

The diaries of a newspaper journalist, 1865-1912: a scholarly edition

Report on use of a 2012 Curran Fellowship

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I write to thank RSVP and the Curran Fellowship committee for supporting my background research into the Victorian provincial journalist, Anthony Hewitson. The fellowship provided much needed funding to enable me to travel to libraries and archives around the North of England, and to the *Times* archive and the British Library in London. These visits have added a great deal of contextual information to Hewitson's diaries, which I aim to publish in a scholarly edition. They have also given me a broader national picture of the Victorian provincial press, which will assist other research and writing.

The fellowship enabled me to travel to:

Lancaster public library: Hewitson served his printing apprenticeship on the Tory *Lancaster Gazette* from 1850 to 1857, initially under the editorship of Mortimer Collins, and launched a Conservative paper, the *Lancaster Standard*, in 1893. Browsing through the *Standard* (on microfilm) confirmed that it was the 'official organ' of the Conservative-Unionists, operating as a weekly electoral address for the Tory candidate; it had Hewitson's chatty style but was a mixture of a traditional local weekly and a New Journalism-style populist paper. Hewitson appears to have left the paper by October 1894. Consulting rival titles for comment on their new competitor revealed some of the business and political arrangements of Hewitson's paper. Local history books and a jubilee pamphlet for another paper, the *Lancaster Guardian*, gave valuable context.

Kendal public library: Hewitson spent just two months here, as compositor and reporter on the Radical *Kendal Mercury*, from July to September 1857. He was politically Radical and theologically liberal, so it was no surprise that the *Mercury's* editor was an ordained Unitarian minister, George Lee. The paper, a traditional 3 ½d weekly, published poetry by Goodwyn Barmby, the communist and Unitarian, who had been a member of an essay class in Lancaster attended by Hewitson during his apprenticeship. Comparing issues before and after Hewitson arrived, his flowery style can be detected in some reports, such as an account of Cumberland wrestling at Ulverston (15 August 1857), where 'many noble and symmetrical figures, when stripped to their tights, were presented to the view of the spectators – there were in fact not only Goliaths in stature, but Samsons in bone and muscle' etc etc. Local histories such as Curwen's *Kirkbie-Kendall* and Nicholson and Axon's *The Older Nonconformity in Kendal* gave valuable background to the newspapers and their proprietors. The rival Tory *Westmorland Gazette* makes no mention of Hewitson (unsurprisingly), but does carry poetry by his former editor, Collins, illustrating the extensive journalistic and literary networks of which Hewitson was part.

Dudley Archives: Hewitson was invited to the *Brierley Hill Advertiser* by a former printing colleague at Lancaster, where he worked as compositor, reporter and editor from September to December 1857. Browsing all the local papers and tracing their histories brought to life the publishing ferment of the late 1850s after repeal of the advertising and stamp duties, as new titles were launched, old ones either adapted or died, and rapidly expanding local markets were defined, week by week. The *Advertiser* was a four-page penny paper, launched in 1853, probably with its two centre pages of non-local material supplied by a London printer. During Hewitson's brief stay poetry is introduced and the number of leaders on local subjects increases, and are written in his distinctive style. A later biographical sketch of Hewitson in *Yorkshire Notes and Queries* suggests that he worked on two

other papers in the Black Country after the *Brierley Hill Advertiser*, a Dudley paper printed by a Mr York in Queen St, Wolverhampton, and one called the *News*, also printed by York. Part of this mystery was solved, by examining all the contemporary local titles, and finding the marvellous *Dudley and Midland Counties Express* (Sept 1857-Aug 1858), a high-quality 16-page tabloid newspaper/magazine with predominantly local content, but printed in London. From December 1857, it was printed by Joseph York, Wolverhampton, when 'The Proprietors beg[ged] to announce that they have secured the services of gentlemen of eminent ability to conduct the Literary departments of the paper'. Presumably Hewitson was one of these gentlemen. His paper's rival was the *Dudley Times*, launched in 1856; comparison of the two reveals a price war, poaching of staff and eventual capitulation by the *Express*, when it is subsumed into the *Times*. It is likely that Hewitson learnt from this fierce rivalry in highly competitive local markets. However, I could find no trace of a *News* published by York.

Manchester Guardian archive, Manchester University: Hewitson was proud of his status as a regular correspondent for this paper, commencing when he was still an apprentice in Lancaster and continuing for more than 30 years, according to his diaries. However, he appears to have left no trace in the *Guardian's* surviving papers, which record their more 'literary' freelance contributors, including leader writers, but not lowly district correspondents like Hewitson, at least from the 1850s to the 1880s. A summary of the costs of producing the *Guardian* in 1857 reveal that more was spent on 'District & Provincial reporting', presumably freelance (£514), than on reporters' salaries (£422), suggesting that Hewitson was only one of scores, possibly hundreds, of occasional freelance and moonlighting reporters. However, the archive contains plenty of other useful material, including an estimate of the costs of producing one issue of the *Family Herald*, *Guardian* sales in each town of its circulation area in 1852(?), fees paid to contributors, including dialect writers Ben Brierley and Edwin Waugh in 1888 (Waugh was worth a guinea and a half per item, Brierley only a guinea), some typescript scholarly articles about the *Guardian* and other provincial papers, presumably written by Wadsworth, the editor during the 1950s (and seemingly unpublished --see Ayerst 615 -- including one that concludes the main attraction for *Guardian* readers in the 1830s was its local content), plus snippets on Preston papers and personnel.

Times archive, London: Hewitson was also proud of his association with the *Times*. The very helpful archivist, Nick Mays, had warned me in advance that there was only one mention of Hewitson, but I wanted to check for myself, and to gain some contextual knowledge of the *Times* 'country correspondents'. Hewitson appears in a printed list for 1877, one of around 200 country correspondents, most of whom are reporters or editors of local papers. There are some letters from the *Times* manager, Mowbray Morris, to or about other district correspondents, giving a flavour of their work and reasons for their occasional dismissal – Mr Rawson of Nottingham was dispensed with in 1866 because the *Times* was 'not satisfied with either the accuracy or the originality of his reports'.

Wakefield local studies library: In 1894, a year after launching the *Lancaster Standard*, Hewitson went into partnership with William Carr and began to 'manage' the Conservative *Wakefield Herald*. In 1896 he bought Carr out, and he and his sons ran the paper until its sale in 1911. Browsing the *Herald* and its competitors and consulting local history books gave the dates of Hewitson's involvement, its political line and its place within the local newspaper market.

British Library: This visit was to tie up loose ends and look at the trade press. I checked the *Wolverhampton Spirit of the Times* microfilm for 1859, but its date and publisher meant that it had no connection with Hewitson's time in the Midlands. I also consulted Mitchell's *Newspaper Press Directory* but found nothing new on Hewitson; however an 1846 article on 'Country newspapers and their management' gave some useful background, including mention of correspondents and of the sub-editing function (I have a hunch that a study of the sub-editor across the 19th century could be very illuminating). Unfortunately, trade press titles such as *Printer's Register* and *Press News* were

not available, during the gap between Colindale closing and the robots at Boston Spa beginning their work.

The research enabled by the Curran Fellowship has added specific detail, and more importantly, broader context to Hewitson's diaries. Being able to visit each place in which he worked made the diaries more vivid. Some details were included in a very successful play that I, a scriptwriter and actor created from the diaries, to mark the centenary of Hewitson's death in October 2012, and I am now using the material to draft an introduction, and sample footnoted year, with which I will approach publishers.

Thanks again for the financial help, and for your vote of confidence in this project.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hobbs