

To: Curran Fellowship committee, Research Society for Victorian Periodicals
From: Dallas Liddle
Re: Report on 2018 Curran Fellowship project, “News Machines”

I am writing with profound gratitude to report on a May-June 2018 research trip to five London libraries and/or archives made possible by your award of a Curran Fellowship this past summer.

The Curran Fellowship, supplemented by a small summer research grant from my institution, enabled me to stay in London researching full-time for more than three weeks from 14 May to 6 June, consulting the archives of the London *Times* (in the News Corp International archives), the rare books collections of the London School of Economics, the public collections of the Science Museum, the private collection of the St. Bride Printing Library, and of course the British Library.

I began with a list of specific materials in these collections I need for a book project on the systems history of Victorian daily news, and found almost everything on the list. At the LSE a file on the working history of Victorian compositors was missing, but I copied the entire “leader diary” of Leonard Henry Courtney, the most productive *Times* leader-writer of the nineteenth century, and I am using it to reconstruct Courtney’s individual working practices and trace the shape of his career. At the Science Museum the model printing machines I hoped to examine were not on display and staff could not locate them, but I did photograph a mid-century Victory printing machine in detail. At the News UK Archive I reviewed dozens of volumes of leader-diary records and their summaries and details of how articles were assigned. At the British Library I reviewed all important patents filed during the development of newspaper printing machines in the nineteenth century. At the St. Bride Printing Library I found contemporary guides describing the practices and complexities of newspaper bookkeeping.

The most rewarding moments of the trip, however, involved documents I had not known existed. Some of these confirmed guesses about Victorian newspaper history; others actually altered my understanding of evolving newspaper practices; others I am still happily analyzing. For example, I was able to find documentation of the organizational structure, hierarchy, and payroll of the mid-Victorian *Times*, which suggests it was managed differently than any other contemporary newspaper—and differently than I had believed. Original correspondence between newspaper editors and government officials (J.T. Delane and Viscount Canning; Lord Palmerston and John Easthope of the *Morning Chronicle*) helped clarify how politicians interacted with the supposedly independent press—Palmerston in the 1830s in particular literally dictated the form and much verbatim content of leaders that appeared in the next day’s paper, although, interestingly, it appears he was not able to get the paper’s Parliamentary report altered. A short-lived attempt pre-*Palmer’s* to simultaneously index *The Times* and three other morning papers, which I had not known about but

that the British Library allowed me to scan complete, should enable me to identify and quantify the exact differences in topics and coverage between papers in the later 1830s.

In fact, it is clear that the resources and primary sources I was able to access thanks to the Curran Fellowship will make “News Machines” a far more useful and accurate study than it could possibly have been otherwise, and helped me avoid major mistakes and clarify misunderstandings that would otherwise have ended up in print. (One of my favorite theses, that the *Times* was a self-organizing system, was partly disproven by what I found in the *Times* archive--the real story about the paper’s unique organizational architecture is much more interesting.) Meanwhile, my understanding of and ability to document how all the individual subsystems of Victorian news worked and developed—leader-writing, leader-writing, reporting, composing, printing, sub-editing—was deepened and enriched.

In total, over the three weeks in London it appears that I consulted well over 100 separate books, articles, documents, reference works, and collections (many available nowhere else). I took over 500 photographs of documents or artifacts, and made 160 single-spaced pages of computer notes as well as 15 pages of handwritten ones. Those notes and images are now my primary references as I work to complete a full manuscript of “News Machines” by the end of my sabbatical semester in December. When the book is published, I will have Eileen Curran and the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals to thank for any lasting value it may contribute to periodicals research.

Respectfully submitted, with grateful thanks,

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