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Chapter 1

The Foundation and Early Years of the *News of the World*: 'Capacious Double Sheets'

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Introduction

The *News of the World* (NOTW) was established in 1843 and quickly found a readership. By 1846, when Charles Mitchell first published his *Newspaper Press Directory*, the NOTW was claiming a weekly circulation of over 35,000. In this chapter, I consider how the NOTW carved out such a remarkable place for itself in the mid nineteenth-century market, becoming one of the largest-selling newspapers of all time. The Sunday newspaper was fairly well-established, the first – *E. Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* – had appeared in 1779, but it was the papers that emerged in the 1840s that demonstrated the large potential audience for cheap weekly newspapers. These papers, led by Edward Lloyd's *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* (later *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, then *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* 1842-1931), took advantage of the reduction of the newspaper stamp in 1836 to keep their prices as low as possible while orienting their contents towards the interests of this emerging market. Their success identifying and cultivating a readership amongst the working and lower-middle classes meant that they reached more readers than ever before. It is in this context, as a pioneering publication in the vanguard of a new and successful newspaper genre, that we must consider the NOTW.

The success of the cheap Sunday newspaper is generally attributed to its generous coverage of violent crime and close attention to the more scandalous proceedings in the courts. However, while the *Newspaper Press Directory* recognized that the NOTW was emblematic of a particular genre, it did not mention this type of content at all. According to the *Press*

Directory, the NOTW was 'one of the many papers which compresses into a capacious double sheet the news of the week'.[1] All weeklies contained the week's news: what was remarkable about the NOTW and its rivals was the amount of news they contained given their price. For the *Press Directory*, what made these papers distinct was the way they were oriented towards 'a class of readers who, though respectable, may be supposed – through incessant occupation in the week – not to have had much opportunity before the Saturday evening for newspaper reading.'[2] It was these busy readers, unwilling to pay for a daily paper and without the time to read it, that constituted the market for the cheap Sunday press. These readers may have wanted to read, in a mixture of prurience and shock, of the latest murder, but these were not the motives recorded by the *Newspaper Press Directory*.

The *Newspaper Press Directory* was aimed at advertisers and newsagents and, while it did not shy away from noting a paper's politics or tendency to excerpt from the police reports, tended to present them positively. As the NOTW was a cheap weekly, it may not have been necessary for the *Press Directory* to make explicit the type of content printed in its pages. Nonetheless, its delineation of this new genre is important as it situated it on grounds other than those for which it has become known. As Raymond Williams, amongst others, has argued, the cheap Sundays laid the foundations for the commercial mass press.[3] One of the key arguments for the reduction of the newspaper stamp in 1836 was that it would enable more respectable publications to compete with the radical unstamped papers that crowded the bottom end of the market. The success of the cheap Sundays, when they appeared sixteen years later, appeared to have achieved this end, displacing the unstamped press with newspapers whose politics and contents, although not ideal, were tolerable to the establishment. To understand the appeal of this new genre is to understand this broader political shift, as early nineteenth-century radicalism gave way to an increasingly hegemonic

Victorian liberalism. The NOTW, both less sensational and less radical than its two closest rivals, was the most representative of the genre. To understand its appeal, we must do more than look to its more lurid contents.

What follows is in two parts. The first describes the foundation of the NOTW and its place in the market for Sunday newspapers. The paper's founder, John Browne Bell (1779-1855), was well-placed to launch a new, cheap Sunday newspaper as he already had substantial experience in the print trade. The success of *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* made apparent the market for cheap, unillustrated Sunday papers: Bell, who already owned one Sunday paper, launched the NOTW in an attempt to develop this new market. The second part explores the way the NOTW positioned itself as a new cheap Sunday newspaper. Whereas it followed *Lloyd's Weekly* in an attempt to win a share of its working-class readers, the NOTW presented itself as an up-market alternative available for the same price. Its rapid success suggests that Bell judged the market correctly and the NOTW remained remarkably consistent in both form and content for the next thirty years. However, the newspaper market changed radically over this period, particularly after the repeal of the final tax on knowledge: the removal of paper duty in Gladstone's 1861 budget. The NOTW's refusal to follow its competitors and reduce its price to a penny has been attributed as the reason for its declining fortunes. It had conceived of itself as a respectable newspaper, aligned to the interests of working and lower middle-class readers and at a price they could afford. While the *News of the World* succeeded in adapting the upmarket newspaper for lower-class readers, after 1860 it was no longer a cheap weekly and so had to sell itself on other grounds.

John Browne Bell and the Sunday newspaper in the early nineteenth century

The market for Sunday newspapers was inaugurated by *E. Johnson's Sunday Gazette* in 1779 and, by 1795 there were five Sundays published in London.[4] Despite concerns about the sanctity of the Sabbath, these new Sunday papers closely resembled those published during the working week. *E. Johnson's Sunday Gazette's* only concession to the Sabbath, for instance, was the inclusion of the 'Sunday Monitor' column on its front page, where the theatre advertisements would otherwise be placed.[5] In 1796, John Browne Bell's father, John Bell, entered the market with *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (1796-1896). John Bell was a well-regarded (and well-connected) figure in the London print trade. He was a member of the syndicate behind the *Morning Post* (1772-1937) and his periodicals, the *World, or Fashionable Gazette* (1787-1794) and *La Belle Assemblée* (1806-1847), were important pioneering publications in their respective genres. His *Weekly Messenger* was a successful innovation of the Sunday newspaper, developing its review-like aspects to increase its appeal over the course of the week. Bell ensured its respectability, moderating its content and refusing to take advertisements to make it suitable for families. At seven and a half pence it was fairly expensive but the paper was considered good value (it expanded in 1802, 1810, and 1828) and found a market, particularly amongst country readers. Its circulation was modest – around 6,000 a week in 1803, climbing to 14,000 at the time of Nelson's funeral in 1806 – but this was sufficient to establish the paper and it prospered, surviving until 1896, when it became the *Country Sport and Messenger*.[6]

The market became more competitive in the early years of the nineteenth century and, by 1812, there were at least twelve papers published on a Sunday.[7] The *Observer* (1791-) and the *Weekly Dispatch* (1795-1961) were already well-established, but they were joined by the *Sunday Times* (1821-, originally as the *Sunday Observer*) and *Bell's Life in London* (1822), amongst others. The name 'Bell' clearly operated as a signifier for a type of Sunday

newspaper. The *Weekly Dispatch*, which was edited by an Irish barrister called Robert Bell, appeared as *Bell's Weekly Dispatch* for the first six years of its run; when *Bell's Life in London* appeared in 1822, Robert Bell made clear that it was nothing to do with him (it was founded by another Robert Bell[8]) and noted, too, that the *Weekly Dispatch* was unconnected with John Bell of the *Weekly Messenger*.[9] The market was clearly attractive but, because of the rise of the newspaper stamp in 1804 to three and a halfpence, there was little room to compete through price. Instead, the papers differentiated themselves through their content. The *Weekly Dispatch* (eight and a halfpence) and *Bell's Life* (seven pence), for instance, were both more radical and more seedy than the *Weekly Messenger*, targeting a knowing, London-based, male readership.

John Browne Bell made a number of attempts to establish himself in this market before the launch of the NOTW in 1843. He was motivated by a combination of commercial astuteness and personal grievance, often pitching his publications directly against those of his father. Bell's origins are a little murky. The *DNB* claims that John Bell 'appears never to have married and left his estate to his niece', but this appears to have been a deliberate attempt to disinherit his son.[10] John Browne Bell's record as a publisher certainly suggests he was aggrieved. In 1806 he launched *Le Beau Monde*, a 3s monthly that directly imitated his father's *La Belle Assemblée*, which had appeared just a few months previously, even going so far as to take its title from one of *La Belle Assemblée's* sections. In January 1808, Bell entered the Sunday market with his *National Register* (subtitled 'The King, Constitution, and Laws'), an 8d weekly that combined foreign and domestic news, commercial intelligence and police reports, with a review of national political institutions. The paper was not a success and in January 1809 Bell merged it with *Le Beau Monde*. The resulting paper, *Le Beau Monde and Monthly Register* lasted a few more months before being sold in April 1809 and

Bell and his publishing partner, John de Camp, were declared bankrupt the following year.[11] In 1824 Bell returned to the monthly periodical market, publishing the *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilltons* (1824-1851), another attempt to compete with his father's *La Belle Assemblée* with a title that also evoked his *World, and Fashionable Advertiser* (1787). This was a success, partly no doubt due to its close association with Mary Ann Bell, who had previously managed the fashion section of *La Belle Assemblée* before it was sold by John Bell in 1821.[12] However, it was after the death of his father, in 1831, that Bell attempted a new Sunday paper and this new venture represented his most audacious attack on his father's reputation to date. The new publication was called *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* (1831-1855), evoking his late father's *Weekly Messenger* while suggesting that it was both a continuation and successor.

While his father's *Weekly Messenger* circulated widely in the country (it would absorb the *Farmer's Journal* in 1834), *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* was intended for metropolitan readers and was modelled on established publications such as the *Weekly Dispatch* and *Bell's Life in London*. This made commercial sense as, according to James Grant, these were the two papers with the highest circulation of any paper, 'daily or weekly, in the United Kingdom.'[13] Bell disavowed any connection with his father's paper, which he referred to as 'that old journal, commonly called in the country "My Grandmother's Newspaper."'[14] Instead of its country interests and moderate Toryism, Bell espoused a form of liberalism that Grant thought verged 'on extreme radicalism'.[15] In this, the *New Weekly Messenger* positioned itself between *Bell's Life* and the *Weekly Dispatch*, which Grant thought were 'moderately Liberal' and 'Radicalism in its purest form' respectively.[16] In a move that he would repeat again with the NOTW, Bell entered a market that had already been opened up by his competitors and then attempted to compete on content. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*

was sixteen pages and contained sixty-four columns, larger than all of its rivals for more or less the same price.

Bell's New Weekly Messenger was initially 8d (the *Weekly Dispatch* was 8 1/2d; *Bell's Life* 7d) but, like most weeklies, it reduced its price to 6d after the reduction of the newspaper stamp in 1836. Despite their politics, these long-running weeklies made little attempt to compete with the cheaper, usually unstamped publications at the lower end of the market. It was in this area, however, that the NOTW would take shape. In the 1840s, there were a number of unstamped weeklies, usually with connections with radical politics and the chapbook and broadside traditions, that attempted to mimic the more respectable Sunday press. For instance, Edward Lloyd launched his *Penny Sunday Times and People's Police Gazette* (1840), its title alluding to both the *Sunday Times* and *Cleave's Weekly Police Gazette* while merging them both under the master-sign of the penny. In the same year a *Penny Weekly Dispatch* appeared. In 1841, this titular dexterity reached its climax with *Bell's Penny Dispatch, Sporting and Police Gazette, and Newspaper of Romance, and Penny Sunday Chronicle* (1841).[17] Nothing to do with John Bell, Robert Bell, or John Browne Bell, this paper included 'Bell' as one of many markers of genre in its title intended to demonstrate its capaciousness while masking its generic resemblance to its other penny rivals.

Edward Lloyd proved a particularly astute reader of the market. Observing the success of the *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*), a sixpenny illustrated weekly published on a Saturday, Lloyd launched *Lloyd's Illustrated London Newspaper* on the 27 November 1842. This new paper explicitly mimicked the distinctive front page of *ILN*, with a similar masthead, a large topical engraving, and the same number of columns. At tuppence, *Lloyd's Illustrated London Newspaper* significantly undercut the *ILN* but, as the paper was stamped, it also signalled

Lloyd's interest in developing the cheap end of the legitimate market. After accounting for the stamp, Lloyd's income was still a penny per issue but, selling at tuppence, his newspaper was in a different market. Despite the paper's success (in December 1842 he claimed that circulation was 100,000, 65,000 of which were in London[18]), Lloyd clearly believed that a different kind of publication was needed in this new market. From its eighth issue, dated 15 January 1843, Lloyd expanded the paper's size, redesigned the masthead so that it no longer resembled that of the *ILN*, removed the engraving, and hired Douglas Jerrold as editor. He also increased the cover price to two and a half pence, suggesting that he believed that readers would be willing to pay more for a larger paper.[19] In this new guise the paper, now called *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, with its five columns rather than three and on larger paper, more closely resembled the established form of the newspaper rather than the cheap illustrated weekly from which it was derived. In September 1843 he increased the price by another half penny, making it three pence, while adding another sheet to make it twelve pages rather than eight. Each increase in price raised Lloyd's revenue substantially and, although sales must have been affected each time, any losses were soon absorbed by the growing readership at the new price.

This was the newspaper that demonstrated the viability of the market for a cheap, stamped newspaper. Just as he had with *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, John Browne Bell watched one of his rivals establish a niche and then launched his own competing publication. On the 1 October 1843, the NOTW appeared, printed and published by James John Rogers at 30 Holywell Street, an address well-known in the trade as the former shop of the late printer and publisher Thomas Dolby. A threepenny Sunday newspaper, it was a marked departure for Bell and it placed him in direct competition with *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*.

However, he was not simply an imitator, following where others led. The NOTW might have been aimed at a similar set of readers, but this new paper would appeal on its own terms.

The *News of the World*

The entry for the NOTW in the *Newspaper Press Directory* in 1846 gives a sense of the new paper's place in the market. After noting that it is 'one of the many papers which compresses into a capacious double sheet the news of the week', the entry goes on to describe the NOTW's content:

> It has no very distinctive feature in its composition, which simply aims at giving as much news as possible; and of a general as well as political character. There is some attention given to literature; and a small selection of sporting news. Its commercial intelligence is good, and its 'Grocer's Gazette' seems to mark it out as favoured by that class of traders. It is well suited for the respectable tradesman and intelligent persons in that sphere; and its being cheaper than any newspaper (except one), tends of course to enlarge the circle of its readers.[20]

The emphasis is on economy, the amount of material the paper contains for its price, rather than anything exceptional about its contents. For the *Newspaper Press Directory*, the NOTW was a cheap, respectable weekly aimed at the upper working and lower middle classes.

If anything was distinctive about the NOTW, it was that it provided what looked like an upmarket newspaper for just three pence. The NOTW was a double sheet, with eight pages of six columns and claimed that it contained the maximum amount of type permitted under the Stamp Act.[21] Although *Lloyd's Weekly* had twelve pages, it was printed on smaller paper and only ran to five columns. On larger paper, the NOTW could not only compete in terms of size, it also looked more upmarket. In advertisements prior to the appearance of the first

issue on 1 October 1843, Bell boasted that the size of the NOTW 'will be equal to that of the *Times*, the largest newspaper in the Kingdom'.[22] This was a claim that the new newspaper was capacious, but it also situated it amongst expensive dailies rather than the cheap weeklies with which it was in direct competition.

Its title, too, differentiated the NOTW from its predecessors. There were plenty of papers that used planetary terms in their titles – the two evening papers the *Globe* (1803-1921) and the *Sun* (1792-1900), for instance – and Bell himself published *The Planet* (1837-1844) and the *World of Fashion*. Yet for the NOTW, 'the World' encompassed both the newspaper's coverage as well as its proposed readership. What was unusual was that the title lacked the name of a specific person. The market was dominated by publications whose titles featured somebody's name and so the 'News of the World' would have sounded strikingly new (as well as a little presumptuous). By not including his name in the title, Bell disassociated the newspaper from any of his other publications, particularly *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, but he also distanced the new paper from the genre of the Sunday paper. The name 'Bell', whether or not it referred to an actual individual, had become so closely-associated with the Sunday newspapers of the past forty years that by rejecting it, Bell signalled a clear break between the NOTW and its predecessors.

This sense of inclusiveness suggested by 'the World' also informed the way Bell imagined the NOTW's contents. In a column called 'The Politician' on the front page of the first issue, Bell suggested the paper could transcend class interests by aligning itself with 'truth':

> Journalism for the rich man, and journalism for the poor, has up to this time, been as broadly and distinctly marked, as the manners, the dress, and the habitations of the rich, are from the customs, the squalor and the dens of the poor. The paper for the

> wealthy classes is high priced, it is paid for by them, and it helps to lull them in the security of their prejudices. The paper for the poorer classes is on the other hand, low priced, and it is paid for by them; it feels bound to pander to their passions. TRUTH, when it offends a prejudice, and shews the evil of passion, is frequently excluded from both.[23]

'Truth' was what was missing from each of these class-bound journalisms but, it was implied, this absence is also what defined them. By aligning itself with 'truth', the NOTW created a space distinct from what it presented as class interest: a useful common ground to unite this otherwise divided readership.

'Truth' might have provided a conveniently apolitical perspective from which to pitch a new newspaper, but the NOTW's own class-position was much more complicated. Rather than take the best aspects of each type of journalism, the NOTW used aspects of journalism for the rich to remedy those inherited from the poor. Whereas journalism for the rich was 'remarkable for its talent, for its early intelligence', journalism for the poor was notable 'for the absence of talent, and the staleness of its news'. The supposed superiority of the former dictated both the shape of the NOTW and its place in the market. For instance, although Bell insisted that the 'general utility of all classes' was the originary motivation of the NOTW, its appeal was to be different for different classes. Whereas the paper was designed to suit the limited means of the 'poorer classes', it was its (at this stage predicted) 'immense circulation' that would command the attention of 'the middle , as well as the rich'. When Bell hoped that by combining the 'attractions of the rich newspaper' with 'the smallness of its price' he could 'secure a circulation amongst the poor and the rich', he actually intended a paper for the poor that, because of its circulation, would be noticed (and approved of) by the rich.[24] The NOTW

was presented as a cheap newspaper, not a radical one: this was to be rich man's journalism at a price suited to the poor.

While it has been common for historians to assume the NOTW's radicalism, its politics were carefully judged in order to cultivate as wide a readership as possible.[25] As Virginia Berridge has noted, radicalism was 'axiomatic in popular papers of this type', but it was a radicalism commodified 'to provide an easy appeal'.[26] For Raymond Williams, the NOTW, and other cheap Sundays that appeared in the 1850s, espoused a 'a more generalised social radicalism, of a kind corresponding to the alliance between middle-class and working-class political forces before 1832, in which rich and idle could be isolated as villains, but with innocence and magic (respectability and Providence) as the only effective alternative forces.'[27] For Williams, this radicalism took on the form of melodrama, emptying out politics to tell tales of vice and victimhood. As Williams argues, the cheap newspaper was both attuned to and a representative of a 'new urban popular culture' that was made visible in commercialized and commodified forms.[28] The NOTW, with its distinctive title and masthead, was particularly implicated in this new culture. For Stanley Morrison, it was a 'poor but flamboyant design', but as it incorporated 'a common sign-writer's lettering' it 'would have been familiar to the patrons of the old London music halls.'[29]

The NOTW shared the generic radicalism of its rivals, expressing sympathy for a range of radical causes, but tempered this with moderation. For instance, in the first 'The Politician', the NOTW offered the unpopularity of the Poor Law as 'a neutral ground – It is that of humanity, and of charity – on which the rich and the poor – the Whig, the Tory, and the Radical can meet together – can make their voices heard by the Government.'[30] Surveying what they saw as widespread apathy amongst the governing classes, the column notes the

Rebecca Riots, Chartism, calls for repeal in Ireland, and the Anti-Corn Law League as promising signs of activity but, rather than advocate any one of these movements, opted for the paternalistic course of ameliorating the widely despised consequences of the Poor Law. Looking back in a leading article at the end of 1844, this sympathetic but noncommittal politics was restated. The NOTW, it claimed, was 'devoted to the eternal cause of TRUTH', every political question 'dispassionately considered' and 'no one class […] upheld at the expense of others.' The newspaper was 'dedicated to THE GENERAL WELFARE OF THE COMMUNITY'. Supporting reform so as to 'relieve INDUSTRY of its heavy burthens, and TRADE of its unjust restrictions, without endangering the property or the institutions of the Country.' This was conventional liberalism, but it tempered its support for free trade with a radical afterthought. While the paper admitted 'the sacred Rights of Property', it nonetheless maintained that 'Property has its duties also; - that Labour has its Rights; and that the poor man's privilege should be sacred as the rich man's prerogative.'[31]

Its contemporaries tended to view the NOTW in these terms. In 1846 the *Newspaper Press Directory*, for instance, described its politics as 'liberal', making no further reference to its political opinions in the entry.[32] By 1851, it had modified this to 'Ultra Liberal', differentiating it from the solidly middle-class liberalism of the *ILN* ('Liberal in its general tone; in Politics, neutral') and the politics of its rivals amongst the cheap Sundays, *Lloyd's Weekly* ('Democratic and Anti-Poor-Law') and *Reynolds's Weekly* ('Chartist').[33] Twenty years later, James Grant registered the politics of the NOTW in the same way, offering it as the apolitical representative of a genre against which other publications might be judged. In his *History of the Newspaper Press* he described the politics of *Lloyd's Weekly* as 'thoroughly Liberal', but noted that it was 'not so extreme in that direction as those of some others of its weekly contemporaries.' Foremost amongst these was *Reynolds's Weekly*, which Grant

described as the 'organ of extreme Republicanism throughout the country.' For the NOTW, however, he noted its principles were 'Liberal' and that 'original political discussion' was not one of its features.[34] Given that 'The Politician' had been a fixture of the NOTW's front page from the outset, this judgement reflects the way that its specific politics were subsumed within the expected orientation of papers of this type.

As the *Press Directory* entry makes clear, what made the NOTW noteworthy was the amount of news it furnished for its low price, not its political stance. It took its boast to contain the news 'of the World' seriously, with a regular department 'Foreign News' occupying most of the second page. *Lloyd's* also published the news of the world as 'Foreign Intelligence', usually running to two or three columns and printed prominently on the first page. Although tucked away inside the paper (the front page was dedicated to advertisements, 'The Politician', and a column of 'Jokes' from *Punch*), the NOTW's coverage was both more extensive and better organized, ranging from East Asia, the Indian sub-continent, North America, and Europe. News from Ireland, then Scotland, often followed 'Foreign News', operating as a transition before 'Country News', usually starting on the third page. As was common in weekly newspapers, the leading articles were published at the centre of the paper, on page four, and were followed by 'Last News', which included late items from London, the rest of the country and abroad. It was not unusual for news items to move from this section of the paper to nearer the front over the course of the paper's three editions. For instance, the third edition of the NOTW for 8 October 1843 has two reports of a murder on the front page. In the second edition, they had been printed on page four in column six, following the leading articles. In the third edition these reports displace two royal proclamations, one asking for information regarding the Rebecca Riots, the other recalling some gold coins. Royal

proclamations were news, but they were not exclusive to the NOTW and they were less attractive to its readers.

As a weekly, the NOTW could draw upon the rest of the week's press for news. However, the necessity of Friday publication for country readers meant that it did not simply reprint or rewrite content from elsewhere. Bell knew that country readers were important if the NOTW was to sell enough to turn a profit and so different editions were published from the outset. The first edition went to press on Friday evening 'so as to be forwarded to all part of Europe that night, by the General Post' and did not contain any news received after seven o'clock that evening, including the day's gazettes.[35] Bell overstated the newspaper's circulation here as the Friday edition was more likely intended for more distant parts of Britain than for readers abroad.[36] The Saturday edition was published at six o'clock on Saturday morning and then continued to appear over the course of the day. This edition, according to the paper, contained 'all the news that reaches London, together with every occurrence that transpires in the metropolis, so that residents in the country are furnished with the news up to the latest moment.' Published on a Saturday, rather than a Sunday, this edition avoided any reservations by distributors and newsagents about sales on the Sabbath. The third and final edition went to press at six o'clock on Sunday morning and continued to appear throughout the day. This edition, for a London readership, contained 'all the information that can be collected being inserted as it arrives at our office.'[37]

This pattern of publication, which was established from the newspaper's first issue, ensured that readers across the country would receive the newspaper – if not exactly the same newspaper – at the same time. The *Newspaper Press Directory* of 1846 thought this was particularly noteworthy, speculating that the paper, due to its editions, was 'designed in a

great degree for country circulation.'[38] A few years later, the *Press Directory* discriminated further between the NOTW's readers and those of its rivals. In 1851, it described *Lloyd's Weekly* as 'peculiarly the poor man's paper' giving 'prominence to police reports, and similar matters of *popular* interest', but suggested that the NOTW was most likely read by busy tradesmen (on account of its 'Grocer's Gazette') who, due to 'incessant occupation in the week', had little 'opportunity before the Saturday evening for newspaper reading.'[39] However, although the NOTW thought of itself as 'a Miscellaneous Newspaper fit for family perusal, and enjoyment by the fireside', it was well aware of the commercial appeal of sensation reports of scandal, crime and violent accident.[40] These could often be found at the front of the paper (murder was still news, after all), but they tended to be printed on page five, to fill the space after the leading articles before the regular 'Literature' column on page six, and on page seven, where columns such as 'Central Criminal Court', 'Police', 'Robberies, &c' regularly featured.

That such content passed unremarked by the *Press Directory* demonstrates its generic nature. Sensational material was an important component of the newspaper in general, but the extent to which it was employed and the way that it was written played an important part in distinguishing between papers and situating them within the marketplace. The NOTW fully recognized the commercial appeal of such content, but took steps to ameliorate the generic associations that went along with its low price. As mentioned above, on large paper and unillustrated, the NOTW did not look like a cheap publication, and it took pride in this appearance.[41] Looking forward to the new year in December 1843, for instance, the NOTW boasted about the quality of its paper (by Venables, Wilson and Taylor) and its type (by Vincent Figgins).[42] In 1852, the paper announced its move into new offices on Exeter Street and the installation of 'new steam machinery with all the latest improvements for the

effective production of our newspaper.'[43] The paper's 'Literature' column also established a level of respectability. There was no original literature, only reviews, and these tended to be for non-literary works ranging from travel to popular science. When literary works were reviewed, they were judged both according to their literary merit and their likely appeal to the NOTW's readers: when Tennyson's *Maud* was reviewed in 1885, it was judged flawed because it was 'inaccessible to ordinary intellects.'[44]

The NOTW asserted its respectability in order to market itself to advertisers. In May 1844 it claimed its character guaranteed its 'circulation among the most respectable families in the kingdom' making it 'a most eligible medium for advertisements.' It went on to challenge the idea that the paper, because it was three pence, 'circulates amongst persons not interested in the perusal of Advertisements'. Instead, argue, 'its Readers are the most respectable and influential classes of society, and many thousand copies are sold weekly.'[45] While the NOTW wanted to sell as many papers as possible, it tried to do so with a paper that could appeal to a particular type of reader. In 1844, the NOTW claimed it had sold a total of 175,000 copies, based on the stamp returns from September, October and December 1843, a total higher than all other papers but *The Times* at 258,333 (it did not give totals for either the *Northern Star* or *Lloyd's*, probably the NOTW's chief competitors).[46] The figures were deliberately flattering, aggregating stamps with no regard to the periodicity of the publications, but the NOTW also began to volunteer weekly sales. On 1 September 1844 they were 13,876; by the end of the year they had reached 17,500. At these levels, income from sales dwarfed that from advertisements. To give an example, on the 22 September 1844 circulation was 15,153 and the paper contained about 173 lines of advertisements.[47] On the basis of their advertised rates, this meant that the paper received £187 10s from sales and £2 8d from advertisements (and this sum for advertisements assumes the NOTW derived an

income from advertising Bell's other publications, *World of Fashion*, *Gentleman's Magazine of Fashions*, and *Bell's Historical Scrapbook*). However, with a business model based upon a small return per issue (the NOTW claimed only a farthing was left to cover costs), advertising income, because it was free of overheads, was vital. In 1851, with a weekly circulation of 60,000, the paper was still declaring that 'its readers are the most intelligent and respectable classes or society' while teasing advertisers that 'only a limited space' was allotted for them.[48]

Fox Bourne, in his *English Newspapers* (1887), claims that the NOTW promised 'to emulate all the virtues and avoid all the vices of the other papers' but 'hardly kept its word':

> Its radicalism was more violent than that of *Lloyd's*, and it was more freely supplied with offensive news; but it pleased many readers, and in the course of twelve years it attained a circulation of nearly 110,000, being some two or three thousand ahead of *Lloyd's*.[49]

While it was true that the NOTW rapidly found a market and was able to increase its circulation week by week, reaching 110 thousand a week by 1855[50], it was neither more radical nor more bloody than its rivals. It was certainly aware of the commercial appeal of both radical politics and sensational news and it employed both astutely, but the NOTW presented itself as a respectable newspaper at a cheap price. Fox Bourne's judgement, some 43 years after the paper first appeared, shows both the ability of the genre – the cheap Sunday paper – to overwhelm the characteristics of that genre's representatives and the effect this had on the NOTW's reputation, which had become fixed.

Yet the significance of the NOTW depends upon recognizing its distinct place within the market. For Virginia Berridge, the origin of the cheap Sundays 'lay not in a natural

outgrowth of working-class consciousness, but in a shrewd assessment of the possibilities of an expanding working-class market.'[51] Each paper found its own niche within this market and its own way of addressing and appealing to its readers: for the NOTW, this was by marketing itself as a paper that was affordable by everyone and contained as much news as possible. If, as for Berridge, the cheap Sundays' 'commercial synthesis of radicalism and sensationalism resulted in manipulation of the old traditions of radical journalism so that the real roots of social and economic distress were effectively ignored', the NOTW was particularly important as it represented the fullest example of this synthesis.[52] More moderate than its closest rivals, the NOTW was an explicit attempt to create what would become the popular press. Capitalized and commercialized, the NOTW presented itself as an apolitical yet democratic product, available to all, that contained everything, apparently, that its readers needed to know.[53]

Conclusion: 1855, 1861, and the refusal to charge a penny

The achievement of the NOTW was striking. The paper was launched in 1843 into a new market but, rather than imitate its predecessors, it struck out distinctly on its own. This initial innovation paid off for the paper and it attracted a readership that grew for nearly two decades. This was a publication that was confident of its market. After the repeal of the newspaper stamp in 1855 the NOTW, like its rivals, reduced its price by a penny. The paper claimed that tuppence 'was always our price, the additional penny being paid to Government for the stamp' and then restated its universalist aims:

> "THE NEWS OF THE WORLD" will always contain NEWS FOR ALL READERS. The Fullest Intelligence from the Seat of War, including Original Correspondence and Official Despatches – News from all the Foreign Courts – News

> from all the Colonies – News from the Gold Fields – News from all parts of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales – News for the Politician – News for the Diplomatist - News for Citizens and for Country Gentlemen – News for the Ladies – News for the Family Circle – News of Everything for Everybody.[54]

Even accounting for the expected self-aggrandizing hyperbole common in such pronouncements, the fact that the NOTW chose this moment to restate its aims so fully shows how it perceived of itself – and wanted its readers to perceive it – in the market. Its cheapness was at the service of its accessibility, and the paper took care to exorcise the various less-savoury connotations that were associated with it.

From the first of July 1855 it was available on unstamped paper at two pence, although a stamped impression at three pence was also produced for despatch in the post. Although it attempted to present itself as a political conduit for (relatively) unmediated news, the NOTW was nonetheless committed to a certain relationship with its readers. The paper knew that sensational news reports and some sort of sympathy, at least, with radical politics were not only expected in a cheap Sunday newspaper, but were essential for its survival. Nonetheless, when its rivals began to reduce their price by another penny in 1861, the NOTW did not follow them. John Browne Bell had died in 1855 and the paper was held in trust by his son, John William Bell, for his younger siblings, Walter John Bell and Adolphus Bell. A further reduction in the price of the paper would have halved its income from sales: even with the increase in the number of advertisements in the paper in the 1850s and 1860s, sales were still the paper's major source of revenue and so such a reduction would have substantially reduced the estate. The NOTW's rivals, especially *Lloyd's*, were in a similar commercial position but, for them, the reduction paid off in continuing increased sales. As it would be decades before the NOTW would follow suit, it suggests that the paper thought that it would retain its

position in the market at tuppence. Whereas previously the paper had competed directly with the other Sundays, its price meant that it occupied a position of its own. The gamble was whether its readers would recognize – and so pay for – its distinctiveness, or would simply see the paper as a more expensive version of the cheap Sunday paper now represented by its rivals.

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[1] 'The News of the World', *Newspaper Press Directory*, London: C. Mitchell, 1846, p. 79.

[2] 'The News of the World', p. 79.

[3] Raymond Williams, 'The Press and Popular Culture: An Historical Perspective', in George Boyce, James Curran, and Pauline Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History: from the 17th Century to the Present Day*, London: Constable, 1978, pp. 41-50.

[4] Stanley Morison, *The English Newspaper: Some Account of the Physical Development of Journals Printed in London between 1622 and the Present Day*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, p. 229.

[5] Morison, *English Newspaper*, p. 229.

[6] Alison Adburgham, *Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines From the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972, pp. 185-6; Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, 1981; London: Fontana, 1990, p. 51; Cheryl Law, '*Bell's Weekly Messenger: The Country Gentleman and Landowner's Journal* (1796-1896)', in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds), *DNCJ: Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, Gent and London: Academia Press and the British Library, 2009, p. 47.

[7] G.A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society: From Caxton to Northcliffe*, London and New York: Longman, 1978, p. 86.

[8] Harold Herd, *The March of Modern Journalism: The Story of the British Press from 1622 to the Present Day*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952, p. 83.

[9] Morison, *English Newspaper*, p. 243.

[10] See Morison, *English Newspaper*, p. 241; Adburgham, p. 227; Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957, p. 55; Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, London: British Library, 2006, p. 109. Morison denied a family connection between John Bell and John Browne Bell in his *John Bell, 1745-1831: A Memoir*, 1930; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 (see p. 52) but subsequently changed his mind in *English Newspaper*. For a contemporary assertion, see [James Grant], *The Great Metropolis*, 2 vols, 2, London: Saunders and Otley, 1837, p. 141.

[11] See, for instance, 'Bankrupts', *Manchester Mercury* 26 March 1811, p. 3. Bell and De Camp are described as 'booksellers, printers, publishers, dealers and chapmen.'

[12] There is some discussion as to Mary Ann Bell's identity. Adburgham suggests she must be either John Bell's wife or daughter in law, p. 227. Either way, the *World* was published from Mary's shop in 1832, and John Browne Bell was also

listed at this address (see Morison, *John Bell*, p. 75). Mary Ann does not appear in the 1840s and perhaps this is connected to the death of Browne Bell's youngest son in 1844. See the *Morning post*, 4 March 1844, p.8.

[13] [Grant], p. 134.

[14] Morison, *English Newspaper*, p. 250; Herd, p. 84.

[15] [Grant], p. 142.

[16] [Grant], p. 135, 137.

[17] Morison, *English Newspaper*, p. 257.

[18] 'To Advertisers', *Lloyd's Illustrated London Newspaper*, 11 December 1842, 20.

[19] James Grant, *History of the Newspaper Press*, 3 vols, 3, London: George Routledge, 1871, p. 92. See also Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 163-4.

[20] 'The News of the World', p. 79-80.

[21] See 'The News of the World', NOTW, 8 October 1843, p. 4.

[22] The advertisement ran in a number of provincial papers in the weeks preceding publication, including the *Taunton Courier*, *Leeds Times*, *Worcestershire Journal*, and *Sherborne Mercury*. See for instance 'The Novelty of Nations and Wonder of the World', *Leicestershire Mercury*, 16 September 1843, p. 1.

[23] 'The Politician', NOTW, 1 October 1843, p. 1.

[24] 'The Politician', p. 1.

[25] For the NOTW as ultra-radical, see S. Maccoby, *English Radicalism, 1832-1852,* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935, p. 420; John Hartley, 'Journalism, History and the Politics of Popular Culture', in Stuart Allan (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 14. For a more moderate appraisal, see Louis Dudek, *Literature and the Press: A History of Printing, Printed Media, and Their Relation to Literature*, Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1960, p. 73.

[26] Virginia Berridge, 'Popular Sunday papers and mid-Victorian society', in Boyce, Curran, and Wingate (eds), p. 257, 259.

[27] Williams, 'The Press and Popular Culture', pp. 44-5.

[28] Williams, 'The Press and Popular Culture', pp. 46.

[29] Morison, *English Newspaper*, p. 255.

[30] 'The Politician', p. 1.

[31] 'A Few Words to the Public on the Close of the Year', NOTW, 22 December 1844, p. 4.

[32] 'The News of the World', p. 79.

[33] See 'News of the World', '*Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*', and '*Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*', *Newspaper Press Directory*, London: Charles Mitchell, 1851, p. 123-4, 116, 133.

[34] Grant, 3, p. 95, 97, 87.

[35] See ‘To Our Readers and the Public’, NOTW, 11 February 1844, p. 4.

[36] For instance, in 1845 the paper boasted it was received in Plymouth by seven o’clock on Saturday and so readers could choose which edition they preferred. This suggests that until this point only the first edition was available to readers in Devon and Cornwall. See NOTW, 5 January 1845, p. 1.

[37] ‘To Our Readers and the Public’, p. 4.

[38] ‘The News of the World’, *Newspaper Press Directory*, 1846, p. 79-80.

[39] ‘*Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper*’ and ‘*News of the World*’, *Newspaper Press Directory*, London: Charles Mitchell, 1847, p. 106 and 123-4.

[40] 'A Few Words to the Public on the Close of the Year’, NOTW, 22 December 1844, p.4.

[41] They did publish a series of portraits in 1844, and occasional images appeared over the run. See for instance NOTW, 14 and 21 July 1844.

[42] See NOTW, 24 December 1843, p. 1.

[43] See NOTW, 10 October 1852, p. 4; Griffiths, p. 110. They also announced a fresh set of type from Figgins.

[44] See ‘Literature’, NOTW, 16 September 1855, p. 6.

[45] NOTW, 5 May 1844, p. 1.

[46] See for instance, 'Declaration of the Publishers and Printers of the *News of the World*’, NOTW, 1 September 1844, p. 1.

[47] The weekly sales were reported the following week. See 'Declaration of the Publishers and Printers of the NOTW’, NOTW, 29 September 1844, p. 1.

[48] ‘To Advertisers’, NOTW, 5 January 1851, p. 4.

[49] H.R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism*, 2 vols, 2, London: Chatto and Windus, 1887, pp. 122-3.

[50] See ‘To Advertisers’, NOTW, 22 April 1855, p. 4. They claim a circulation of 109,106 a week and compare this to *The Times’s* 51,204.

[51] Berridge, p. 253.

[52] Berridge, p. 256.

[53] Williams, 'The Press and Popular Culture’, p. 47. The NOTW was set up with £15,000 capital: see Brian Winston, *A Right to Offend*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012, p. 73.

[54] ‘Notice to the Public’, NOTW, 1 July 1855, p. 4.