



Deposited via The University of Leeds.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/240437/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Topham, J. (Accepted: 2025) The "March of Intellect"? The Origins and Evolution of Cheap Illustrated Magazines in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain. *Victorian Periodicals Review*. ISSN: 0709-4698 (In Press)

This is an author produced version of an article accepted for publication in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, made available via the University of Leeds Research Outputs Policy under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

The “March of Intellect”? The Origins and Evolution of Cheap Illustrated Magazines in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

I first stumbled into Brian Maidment’s wonderful oeuvre in the early 1990s, through what I would guess is one of his least well-known publications. I am talking about a nicely produced booklet entitled *Into the 1830s: Some Origins of Victorian Illustrated Journalism—Cheap Octavo Magazines of the 1820s and Their Influence* that was published to accompany an exhibition at the Manchester Polytechnic Library during the 1992 RSVP meeting. Characteristically of Brian’s scholarship, both the exhibition and the booklet introduced scholars to important but unfamiliar material—in this case “*Penny Magazine* type journals of general information, illustrated with woodcuts, in the decade before the *Penny* was founded.”¹

For me, Maidment’s work on this topic was critical because it strongly evoked the vigour of the culture of cheap illustrated print in the years prior to the commencement of the famous titles of the 1830s—the *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers’s Edinburgh Magazine*—in a scholarly context in which those publications were generally seen to appear without precedent. Inspired to study one of the most important of the antecedents, the *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* (1822–49), I discovered a list of thirty-six rival titles that confirmed Brian’s findings. Not long after, he returned to the topic himself in *VPR*, offering a more thorough analysis of the new, cheap, illustrated “knowledge” magazines of the 1820s and 1830s that was pregnant with new questions.²

Brian’s “Dinners or Desserts? Miscellaneity, Illustration, and the Periodical Press” was motivated by a desire to qualify the view that “the expansion of the reading public in the 1820s and 1830s was inevitably linked to a decline in the intellectual coherence and ambition of the periodical press aimed at artisan readers.”³ While noting the striking degree of uniformity in many of the competing magazines of the 1820s, he began to uncover the diversity of those involved and the increasing degree of differentiation between the publications, with titles ranging from the *Mechanic’s Magazine* to W. J. Linton’s *National*. What becomes clear from his study is that this rich array of titles, whose lights have been dimmed by their proximity to the starlight of the *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers’s Journal*, still have much to reveal about the personnel, rationales, and consequences of the early cheap press.

The study of such periodicals helps to revise the story of the “march of intellect,” decentring well-known publishers and ideologues. But, as Brian understood better than anyone, it also contributes significantly to the still remarkably unexplored story of the changing place of wood engraving in early cheap journalism. The experiments of many of these periodicals with the graphical possibilities and cultural status of wood engraving were of real significance in the 1820s and 1830s, and the group of engravers who cut their teeth on them went on to play a critical role in later, better-known publications—not least the *Penny Magazine*, which spawned a vast international movement in cheap illustrated journalism. Thus, more than thirty years later, Brian’s exposition of the origins of such journalism still points the way to a rich and important ongoing research programme.

Jon Topham
University of Leeds

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Maidment, Brian. "Dinners or Desserts? Miscellaneity, Illustration, and the Periodical Press 1820-1840," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 43, no. 4 (2010): 353-387.
- Maidment, Brian. *Into the 1830s: Some Origins of Victorian Illustrated Journalism. Cheap Octavo Magazines of the 1820s and their Influence*. Manchester: Manchester Polytechnic Library, 1992.

¹ Maidment, "Into the 1830s," 5.

² Maidment, "Dinners or Desserts?" 360.

³ Maidment, "Dinners or Desserts?" 381.