

POPULAR NEWSPAPERS DURING WORLD WAR I

Parts 1 to 3: 1914-1919 (The Daily Express, The Mirror, The News of the World, The People and The Sunday Express)

Publisher's Note

When the world descended into the First World War, a barbaric struggle of unparalleled brutality, the primary method for the dissemination of news was the popular press. The British Government realised this and exercised strict controls over reporting. However, these newspapers still have a great deal to offer historians of this period.

Many reporters followed the troops at the front and provide eye-witness reports of conflicts such as the Somme and Gallipoli. They report on the resigned bravery of the common soldier, and the attitudes of their commanders; on the efforts of the nursing corps, and the fate of prisoners of war; on the inflexible nationalist fervour of domestic politicians, and the revolutionary struggles in Russia.

Complete sets of *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The News of the World*, *The People* and *Sunday Express* enable researchers to compare and contrast the reporting of the particular issues and events across the breadth of the popular press. In the case of *The Daily Express*, scholars can see the impact made on the editorial content of a newspaper by a change in ownership - as William Maxwell Beaverbrook, aged 36, acquired *The Daily Express* from R D Blumenfeld in 1915.

Part 1 covers 1914-1915. War did not seem at all inevitable in early 1914 and on 4 January 1914 *The News of the World* even ran a story on "Our New and Cordial Relations with Germany". Even in May 1914, talk of war is more likely to refer to the American war in Mexico. Women's Suffrage issues are widely and contrastingly reported. But after 28 June when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were murdered at Sarajevo, Bosnia, with shots that rang out around the world, the imperatives of nationalism forced Austria to declare war on Serbia (28 July), Russia to support Serbia, Germany to declare war on France (3 August) and Britain to declare war on Germany in support of Belgium and France (4 August). By 16 August the newspapers were describing "the World's Greatest Battle: 2,000,000 Men Meet in Mighty Conflict". Allied attempts to overcome the stalemate of trench warfare by maintaining landings in Gallipoli in 1915 are also described in detail. The ultimate failure of the assaults on Turkey and Mesopotamia caused widespread gloom.

Part 2 covers 1916 and 1917, encompassing the indecisive naval battle of Jutland, the first battle of the Somme (in which a nine mile advance cost over 400,000 lives to the British forces), the submarine warfare in the Atlantic and the eventual entry into the conflict of the United States of America in 1917. The drive to conscript men comes vividly alive, both in the editorial justification of enrolling working men without consent or choice and also in Lord Kitchener's recruitment adverts which leap from the pages. The condemnation and persecution of conscientious objectors is also followed, largely unsympathetically.

Germany was relieved on the Eastern Front when the Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty following the Russian Revolution, but the Allies made gains in the Middle East as Allenby captured Palestine from the Turks. Also in 1917, Allied forces were again able to make only small gains for the loss of enormous numbers of lives in the mud of Ypres, but the issue of tanks at Cambrai promised to end trench warfare. Beaverbrook was closely involved with the replacement of Asquith as Prime Minister in December 1916 by Lloyd George and this is reflected in *The Daily Express*.

Part 3 concludes the project and covers both 1918 and 1919. The cumulative impact of Allied naval supremacy (consequently reducing Axis supplies) and the growing presence of American forces on the Western front forced the war to a conclusion. After watching Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria collapse, the Kaiser fled and peace was formalised by the armistice of 11 November 1918. Over 7 million men had been killed in the war and the economies of many of the major powers were wrecked. The Peace Treaties signed in 1919 were deliberately punitive and sowed the seeds for the Second World war twenty years later. In Britain, women were given the vote and were to enter nearly all public offices and professions and Lady Astor was the first women MP elected to take her seat in Parliament. Union power began to exert an influence as a threatened miners' strike and a successful railway strike paved the way for labour unrest in the 1920's and 1930's. Violence at the General Strike in Glasgow (31 June) threatened social unrest.

These newspapers provide a mass of evidence for the social history of this period, as the popular press always sought to reflect popular culture and stay in touch with public opinion concerning the war, labour disputes, women's right to vote and work, and the human issues of the period.

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Brief Portrait of the Papers

Daily Express

The Daily Express was a popular daily newspaper that was primarily aimed at the middle-class and Tory working class households. It was strongly nationalist and imperialist and fiercely patriotic. The paper always carried a high news content with articles such as "Desperate German Attacks hurled in vain Against the Allies" headlining its front page. The articles were supplied by a stable of regular writers supplemented by special field reporters and outside contributors. There was also a regular Political cartoon, placed prominently in the centre of a right hand page.

Adverts were always an important element of the paper and provide evidence of popular taste. There was always at least a ½ page advert from Selfridges for clothing and fashion. Adverts filled the edges of the paper, ranging from Whisky and cigarettes to Fountain Pens and furniture.

Other regular features included: theatre and entertainment features, 'Fashion Reflections' and other interests such as births, deaths, marriages, 'For Sale', 'Wanted' and 'Today in the Garden' slots.

The Daily Express featured the war very strongly throughout its pages with little or no room left for Human Interest stories. There were a lot of 'Hero' stories and many of the papers, including the *Daily Express*, featured a column for the 'Casualties of War', listing names of those who were killed, wounded, missing or hospitalised and it always carried an advertisement for more men to join the forces.

Daily Mirror

The Daily Mirror was a popular daily newspaper and claimed that it had a "Certified circulation larger than that of any other Daily Picture Paper". It was a tabloid rather than a broadsheet. It had a long standing relationship with the labour and trades union movement and was aimed at the middle and working class households.

It was one of the first dailies to introduce photographs to its pages and a quarter of the paper concentrated on photographs of the war and those associated with it. It cornered the market for the bizarre and aimed to amuse as well as to inform. It minimised its news content to a double page, leaving space for adverts on female interests, such as 'Infant feeding' and 'Grey Hair'. Its Human Interest articles covered stories such as " 'Spiritualistic' Quacks in War-time", which told of Mediums, Crystal Gazers and Palmists being bombarded with female believers, worried about relatives at war.

It featured a political cartoon; adverts for clothing outlets, tobacco and food; short stories "Like all other Men" by Mark Allerton being one of many; 'This Mornings Gossip'; a sport and entertainment page; 'A thought for today' and 'In my Garden' also featured regularly. It often featured Winston Churchill as he wrote a column in the 'Sunday Pictorial' for the Paper.

News of the World

The News of the World was, without doubt, the most 'Popular' newspaper in Britain in simple circulation terms. It stated on the front page that "Certified circulation Exceeds 2½ Million copies weekly" and changed in future copies to "Largest Circulation in the world". It was a light and lively paper with its title printed in a cheery banner effect. The front page held the regular political cartoon with news stories surrounding it. The following pages concentrated on Human Interest stories rather than a news content. Adverts filled a majority of the paper, from Bovril and soap to remedies for illness. Photos and Pictures were featured on every page but did not override the articles. Its features included cartoons, Human Interest stories (eg: "Courtied Two Lovers: Airman has to pay damages. Did not end with old before starting with new"); a song page; a regular serialised story "The Laughing Mask"; Amusements; At the Halls; Missing relatives; Photos found on the battlefield and a regular slot on "Your Weekly Ration" informing people of their entitlement. Its stories always included a 'Quirky' heading perhaps encouraging people to read on.

The People

The People described itself as "A Weekly Newspaper for all Classes". It was produced on a Sunday and featured many human interest stories such as "portraits found on the battlefield" which provided images of loved ones found amongst the casualties. It contained regular articles on gardens and small holdings. "The Home Page" featured articles on clothing and fashion, concentrating on female interests. Divorce court stories and articles on "the turf" and the Music-hall also featured regularly. It included some photographs and a regular political cartoon, along with a strip of illustrations entitled "Various phases of the war as seen by Leading Cartoonists of other Lands". These were images from Austria, Canada, America, France and Germany. The strip was excluded when the paper reduced its size from 16 pages to 13. Adverts filled the edges of the paper, ranging from soap to Bovril and Grapenuts. It also featured a regular "Reply to Readers Queries" page.

The Sunday Express

The Sunday Express was launched by Lord Beaverbrook in 1918 as a Sunday stablemate to the *Daily Express*. It was a Nationalist and Imperialist paper and was proud to be so. It was less heavy than other war-filled papers and contained short news features. It had a regular cartoon on its front page and had a high emphasis on female articles, adverts and interests. Beaverbrook used his connections to land scoops and review articles by leading figures and had regular writers such as H Trevor and E V Lucas. It featured 'Green Room Gossip'; 'Music in London'; 'Some best books'; a female interest page; a childrens corner featuring cartoons and competitions; specials on "Sport by Sportsmen for Sportsmen". Photos appeared prominently with headings such as 'People in the News'. They were portrait photos of people, mainly beautiful women and, during 1919, the paper ran a competition for new women cinema stars and printed each photo entry. It contained many Human Interest stories such as the Drug Related Death of Bille Carlton, a rising young actress, regarding the tragedy as a "cocaine induced sleep of death". Fashion outlets featured high among its range of adverts as it seemed to relate to a female audience.

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