

Becoming a Researcher

Reading Objects Teaching Pack 4: Newspapers

Guidance

The purpose of this pack is to offer activities and resources to aid a teaching workshop to undergraduate or postgraduate researchers new to Special Collections. Activities begin with a detailed reading of specific items held in Special Collections and are designed to engage students in reading content, context, structure and materiality. The aim of the session is to provide students with the questions and tools to rigorously read any newspaper articles that they may encounter during their research, and also to consider the importance of article placement and newspaper formatting.

In line with the Research Skill Development Framework used by the University of Leeds, the aim for this teaching session is to encourage an increased level of student confidence and autonomy when approaching primary materials, and to facilitate independent research.

At the end of the pack you will find links to related resources in Special Collections, and handouts for use during the workshop including a key questions sheet.

Session overview

Students work in small groups, with each group using one set of copies of articles. Students progress through 2 short activities, and then work together to look at original copies of the newspapers. A further extension activity is also outlined. Students gain experience of the skills needed to interpret newspapers in an archival research context.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the teaching session, students should be able to:

- Critically examine newspaper articles and pages.
- Analyse the relationship between the content of an article and its context (including its placement on the page, the newspaper in which it is published).
- Be aware of the questions that need to be asked of newspapers as historical documents (including who is writing the articles, who is the newspaper owned by, what is the editorial process / position of the newspaper).
- Be aware of the different kinds of articles and columns that are found in a newspaper.
- Appreciate how the physical or digital properties of a newspaper might affect how it is read.



Planning a Session:

Teaching sessions using Special Collections material are generally held in the Brotherton Room. This can comfortably accommodate up to 20 students looking at material.

Information on booking the Brotherton Room is available on the [Library Website](#).

Primary materials to be consulted in library or via the Special Collections website

- *Leeds Mercury*
Physical copies of the *Leeds Mercury* can be consulted in Special Collections which holds volumes including the years 1830-1889. Staff and students at the University of Leeds can also consult digital editions of the newspaper via the British Library Newspaper site
[catalogue link: <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b3551873>]
- *Manchester Guardian*
[catalogue link: <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b1625751>]
- *The Times*
[catalogue link: <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b2661465>]

Suggested Secondary Reading

Students can read [Special Collections Research Skills resources](#) in advance of their visit to Special Collections.

Information about nineteenth-century factory legislation:

<http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/earlyfactorylegislation/>



Further Reading

Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (eds), *Reading Primary Sources: the interpretation of texts from nineteenth- and twentieth- century history* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). Includes a chapter on reading newspapers and an 'analytical toolkit'.

Martin Hewitt, *The dawn of the cheap press in Victorian Britain: the end of the 'taxes on knowledge', 1849-1869* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

Torbjörn von Krogh and Ulrika Anderson, 'Reading Patterns in Print and Online Newspapers: The case of the Swedish local morning paper VLT and online news site vlt.se', *Digital Journalism*, 4:8 (2016), 1058-1072.

Journal of Victorian Culture, 17:2 (2012) has a number of articles on reading 19th century newspapers in the digital age.

Lesson Plan:

Introduction	Talking to group	5 minutes
Activity 1: Content	Small Group Discussion	15 minutes
Activity 2: Context	Small Group Discussion	10 minutes
Activity 3: Structure & Materials	Whole Group Discussion	10 minutes
Activity 4: Extension Activity: reading across sources	Small Group Discussion	30 minutes
Round up	Whole Group Discussion	5 minutes

Introductions:

Powerpoint introductions to Special Collections for use in teaching sessions are available [here](#).



Case Study: The *Leeds Mercury* and the Ten Hours' Bill

ACTIVITY 1: Content

Read carefully through the following articles which were published in two newspapers based in the north of England in the mid-nineteenth century:

- 'A Dialogue on the Ten Hours' Bill', *Supplement to the Leeds Mercury*, Saturday 13 February 1847, p. 11.
(This dialogue is continued in the *Supplement to the Leeds Mercury* on Saturday 20 and Saturday 27 February 1847, p.11, if you would like to read it all.)
- 'The Ten Hours Factory Bill', *Leeds Mercury*, 8 May, 1847, p. 4.
- 'Ten Hours Bill', *Manchester Guardian*, 8 May, 1847, p. 8.

These articles are all about the ten hours' bill, which sought to limit the number of hours that individuals (initially just women and children) could work in a mill or factory to ten hours per day.

1. Have a look at the Living Heritage pages of the parliament website on factory legislation in the nineteenth century. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/earlyfactorylegislation/> .
What differences are there between the Living Heritage descriptions of the bill and its effects and the way it is described in contemporary newspaper articles?
2. Look at the different formats of these articles: one is allegedly a dialogue between two men, one is an editorial piece, and one is a letter from a cotton-spinner. How do the different formats affect your engagement with the article? Are you more likely to believe some rather than others, and why? What is the effect of having the same subject discussed in these different formats?
3. What is the tone of these articles? Do they seek to persuade or to inform? Are they subjective or objective? How do they compare / contrast to newspaper articles that are written today?



ACTIVITY 2: Context

On the page and in the newspaper

In today's newspapers, where an article is placed and the amount of room it is given are of crucial importance. Stories thought to be the most important on a particular day are usually given more space in the paper, appear in the first few pages and are frequently indicated by larger headlines. Where stories are placed and the amount of space they are given can therefore give an indication of the editorial direction of a paper: its political bias, for example, or its views on a certain subject.

As you will have seen already, Victorian newspapers were formatted differently, but it is still interesting to read across the pages of a newspaper, and to consider how articles or adverts which are juxtaposed relate to each other.

1. Have a look at page 1 of the *Supplement to the Leeds Mercury*, for Saturday 06 March, 1847, the week after the final instalment of the dialogue between a Factory Operative and a Gentleman.
 - a. The Living Heritage article on nineteenth-century factory legislation suggests that 'Campaigners [for reform] did not hesitate to compare the treatment of mill-workers, including children, with that of slaves.' On the first page of the *Supplement* for 06 March 1847 are two articles, one relating to slavery and one to the ten hours' bill. Compare them in terms of their size, position and language. Does this comparison suggest anything about the editorial position of the *Leeds Mercury* at this time?
 - b. Read over a period of time, newspapers can reveal biases both for and against a range of subjects including: political parties, institutions, ideologies, individuals, nations and races. These biases, read alongside the predominant subject matter of articles, and any advertisements, can help us to infer the anticipated readership of the newspaper.

Having read the articles above. Who do you think is the anticipated readership of the *Leeds Mercury*?

2. Historical context

Which other factors might affect newspaper readership during the mid nineteenth-century?



3. North-South divide?

Using the online versions of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* do a search for the ten hours' bill, or for mills more generally during the year 1847. Do the newspapers retrieve a similar amount of results to the *Leeds Mercury*? What are the predominant views being expressed – is there a north/south divide during this period on the subject of mills, or are any differences newspaper-specific rather than being region specific? You might find it instructive to examine other papers on the British Library 19th Century Newspapers website.

TEACHING NOTES for ACTIVITIES 1 and 2

Contextual information

- The *Leeds Mercury* in 1845 had a circulation of around 9000 and was one of the few newspapers alongside the *Manchester Guardian* that was both influential and solvent (Hewitt, 2014, p.12), but the mid-Victorian press still had a limited readership compared to the early twentieth century when approximately two-thirds of the population read or had access to a newspaper on a daily basis (Bingham, 2004, p. 3). The 1851 census recorded the population of Leeds at 172,023, marking a rapid growth from the population recorded half a century earlier (53,162 in 1801).
- Possible reasons for the limited percentage of individuals purchasing the newspaper include a lack of leisure time, lack of a disposable income and illiteracy. In 1847 the price of the *Leeds Mercury* and Supplement (12 pages) was sixpence, or six shillings and sixpence per quarter. As such it was more expensive than *The Times* which was sold for five pence.
- In 1880 an Education Act made education for five to ten year olds compulsory, but in 1855 23.7% of men and 43.1% of women in Leeds and Hunslet still made a mark on their marriage certificate, rather than writing their name (Stephens, 1980, p. 243). This can be seen as a basic indicator of illiteracy, although there is a suggestion that more individuals were able to read than to write.
- Derek Fraser suggests that the readership of the *Leeds Mercury* was made largely of the emerging professional and manufacturing classes, and that as such it was an organ for their views rather than more traditional ones.

At the end of the Napoleonic wars that Tory oligarchy of gentlemen merchants [...] was still firmly in control. Within a generation it had been supplanted by a rival Liberal elite in all the political institutions of the town. The economic growth of Leeds had attracted migrants with



entrepreneurial talents and had thrown up new manufacturing, commercial and professional families to challenge the authority of the traditional elite. Most of these 'outsiders' were Dissenters in religion and Whig Liberals in politics, and they looked for an outlet for their views not to the venerated *Leeds Intelligencer* but to the *Leeds Mercury*. (Fraser, 1980, p. 273)

Sources

—Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

—Derek Fraser, 'Politics and society in the nineteenth century', in *A History of Modern Leeds*, ed. by Derek Fraser (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 270-300.

—Martin Hewitt, *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain: the end of 'taxes on knowledge', 1849-1869* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

—W.B. Stephens, 'Elementary education and literacy, 1770-1870', in Fraser, pp. 223-249.



ACTIVITY 3: Structure and Materials

Reading a newspaper article online can be a very different experience to reading one in print, especially when you are looking at older newspapers. Look at a print copy of the *Leeds Mercury* in Special Collections, or, if you are not visiting Special Collections mock-up a page from the dimensions given below.

1. How does your experience of reading the printed version of the paper compare to reading the digitised version online? What does it suggest about newspaper reading during this period?
2. Compare a print copy of the nineteenth-century *Leeds Mercury* to a newspaper published today.
 - a. What are the differences in the size and structure of the newspaper as a whole, and also in the formatting of individual articles?
 - b. Do these differences affect how you read the newspaper?
 - c. Do these differences affect the articles you choose to read, your ability to read the whole article, the way you read articles, or the way you move between articles for example?
 - d. Is the curation of online digital pages as important now that we scroll down pages, or follow links, rather than reading one page at a time?

Dimensions of the Leeds Mercury.

Each page of the *Leeds Mercury* in 1847 was 25 inches tall (63.5 cm) and 17 inches wide (43.2 cm). Each page was divided vertically into 6 columns of equal width.



ACTIVITY 4: Extension Activities - reading across sources

Read extracts from Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, which was serialised from 1854-5 in Charles Dickens' *Household Worlds*.

1. How does Gaskell's representation of mill-work, as well as mill owners and workers compare to their depiction in the newspapers?
2. To what extent does Gaskell use fiction as a political tool in her discussion of class relations and working conditions? How does she do this, and how does this differ from both the prose and politics of a newspaper article?

The following chapters might be a useful basis for discussion:

Chapter 10: Wrought Iron and Gold. Mr Thornton (mill-owner) considers the 'battle' between masters and workers.

Chapter 17: What is a Strike? Nicholas Higgins (mill-worker) explains the purpose of a strike.



Becoming a Researcher: Newspapers

Related Resources

If you have enjoyed this workshop and would like to research further into any of the ideas or questions raised, you might be interested in the following resources held by Special Collections.

- **[Newspapers](#)**
Special Collections holds a wide range of printed newspapers from the 18th century to the present day. The collection is particularly strong on newspapers from the Yorkshire region including: the [Leeds Intelligencer](#), [Leeds Mercury](#), [Halifax Courier](#), [Yorkshire Post](#) and the [Evening Post](#).
- Full details of newspapers that can be accessed via the University of Leeds Library, whether in print, microfilm or digital versions, can be found on the [library website](#).
- **Business archives**
Special Collections holds a number of business archives which contain fascinating information about not only the ways in which businesses were and are run, but also provide other insights into social history through their wage books, ledgers, apprentices' agreements and correspondence. One example is John Forster's *Spinners Wage* (1828-1841) book which details not only the wages paid to his spinners and any money advanced, but also contains medical certificates for the children in his employment indicating the increasing surveillance of mills and factories during the mid-nineteenth century.
- **Nineteenth-Century literary archives**
Special Collections holds a number of print and manuscript archives relating to nineteenth-century authors including: [Elizabeth Gaskell](#) and the [Brontës](#).

External Links

- [British Newspaper Archive](#), in partnership with the British Library
- Emma Griffin, '[Manchester in the 19th Century](#)', on the British Library website. Contains links to images of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* page proofs with manuscript notes.
- [Victorian Britain](#) on the British Library website, which includes posters, newspapers and illustrations.



Newspapers: Handout 1 – Activities and questions

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Handout 2: Key questions to ask

Content

- What is the article about?
- What format is the article in? Is it in the form of a letter to the editor for example, an opinion piece, a news item, or an editorial?
- What language is used in the article? Is it formal or informal? Is it objective or is there an implicit or explicit attempt to persuade the reader to a certain point of view?

Context

- Who wrote the article?
- Where is the article placed on the page? How much space is it given on the page? Are its headlines large or small? Is it accompanied by a picture?
- Is the article juxtaposed by other articles / letters / advertisements? Do these give you a sense of the anticipated audience for the article?
- Which newspaper does the article appear in, and what date was it published? Is it a local or a national newspaper?
- What other kind of factors might determine the readership of the paper? What price is it? What are levels of literacy like at the date / location at which it is published?

Structure and Materials

- How would you describe the colour, quality or size of the newspaper? Does this tell us anything about the readership at which the newspaper is aimed, or its reading habits?
- How are the articles arranged on the page? Is it possible to see a method behind them? Are articles arranged by size, importance, or, as in births, deaths, and marriages notices are they arranged alphabetically?
- How does the format of the article / layout of the page affect how you a) read each individual article and b) move between articles?
- How does your experience of reading articles / pages in print and online compare or contrast?

