at some point, primarily regarding postage problems, but also discussing payment (as above) and occasionally offering seasonal greetings, but they always maintained a deferential tone.[59] The newsletter on December 25, 1693 began by saying "Madam, I pray yo^{r} Ladysp to excuse the Brevity by reason of the day."[60] A few days later, he wrote in a note in the bottom left-hand corner of the last page to thank her for his payment: "Madam I have rec^{d} my quarterage & humbly thank yo^{r} Ladye wishing you a happy new year."[61] Evidently Pole paid the scribes quarterly, and it appears to have been common practice to write and thank her for the payment. In October 1694 Sim added similarly on the back of the newsletter "M^{dm} I received y^{e} mony and return you humble thanks."[62]

Another writer excused himself for illness at one point, detailing his afflictions in a very apologetic manner:

> Madame? The sudden Indisposition which this day was seauennight by stoppadge of urine violent ague, a great paine in the side & ^{did} put a stop to my duty in serueing you with my letter these holly dayes for which I begg your favourrable excuse, & haveing got God be thanked this day some reliefe I hoape I will recover my strength as to be able to serve you, as formerly if you please.[63]

[57] Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper*, 8.
[58] Glaisyer, "'The Most Universal Intelligencers'," 265.
[59] There are a series of letters in the Clark Library collection from the 1700s that reference ongoing problems with postage, specifically postage charges. See, for example, box 5.
[60] December 25, 1693, box 2, folder 46, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[61] December 30, 1693, box 2, folder 46, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[62] October 27, 1694, box 3, folder 71. OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[63] January 4, [?], box 2, folder 54, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library. It is unclear why the writer placed a question mark after the word "Madame," which heads the letter, but one could speculate that it indicates an uncertainty about the recipient's gender.

This and all other direct addresses to Pole make clear the hierarchical relationship between newsletter writer and reader. Pole is clearly in the position of power, with the scribes providing a service for her, and that relationship is reinforced through all their communication to her. Newsletters such as these were more expensive than broadsides or newsbooks, and could be a marker of status. Indeed, Harold Love has suggested that some newsletter writers 'enjoyed circulations that would have justified printing, if it were not necessary to maintain the supposed exclusivity and hence the high price of the product'.[64] The newsletters for Pole, then, could act as a marker of status, something reaffirmed by the relationship between her and the scribes.

Pole as a Reader

The fact that the newsletters are addressed specifically to "Madam [or Lady] Pole" most clearly highlights her identity as a possessor and reader of the items. We can borrow here from the excellent work that has been done on the term "her book" and the importance of writing one's name on texts.[65] Scholars such as Rebecca Laroche have argued convincingly that an autograph signature on the title page of a book functioned as a claim to the knowledge held within the text.[66] This can be applied to Pole's newsletters. In naming herself as the recipient of the newsletters, she was laying claim to their specialized knowledge, and fashioning an identity for herself that was highly informed and political.

There is a clear expectation in the newsletters that the reader would be knowledgeable about contemporary politics, and that they would have the reading skills and habits necessary to understand events fully. As mentioned above, there was a symbiotic relationship between

[64] Love, "Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England," 141.
[65] See, for example, Jason Scott-Warren, "Reading Graffiti in the Early Modern Book," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2010): 363-381; Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, 2001); Katherine Acheson, "The Occupations of the Margins: Writing, Space, and Early Modern Women," in *Early Modern English Marginalia*, ed. Katherine Acheson (Abingdon, 2019), 70-90.
[66] Rebecca Laroche, "'To take in hand the practice of phisick': Early Modern Women's Signatures in Print Medical Texts," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts, IV,* ed. Michael Denbo (Tempe, Arizona, 2008), 271.

printed and manuscript news, and the reliance on information provided by the *Gazette* is evident in these newsletters. In many cases, understanding the context of the news presented would have depended on reading multiple news sources. In June 1692, for example, the newsletter writer reported: "[w]ee rec^{d} yesterday 2 fforraine Mailes of the 10th & 12th ins^{t} which give many particulars of the proceeds of the seige of Namour, but I shall give (without whats mentioned in the Gazett) as briefe an acc^{t} as I can."[67] If the reader of this passage was not familiar with the *Gazette*'s reporting of the siege, then it is unlikely that the newsletter would have made as much sense. There is clearly an underlying assumption that the recipient of the newsletter would also be reading the *Gazette*. Whether Pole did so or not we do not know, but it seems likely, given the frequency with which the newsletters cross-reference reports from the publication. Indeed, even if she did not originally read the *Gazette*, she may have been encouraged to by the newsletters, in order to follow the stories properly.

This reading, relying on both print and manuscript and perhaps multiple different news sources, demonstrates an 'extensive' method, with the reader drawing on printed and manuscript sources in order to build up a fuller picture of current affairs.[68] This is also an active form of reading: Joad Raymond has pointed out that this necessity to cross-reference when reading, either with different publications or referring back to previous newsletters to follow the story, relies on the reader actively engaging with the news being presented, and having to develop certain reading skills in order to do so.[69] The interested consumer would have to be fully engaged with all forms of the genre, and make an effort to keep up to date, varying their reading habits and reading critically and carefully to understand the news fully.

[67] June 7, 1692, box 1, folder 21, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[68] Atherton makes this point, arguing that "Newsletters had to be read *extensively*. A large volume of news was demanded by the discerning and wise because it was recognized that even the best reports might be uncertain, temporary judgements in need of later confirmation or denial." Atherton, "'The Itch grown a Disease'," 45.
[69] Raymond, "The Newspaper, Public Opinion, and the Public Sphere," 132.

This process was streamlined somewhat by Pole's newsletter writers in the second half of the 1690s, when a hybrid print-manuscript newsletter appeared. Most of the newsletters after about 1695 consist of print publications, either *The Post Boy* or *The Post-Man: And the Historical Account, &c*, with manuscript additions.[70] The printed text covers two sides, and the notes are written on the blank back page, sometimes spilling over to the verso of that sheet, above the address. The two sections supplement each other: the print publication deals with mostly foreign news, while the manuscript letter generally focuses on domestic events.

The manuscript section, being written after the printed publication, could also provide more up-to-date information. In the manuscript notes on the edition of *The Post Boy* from August 31 – September 3, 1695, the scribe has included an item of news that was not present in the printed sheet. He wrote "23 Roman Catholick Lords and Gentlemen are Indicted at the Old Baily in an order to an Outlawry to seize their Estates among them are the Lords Griffin Castlemain, Middleton, Stafford S^{r} Edward Hales &c."[71] This item of news is then reported in the next edition of *The Post Boy*, covering September 3 – 5, which records:

> Last week at the Sessions held at the *Old-bayley*, there were bills of High Treason found by the Grand Jury against the Earls of *Midleton*, *Stafford*, *Castlemaine*, and the Lord *Griffin*. The Duke of *Berwick* Lieutenant General *Hamilton*, Sir *Edward Hales*, Sir *William Walgrave*, and many others .to the number of 23, upon an Account of their being in *France* with the late King *James*, and if they do not come back into *England*, and surrender themselves they will be Outlawed, and their Estates confiscated.[72]

[70] This was an amalgamation of two publications: *The Post Boy, With Foreign and Domestic News*, established in May 1695, and *The Historical Account, &c*, which then became *The Post-Man* in October 1695 after the original printed of *The Historical Account* withdrew. See Stanley Morison, *The English Newspaper: Some Account of the Physical Development of Journals Printed in London 1622-1932* (Cambridge, 1932), 57-59.
[71] August 31 – September 3, 1695, box 3, folder 34, MS.1951.021, Clark Library.
[72] September 3 – 5, 1695, box 3, folder 34, MS.1951.021, Clark Library.

Both accounts were referring to a prosecution of Jacobite politicians and courtiers opposed to the Williamite regime. The latter account is more detailed, but it is clear that receiving the newssheet with the manuscript additions could give the reader a much more up to date picture of events, which could then be expanded on several days later.

The imagined reader in the newsletters, then, appears to be one with significant reading skills, and highly informed about events at home and abroad. There is clearly an assumption of a certain level of knowledge about current affairs, international relations, and parliamentary politics. Events are usually reported with little to no explanation of their significance. However, on occasion the writer does provide some explanatory details, for example when discussing the outcome of a court case. He wrote that "Mr Croone is now repreived sine die, which is the next door to a Pardon."[73] *Sine die* is a legal term meaning that no day has been assigned for a hearing, so that the defendant essentially is reprieved through lack of a trial. The writer's explanation shows an awareness that the reader may not have much legal knowledge (*sine die* was a standard term). Conversely, there are other occasions where Latin terms have not been translated, such as when new regulations are introduced for the East India Company. The newsletter reports: "[t]he Regulations, which the K. has made for the E. India Company, are now passed the seales & are in substance the same as were agreed by the H. of Coms & are not for any time of years but Durante Regis Beneplacito."[74] The writer does not explain the Latin phrase, which means "for the duration of the king's pleasure," assuming either a level of Latin comprehension or of common political terms. It is not clear if Pole had either, but this level of knowledge was at least assumed by the newsletter writer.

This contrasts to a newsletter from earlier in the seventeenth century, sent to Elizabeth Tollemache, which reveals a very different relationship between scribe and recipient.

[73] Undated, box 1, folder 2, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[74] November 14, 1693, box 2, folder 40, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.

Tollemache was born Elizabeth Stanhope, daughter of Sir John Stanhope, and married Lionel Tollemache, the MP and Privy Councillor to both James I and Charles I. Their family home was Helmingham Hall, in Suffolk. The letter was written in 1619, by one Arthur Grant, whose connection to the family is unclear. He was probably a professional newsletter writer, similar to the scribes who wrote to Pole, but he appears to have had a closer, or more personal, relationship with his reader. Instead of assuming a level of knowledge of the places and events he was describing, Grant wrote Tollemache: "there is much news abroad but what I send shalbe [sic] true, […] if yo^{r} Lady^{sp} please to send mee word, of what you doe not understand, because you shall read of strange countres, men and towns I shall in writtinge discribe them."[75] This concern for Tollemache's comprehension, and the obvious exchange of letters between the two, contrasts to Pole's more detached, business-like interactions with her scribes. Perhaps this suggests that Grant was operating on a smaller scale that the almost mass-produced newsletters that Pole received, something which developed in the later seventeenth century.

In the Pole collection, the writer does occasionally outline hypothetical outcomes of certain events. In February 1691, he wrote that "[t]here is a hott report, that the L^{d} Prestons pardon is passing the seales, which if true, will convince the world, y^{t} he has made a Confession, that deserves the same."[76] This is referring to Richard Graham, Viscount Present, the Jacobite politician due to be executed for treason but whose confession granted him a pardon. On another occasion the writer intimated the potential consequence of the death of the King of Denmark, writing "By a Vessell arrived in the North from denmark wee heare y^{t} that King is dead, which if true, & true also, y^{t} his eldest & not second son is in ffrance, some strange things wee may expect to heare upon it."[77] However, most of the time the consequences of

[75] Arthur Grant, Autograph Letters signed to Elizabeth Tollemache, 1615-1619, Misc Mss, Clark Library.
[76] February 28, 1691, box 1, folder 4, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[77] July 21, 1692, box 1, folder 24, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.

political manoeuvrings or international events are left to the reader's imagination. To discern the significance of these events would rely on a working knowledge of international relations, perhaps one that readers were expected to gain through frequent reading of various news publications.

However, this readerly identity is at odds with the gendered expectations for news readers, which is made obvious through some textual clues. The newsletters appear to have been mass produced to an extent, with a writer creating the same letter for numerous recipients. In the Pole collection the scribes often heading their letters with the word "S^{r}," despite being addressed on the back to "Madam" or "Lady Pole." King has observed a similar habit in the Hobson/Newey newsletters, which were sent to either Mrs Hobson or Mrs Newey, but frequently headed with "Sir."[78] There are a few newsletters which are headed "M^{dm}" in the Pole collection, but this is relatively rare.[79] The reason for this occasional change is unclear – perhaps the writer simply forgot, most of the time, to use the female address. There is even one occasion where the scribe originally wrote "S^{r}," but then crossed it out and replaced it with "Madam."[80]

It is evident from this and from the direct messages from the scribe discussed above that they did know they were writing to a woman, but the newsletter writer clearly had a male reader in mind. This suggests either that men made up a significant part of their market, or that the ideal audience was thought to be male, irrespective of who they were writing to. This may have contributed to a general assumption in the historiography that men were the primary readers of newsletters. Most extant large collections of newsletters were addressed to men, although that does not necessarily mean that Pole was unusual in her habits; perhaps many

[78] King, "All the News that's Fit to Write," 115; King "'~~Sir~~ Madam'."
[79] January 1693/4, box 3, folder 55, OSB MSS 60, Beinecke Library.
[80] December 21-24, 1695, box 3, folder 38, MS.1951.021, Clark Library.

addressed to women were not preserved.[81] Whatever the make-up of their audience, however, the letters are gendered from when they were first written, and in reading them, Pole was subverting expectations.

Women and Manuscript Newsletters

The Pole collection may be significant due to its sheer size, but it is by no means the only example of a woman receiving such newsletters. The Tollemache letters represent an example from the early decades of the news genre, but by the end of the seventeenth century women can increasingly be found receiving newsletters.[82] The Beinecke Library holds a letterbook of newsletters to Lady Clopton from 1688-89, imparting information about the ongoing Glorious Revolution.[83] Barbara Clopton was the daughter of the royalist Edward Walker, Garter King of Arms from 1645-1677, and wife of Sir John Clopton.[84] There is no address on the newsletters but they were probably sent to the family seat of Clopton House, near Stratford-upon-Avon. It appears that these newsletters were commissioned specifically to follow the political events surrounding the revolution, as they only cover a short period of time. One the last letter in the volume Clopton's husband, John, has written "News lett.rs my wife had of Mr Hamon from K. James his goeing away."[85] This note makes Lady Clopton's ownership of the newsletters clear. It also underlines her interest in politics and contemporary news. They give the impression of Clopton having a specific interest in a moment of history,

[81] The Folger finding aid for the Newdigate papers has lists of similarly significant collections of newsletters; of these, the Pole collection is the only one specifically addressed to a woman. However, as demonstrated in this article, there are a number of smaller collections of newsletters addressed to women. See "Newdigate Family Collection of Newsletters," *Folger Finding Aids*, accessed Jan 20, 2019 https://findingaids.folger.edu/dfonewdigate.xml

[82] As mentioned above, King has drawn attention to the Hobson/Newey newsletters, addressed to Mrs Hobson or Mrs Newey, also dating to the period 1690-1710. See King, "All the News that's Fit to Write," 115.

[83] 25 letters of news relative to the abdication of K. James 2 to Lady Clopton, from Mr. Hamon, 1688-1689. Osborn fb210, Beinecke Library.

[84] A. M. Mimardière, "CLOPTON, Sir John (1638-1719), of Clopton, Stratford-on-Avon, Warws." *History of Parliament Online*, accessed 6 June 2021. http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690/member/clopton-sir-john-1638-1719

[85] Osborn fb210, f358v, Beinecke Library.

rather than a general desire to stay up to date on current affairs, but her ownership of them (and therefore the information they contained) is emphasized, and hints at a deeper awareness of the significance of the period.

Finally, Temperance Gell, another Derbyshire resident, also received a series of manuscript newsletters. Gell was younger than Pole, and received her newsletters in the period 1720-1729, but there were links between the two families. The Gells' family home, Hopton Hall, was only about thirteen miles from Radbourne, and they were of similar social status.[86] The Gells were a prominent gentry family in the county, and had sat in Parliament, although a move to reaffirm Anglicanism in Derbyshire in the 1690s pushed out the Presbyterian Gells.[87] John Gell, Temperance's grandfather, was a significant parliamentarian figure in the early civil war years before he switched allegiance, leading to his imprisonment in the Tower of London.[88] He was pardoned and made a gentleman of the privy chamber by Charles II. When his grandson, Sir Philip Gell, died in 1719, the estate of Hopton Hall passed to Philip's sister, Temperance, until her death in 1730.[89] She therefore held a position of independence comparable to that of Pole's as a widow: she was financially independent and living without direct male influence. This is an intriguing parallel, underlining the significance of Pole's widowhood to her news consumption. It seems likely that the absence of a husband, father or

[86] There are a few letters between members of the Gell and Pole families in the Derbyshire Record Office. See, for example, D5557/2/131/1-2.
[87] James Riordan, "Power, Ideology and 'country politics': Episodes from Derbyshire, c.1660-1760" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2018), 88.
[88] Trevor Brighton, "Gell, Sir John, first baronet," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2013, accessed July 6, 2021. https://www-oxforddnb-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10508?rskey=4fSHJo&result=2 For more on the Gells see Ann Hughes, "Political Eclipse, Administrative Change and Social Tension: the Gells of Hopton and Lichfield Dean and Chapter Property during the Interregnum and Restoration," *Midlands History* 36, no. 1 (2011): 24-41; Andy Wood, "Beyond Post-Revisionism? The Civil War Allegiances of the Miners of the Derbyshire 'Peak Country' *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 1 (1997): 23-40.
[89] A petition to Chancery regarding the will of Philip Gell reveals that Temperance Gell was given Hopton Hall 'for her life'. See D258/38/13/2, Derbyshire Record Office.

brother and the greater financial freedoms that both Pole and Gell enjoyed allowed them to cultivate their sustained interest in the news.

Gell had lived in London with her sister Elizabeth for several decades, then appears to have settled at Hopton Hall after Philip's death (Elizabeth had died in 1704).[90] Her subscription to the newsletters may, therefore, have also been an attempt to maintain the knowledge and understanding of current affairs that she could have gained while living in the capital. The newsletters would have come to Hopton every few days, but there are only seventy-six remaining, covering a nearly ten-year period. Gell's newsletters are slightly shorter than Pole's, and there is no hybrid of print and manuscript news forms. Moreover, there are none of the (albeit fleeting) communications from the newsletter writer that we saw with the Pole collection. However, there is one significant similarity. While the newsletters are addressed to "Madam Gell at Hopton"; they still open with "S^{r}." The imagined reader here, ten years after Pole received her last newsletter, was still male.

Gell's newsletters impart similar kinds of news to those we have seen already, beginning with news come from various European posts before moving on to domestic matters. They all end in the same way, with a note about various stock listings from "South Sea," "Bank" and "India." For example, the newsletter from July 28, 1724 ends with "South Sea 118 Bank 131 India 146."[91] This refers to the South Sea Company, the Bank of England and the East India Company, and was a common feature in printed newspapers at the time. On the same date, for example, the *Daily Courant*, the *Daily Post* and the *Evening Post* all reported the same

[90] For more on Gell's early life and family, particularly her mother, Katherine, see Ann Hughes, "'A soul preaching to itself': Sermon Note-Taking and Family Piety," in *People and Piety: Devotional Writing in Print and Manuscript in Early Modern England*, ed. Elizabeth Clarke and Robert W. Daniel (Manchester, 2020), 63-78. During her time at Hopton in the 1720s Gell established a school in Carsington to provide for the local poor children. A plaque on the Carsington and Hopton Primary School reads 'This School was Built and Given by Mrs Temperance Gell of Hopton for Twenty Poor Children of Hopton and Carson, to Learn to Read, Write, and other proper Works. Anno Dom: 1726'. See https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1109456

[91] D258/38/6/2, Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock.

stock prices.[92] Amy Froide has demonstrated that these stock listings were a common feature in printed news from the late seventeenth century onwards, used to attract public investment (and often provided a way for women to purchase shares and interact with the stock market).[93] They are not as common on manuscript newsletters, but the inclusion in Gell's correspondence again underlines the extent to which manuscript and print forms interacted. Moreover, they could indicate her financial position. We do not know if Gell specifically requested that stock listings be included in her newsletters or if the scribe included them as a matter of course, but they offered her an entry into a world of finance and trading.

As with Pole, there are no indications of Gell reading the newsletters; she did not annotate them in anyway. However, again, the price she would have paid and the regularity of their arrival indicates a desire to at least be seen as a consumer of news, and it is unlikely that she would have paid for their delivery if she did not have some interest in consuming their contents. The very act of subscribing to the newsletters gives us an insight into Gell's self-fashioning, contributing to her identity as a politically-engaged woman of good socio-economic standing.

Conclusion

The newsletters that Anne Pole received would have given her, had she read them diligently, a thorough and detailed knowledge of the political, economic and intellectual developments across early modern Europe, along with a passing familiarity with events in the Americas and the Middle East. She may have been a very well-informed woman, engaged with events far

[92] See *Daily Courant*, issue 7104, July 28, 1724; *Daily Post*, issue 1509, July 28, 1724; *Evening Post*, issue 2342, July 28-30, 1724.
[93] Amy M. Froide, *Silent Partners: Women as Public Investors during Britain's Financial Revolution, 1690-1750* (Oxford, 2017), 11.

beyond her rural Derbyshire home. She also would have been encouraged to draw on both manuscript and print news sources, reading widely to gain a fuller understanding of events.

The Pole collection is, as stated earlier, unusual in its size and scope, at least for newsletters addressed to a woman in this period. However, we should not assume that she was an outlier among her peers. As demonstrated briefly here, there are other examples of women reading manuscript newsletters, stretching from Elizabeth Tollemache in the early seventeenth century to Temperance Gell in the 1720s. Women in early modern England clearly did and could consume the news, often paying a significant price to receive the more coveted form of the manuscript newsletter. They may have subscribed in their own name, or read news received by male family members; the examples given here suggests a high likelihood that many other women read such newsletters, but their consumption was hidden if it was not in their own name. Moreover, we should not discount letters between friends and family as a means by which women got their news. Although beyond the scope of this article, women's letters are full of news items, whether they be of local, national or international import. Women such as Brilliana Harley, Joan Barrington and Elizabeth Mordaunt, to name a few, passed news between friends and family members and clearly had a large appetite for current affairs.[94]

Moreover, news reading could form an important part of a gentlewoman's identity, especially a woman who, like Pole and Gell, was socially and financially independent, either in widowhood or having never married. It is evident that newsletter writers did not expect women to be the majority audience for their work, but given that there were no specific strictures against women reading the news, perhaps this was a more common pastime than we

[94] See, for example, Thomas Taylor Lewis, ed., *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley, of Brampton Bryan, Knight of the Bath* (London, 1854); Searle, ed., *Barrington Family Letters, 1628-1632*; Mary Coate, ed., *The Letter-Book of John Viscount Mordaunt 1658-1660*, Camden Third Series, Vol 66 (London, 1945).

might initially assume. Reading could signal how a person wanted to define themselves: in reading devotional texts, for example, women were able to align themselves with a pious form of femininity. Owning and reading manuscript newsletters, therefore, could allow a woman to highlight certain parts of her character; to demonstrate her independence, her social standing as a member of the gentry, and her political allegiances – something which should certainly be considered a political action, if we are to follow Sharpe and Zwicker's suggestion that reading should be seen as political performance. This furthermore has implications for our understanding of active reading: even if there are no physical traces of reading, in the form of marginalia or other notes, identity construction itself should be seen as a form of activity.

It is clear, therefore, that more work has to be done to illuminate women's place as consumers of the developing news genre.[95] The assumption that they were not keen news readers overlooks the evidence of women such as Anne Pole, and the many others who engaged with the news in a variety of forms. Instead, we should recognize that many women were highly interested in the news, and that they were able to consume it in a number of different ways. The examples given here suggest that news reading may have been much more widespread that we have previously acknowledged, even if the archival records are patchy. This will not only develop our view of the news genre, but our understanding of women's participation in early modern politics. News, whether carried in familial letters or in more formalized sources such as newsletters or newsbooks, allowed women to participate in the political sphere, despite often living at some distance from London. Exploring how

[95] As an area, this is remarkably understudied. There has been some significant attention paid to women producers of the news, but little acknowledgement that women were also reading the news, except for the work of scholars such as Rachael Scarborough King (referenced here), and Helen Berry on the periodical press – see, for example, Helen Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England* (Aldershot, 2003). For work on women in the creation and production of news, see Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730* (Oxford, 1998); Marcus Nevitt, *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England, 1640-1660* (Aldershot, 2006).

women consumed the news, and how widespread this practice was, allows us to add another dimension to our understanding of early modern women and politics, showing that even those women who were not openly involved in political matters were far from disinterested in or removed from the early modern political world, but instead viewed it as a crucial part of their identity.