

## «Published by Authority»: The *London Gazette*, 1665-1780

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**Abstract:** In this paper I review the history of the *London Gazette* from its foundation in 1665 to the late eighteenth century. I consider the paper's foundation, form and frequency, circulation, sale and distribution, content (looking at news, notices and advertisements), readers, its reuse in other publications and its current availability. My aim is to chart what we already know about the *Gazette's* history as well as to suggest some future directions for research. I also make a few observations about the *Gazette's* later history.

**Keywords:** *London Gazette*, newspaper, circulation, readership, advertising

### Introduction

In this paper I review the *London Gazette's* foundation, form and frequency, circulation, sale and distribution, content (looking at news, notices and advertisements), readers, its reuse in other publications and its current availability. As well as charting what we already know about the *Gazette* I also wish to suggest some future directions for research. I draw on a wide variety of literature here, and although there are many new avenues to explore, and it is over 50 years since the publication of P. M. Handover's 1965 tercentenary *A History of the London Gazette 1665-1965*, I remain indebted to this volume.

### 1. Foundation

The first issue of the newspaper that was to become the *London Gazette* was printed in Oxford on presumably Thursday 16 November 1665 as the *Oxford Gazette*.<sup>2</sup> The Court had decamped from London to Oxford because of the plague and the first twenty-three issues were printed in Oxford by Leonard Lichfield and reprinted in London by Thomas Newcomb, as the imprint to the paper states, «for the use of some Merchants and Gentlemen, who desire them» (*Oxford Gazette*, 1, 13-16 November 1665). From the twenty-fourth issue the paper was printed in London and was titled *The London Gazette* (*London Gazette*, 24, 1-5 Feb 1666<sup>3</sup>).

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2 The first issue was numbered but undated. This date is calculated from the second issue.

3 I have taken the year to begin on 1 January.

The foundation of the *Gazette* and its early months were embroiled in rivalries and disputes between high-ranking government officials, the Secretaries of State, their undersecretaries and newsbook and newsletter writers. The competitions, confrontations, duplicities, and fallings out are too convoluted to summarise here. Suffice it to say that Henry Muddiman was the *Gazette's* first editor, or in the contemporary description, its writer (or sometimes gazetteer), and he was directed by undersecretary of state Joseph Williamson. Williamson ran an information network from his office. He received information from officials and others from throughout Britain and also abroad; some of this information appeared in the *London Gazette*, and some was put into an office manuscript newsletter (CHRISTIE, 1874, pp. 161-65; EVANS, 1923, pp 291-95; FRASER, 1956; GREEN, 1864, pp. vii-ix; HANDOVER, 1965: introduction, chap. 1; MARSHALL, 1994, pp. 30-31, 45-46, 60; MUDDIMAN, 1923: chapters IX, X; SUTHERLAND, 1986, pp. 1-24; WILLIAMS, 1908; WHYMAN, 2009, pp. 51-52).

The *London Gazette* was part of wider attempts to control what the reading public knew and for many years – 1672-1679 and 1682-1695 – it was the only newspaper (although there were other periodical publications). From 1695, when the Licensing Act lapsed, it faced sustained competition from other newspapers.

Muddiman was the *Gazette* writer for the first twenty-five issues and was succeeded by Charles Perrot, who was in post for seven years, followed by Robert Yard, who held the post from 1673 until 1702. Charles Delafaye followed him as the writer of the *Gazette* until Richard Steele took over in 1707 (SAINTLY, 1973, p. 45). While still working on the *Gazette*, Steele founded the iconic periodical the *Tatler*, and his biographers have noted that while he did not relish the job of keeping the *Gazette* «very innocent and insipid», he probably learnt much about periodical production that influenced his editorship of the *Tatler* (STEELE, 1714, p. 81; KNIGHT, 2009, pp. 45-46).

A number of *Gazette* writers followed in quick succession: Scott, King and Ford. Samuel Buckley took over in 1714 and remained in post until 1741 (SAINTLY, 1973, p. 45; HANDOVER, 1965, pp. 48-49). Buckley had been editor and printer of England's first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, and he continued to edit this paper when he took on the role of *Gazette* writer. Buckley remained in post for life and was replaced by Edward Weston in 1741, and then in 1770 William Fraser became the *Gazette* writer. Unlike the appointments earlier in the century Weston and Fraser did not have interests in other periodicals or newspapers and were, by Handover's account, dutiful in their role as gazetteer (HANDOVER, 1965, pp. 57-59).

The foundation of the *London Gazette* in 1665 has been seen as a point of departure: this was the first 'English newspaper' that has remained in continuous production. Recent scholarship has begun to nuance this view in two important respects. First, by attaching greater significance to continuities with the newsbooks of the mid-seventeenth century, particularly through the work of Joad Raymond, we can locate the *London Gazette* in a longer trajectory of printed serial news publications and reassess its significance (RAYMOND, 1998). Secondly, the *London Gazette's* relationship with manuscript newsletters is being probed in productive ways. Scholars are exploring how manuscript newsletters thrived well into the period that was once thought to have been dominated by printed news; and how newspapers, including the *London Gazette*, had complex relationships with these manuscript newsletters (KING, 2016; 2018a; 2018b; BARBER, 2013).

## 2. Frequency and Form

The *London Gazette* was initially published twice a week, with each issue bearing a date of an interval of days either Thursday to Monday or Monday to Thursday. In June 1709, 'it was thought fit' to publish the paper three times a week on a Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (*London Gazette*, 4552, 23-25 Jun. 1709).

Thrice-weekly publication lasted until August 1712, when the Stamp Act came into force – presumably raising concerns about the commercial viability of a thrice-weekly publication – and the paper reverted to a twice-weekly cycle of Saturday and Tuesday publication days, which lasted into the early nineteenth century. The newspapers were numbered continuously and each issue was paginated individually. Continuous pagination began in 1785 and allows us to see easily that the *London Gazette* in this year amounted to 592 pages; it exceeded a thousand pages for the first time in 1793, when the last page of the last issue of that year was numbered 1169 (*London Gazette*, 13608, 28-31 Dec. 1793).

After the very brief initial period as the *Oxford Gazette*, it was known as the *London Gazette* from issue twenty-four. The title *The London Gazette* appeared across the top of every issue and underneath was printed «Published by Authority». The *Gazette* was a half-folio sheet printed on both sides in two columns divided by a rule. This layout was probably borrowed from Bible printing (HANDOVER, 1965, pp. 10-11; CLARK, 1994, pp. 27-29). Graham Pollard argues that the *Gazette's* layout was very economical and a lot could be crammed in, because compared to the quarto publishing of earlier newsbooks, it «was set in a smaller size of type... the text was in double column, separated only by a vertical rule, and thus occupied the space wasted on the inner margins of a quarto; and lastly, the shorter lines of the column used less space at the end of paragraphs» (POLLARD, 1941, p. 123). These were not insignificant savings for they «halved the amount of presswork» (POLLARD, 1941, p. 124). Although the *London Gazette* was not the first newspaper to have a two-column layout (the *Amsterdam Courante* had in 1618), the «great contribution of the *London Gazette* to newspaper history as a whole», Charles Clark argues, «was really its form rather than its function», with many other newspapers imitating its layout and the way it ordered material (HANDOVER, 1965, p. 10; CLARK, 1994, pp. 26, 29-31, 43, 64, 78, 84-85, 96).

Most issues across the period were this single half sheet, but at times the *Gazette* expanded to include additional material. The length and format of the *Gazette* was also shaped by the 1712 Stamp Act, which required the paper to be printed on stamped paper (costing 1d per whole sheet and 1/2d for a half sheet) – this tax could be avoided by printing the newspaper in a pamphlet format, which only required a duty of 2s a sheet on a single copy to be paid on a single issue (HARRIS, 1987, pp. 19-20). From the first issue of 1785, the Royal Coat of Arms was added to the top of the front page of the *Gazette* (*London Gazette*, 12608, 28 Dec. 1784-1 Jan 1785).

By the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the newspaper was no longer regularly reporting foreign news (except for military dispatches), and it was dominated by official announcements and advertising. These changes, as Handover argues, had typographical repercussions. Unlike other contemporary papers, which were trying to squeeze as much as possible on to each page, «the typography of the *Gazette* was becoming more spacious». In Handover's words, the «*Gazette* was typographically no longer a newspaper, but a handsomely laid-out journal of public announcements and advertising» (HANDOVER, 1965, p. 59).

Two additional publications were closely associated with the *London Gazette* and are worth noting here. First, the *Gazette de Londres* was a French translation of the *London Gazette* (excluding the advertisements) that was produced from 15 November 1666 until at least 1707; it had a much more modest circulation compared to the *London Gazette*, with sales averaging just over 500 in the 1695-1697 period, with an additional 150 copies given away (GLAISYER, 2017, p. 264; SNYDER, 1968, p. 235). The second publication was a series of «extraordinaries». These were publications produced between the publication days, usually in the form of a single sheet that imitated the format of the *London Gazette*. They were usually produced in war time and conveyed news that could not wait until the next publication day (HANDOVER, 1965, p. 30, 64; GLAISYER, 2017, pp. 264-265).

### 3. Circulation

Although a continuous run of circulation figures does not survive for the *London Gazette* we are able to glimpse the numbers of copies in circulation at various points across the period. We do not have sufficient figures, however, to chart with confidence any particular trends across much of the period. Based on a record of the number of reams of paper used to print a couple of issues in October 1666 Thomas O'Malley has estimated that the print run for each of these issues was around 13-15,000 (O'MALLEY, 1986, p. 31, 221n18). Printers' accounts for some of the quarters between September 1678 and July 1681 have been used by John Childs to calculate the average number of copies sold of each issue in each quarter and he found that this varied between 4,021 in the winter quarter of 1681 and 6,973 in the autumn quarter of 1678 (CHILDS, 1987, pp. 105-106).

The most detailed information on circulation survives for two particular periods: May 1695-February 1697 and November 1705-September 1707. The detailed printers' accounts, which were produced for the Secretaries of State, survive for these two periods and contain the number of copies of each issue that were printed, the number sold, the number given away and the number unsold. For the mid-1690s period, which we have studied, sales averaged nearly 10 000, with the highest figure for a single issue in July 1695 reaching 18 162 copies; for the 1705-1707 period, studied by Henry Snyder and J. M. Price, sales averaged 7 637 and reached a high of 11 939 for an issue in April 1706 (GLAISYER, 2017, pp. 258-259; SNYDER, 1968, pp. 226-229; PRICE, 1958, pp. 217-218, 213). These figures include the significant number of issues that were given away to officials which in the mid-1690s was usually 900 copies and 950 copies in 1705-1707 (GLAISYER, 2017, p. 259; SNYDER, 1968, pp. 226-229).

James Sutherland and Laurence Hanson have considered the figures for six issues from the middle of 1710, which suggest that sales did not exceed just over five and a half thousand, with over a thousand copies of each issue given away (HANSON, 1936, pp. 141-143; SUTHERLAND, 1934, p. 114). Following the 1712 Stamp Act, records of revenue raised from printing newspapers on stamped pages allow the average numbers of copies to be calculated for some periods. Presumably these figures include those copies which were sold as well as those which were given away. Snyder's and Price's work on such records for some weeks in the period 1712-1714 suggest that the average circulation of the *Gazette* at this time did not exceed 5000 copies (SNYDER, 1968, pp. 218-219, 221-225; 1976, pp. 388-389; PRICE, 1958, pp. 218, 220-221). For the period 1717-1719, summary accounts studied by J. D. Alsop, Sutherland and Karl Tilman Winkler, indicate that circulation was on average never more than 2000 for each issue of the *London Gazette*, and this was similar to the circulation for a week in February 1721 (ALSOP, 1986, p. 24; WINKLER, 1993, pp. 704-712; SUTHERLAND, 1934, pp. 114-115). As far as we can tell, circulation figures are not readily available for later in the eighteenth century.

### 4. Sale and Distribution

The *London Gazette* usually costed a penny an issue and was distributed in a variety of ways. As we have already seen, a significant proportion of copies were given away, probably mostly to those who in an official capacity needed to have access to the *Gazette*, as well as those who were part of the international information network operating out of the Secretaries of State office and received their copies as part of their 'payment' for supplying information. Copies were also available by subscription and were distributed by government officials to both those who were paying and those who were not (HARRIS, 1975). The *Gazette* was also sold by hawkers

in London, who obtained their copies from intermediaries – mercuries –, mostly women who bought copies from the printer (HINDS, 2010, p. 126). O'Malley notes that one mercury in 1666, Mrs Andrewes, was selling on up to a third of the print run (O'MALLEY, 1986, p. 31).

We have found that in the years in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, for which accounts allow us to make the relevant calculations, the printer sold the paper to mercuries for just under  $1/2d$  (GLAISYER, 2017, p. 265). The *Gazette* was also purchased by coffeehouses (HARRIS, 1975, p. 142)

## 5. Content

### 5.1. News

Broadly speaking, the *London Gazette* can be divided into three sections, which were distinguished typographically. The first section reported on news and comprised paragraphs with headings listing places and date. As Clark observes, these paragraphs were presented in the *Gazette* in the order in which they occurred, rather than the order of importance, so this might lead to a major event being prefaced by something far more modest (CLARK, 1994, pp. 17-18). It may have been more complicated than this, though, with the news appearing according to the order in which it arrived in London, with some news having travelled faster, and as Tony Claydon argues, coverage of a single short event could unfold over a much long time as news came in from different sources (CLAYDON, 2013).

Scholars have struggled in different ways with the news section of the paper. One well-established view of the *London Gazette* (and indeed of much of the English newspaper press in this period) is that printed newspapers were not allowed to cover domestic news, and so papers carried mainly foreign news and very little domestic news. The *Gazette* in particular was hampered in its reporting of domestic news because it was an official newspaper and could not print anything that might bring the monarch or the government into disrepute. This view has a tendency to perpetuate the idea that the foreign news was only really there because papers were not allowed to cover the domestic news and when it is acknowledged that there might have been some demand for foreign news it is often seen that such news was only of interest to a narrow range of merchants and investors who might have had specific commercial interests in such information. There are a number of ways that these views have been and need to be modified.

First, the *London Gazette's* relationship to the well-established manuscript newsletters. It has long been held that manuscript newsletters supposedly reported on the news that the *London Gazette* did not and was not allowed to report. However, Rachael Scarborough King has found that newspapers and manuscript newsletters had much content in common and concludes that the «archival evidence does not support the contention that the purpose of the newsletters was to convey private information that could not be printed» (KING, 2016, pp. 420-424; 2018b, p. 44). However, this question is not at all clear cut; as Alex Barber has argued, John Dyer, in his manuscript newsletters, «furnished his readers with excerpts from the speeches of members, accounts of debates and information on votes of members that were simply unavailable elsewhere» (BARBER, 2013, p. 306). This could be a risky business though, as Michael Harris has suggested that in relation to the reporting of parliamentary news the same «constraints of space and possible legal action» applied to both printed newspapers and manuscript newsletters (HARRIS, 2007, p. 72).

Secondly, foreign news did have a market. Yes, it was important to merchants with particular interests, but it was also of interest to a much wider pool of people (PEACEY, 2016). It is useful to consider the *London Gazette* as part of the continental European news networks and make comparisons with continental European newspapers as a way into

understanding the *Gazette* and the broad appeal of foreign news across the continent (SCHULTHEI -HEINZ, 2010).

Thirdly, how much domestic news was actually in the *Gazette*? Michael Harris has reminded us that the advertisements were a source of news and so too were the notices (HARRIS, 1998). While King does not use her analysis of the date-lines of the paragraphs in the paper for the period January-July 1695 to explore the significance of domestic news in the *Gazette*, her finding that just under a third of the 681 items had a domestic dateline reminds us that we should not underestimate the presence of home news (KING, 2018b, p. 43).

Fourthly, was the domestic news really as bland as has been suggested? While it is tempting simply just to question this well-established account of the *Gazette* for the sake of it, there are some hints that this might be a useful line of inquiry to pursue in the future. Certainly there were news items that were not reported and much effort was expended to prevent anything that might discredit the government or monarch from appearing in the paper. At times, however, mistakes were made and confidential information was published. Readers were also able to read between the lines, and in certain ways and at certain times the *Gazette* was perhaps more controversial than might have previously been thought (GLAISYER, 2017, p. 263).

All this is not to deny that the domestic news that the *Gazette* did report was in some ways limited or that British domestic news did circulate in other forms (certainly, continental European newspapers covered British domestic news to a greater extent than the *Gazette* and reached readers in Britain) (PETTIGREW, 2014, pp. 239-240). But it is to say that perhaps there was more domestic news in the *London Gazette* than has often been thought, and secondly, that we should be very wary of apologising for the foreign news in its pages, as it did have an audience.

Where did this news come from? The news was supplied through the intelligence network run from the Secretaries of States' offices, as well as taken from continental European printed and manuscript newsletters. During the eighteenth century there were a number of requests from *Gazette* writers to encourage officials posted overseas to send news (BLACK, 1987, p. 64). By the late eighteenth century, the foreign news reporting had declined very significantly and the *London Gazette's* coverage of foreign news concentrated on military dispatches.

As well as foreign and some domestic news, including shipping news from British ports, the first section also contained useful 'information' and 'announcements' that might not so easily be classified as news if we are thinking of the paragraph as the unit of news. For example, the *Gazette* regularly listed the crown-appointed Lent preachers until the mid-eighteenth century (JENKINSON, 2010, p. 76; FAROOQ, 2013: n. 24, p. 47). It included proclamations from the crown, and at other times it included loyal addresses, abhorrences or coercive petitions. Sometimes, these latter items filled columns and columns and considerably extended the number of pages of the *London Gazette* and also increased its cost (GAUCI, 2001, pp. 241, 252-253; KNIGHTS, 2005, pp. 122, 125; O'MALLEY, 1986, p. 44; HARTH, 1993, pp. 151, 213-214; VALLANCE, 2011; BRADLEY, 1986, pp. 108-111). To a very limited extent the *Gazette* covered parliamentary news providing, in Harris's words, «the timetable view of events ... the opening and closing of sessions, the royal speeches and the lists of items of legislation ... the elections and some of the extra-parliamentary activity of M.P.s» (HARRIS, 2007, pp. 63, 72-73).

## 5.2. Notices

There were notional divisions between the three sections of the paper. Following the news section was a second section, printed in italics, which was a sort of 'Notices' section, and then a final section which was headed «Advertisements» for much of the period. However, these were not hard and fast divisions and, as we will see, much that appeared in the advertisement section might conform more easily to modern conceptions of notices

and that items moved between sections. In the early decades of the *London Gazette*, the italicised middle section of the paper contained paragraphs placed by various departments of state soliciting for tenders, announcing payments and so on, and non-state bodies, like the East India Company, for example, announcing their meetings.

Notices were placed in the *London Gazette* in connection to crimes committed: to identify corpses and to track down suspects. Rewards were usually offered and such advertisements were both government sponsored and also placed by individuals (GASKILL, 2000, pp. 168-169, 267-269).

### 5.3. Advertisements

In the early months of the *London Gazette* no advertisements appeared in the paper but a paragraph, ironically titled «An Advertisement», appeared in issue 62, in June 1666, and made it clear that though the paper «Being daily prest to the Publication of Books, Medicines, and other things, not properly the business of a Paper of Intelligence», the paragraph was «to notifie once for all, that we will not charge the *Gazette* with Advertisements, unless they be matter of State», and that a separate «Paper of Advertisements» was planned (*London Gazette*, 62, 14-18 Jun. 1666). This stricture was gradually relaxed with advertisements for lost and found animals appearing first in the paper before the columns were filled with other advertisements for books, medicines, and other goods, as well as runaways and missing persons, valuables, horse races and auctions.

R. B. Walker has very usefully categorised advertisements: «books, medical, lost or stolen, runaways, lotteries, real estate, goods for sale, auctions, bankruptcy and miscellaneous» for the *London Gazette* and two of its rivals, the *Post Boy* and the *Flying Post*, for the three years: 1695 (only for the *Gazette*), 1696 (after which the licensing act had lapsed and the competitor papers had been established) and 1700 (WALKER, 1973, p. 117). The 13 issues of the *London Gazette* from 1695 contained 202 advertisements of which 54 were for books, 58 for runaways; in 1696, the 203 advertisements were still dominated by books, with 56 advertisements, 50 advertisements for lost or stolen goods, and 46 for auctions showed the changing nature of advertising in the *London Gazette* (WALKER, 1973, p. 117). By 1700, of the 240 advertisements, 79 were for books, 43 for lost or stolen goods and 42 for bankruptcy. While the *London Gazette* was holding its own in terms of its overall numbers of advertisements, these were increasingly dominated by the notices that legislation required to be listed here (WALKER, 1973, p. 117). Its competitor papers, with their tri-weekly publishing schedules, published more advertisements across the same period (WALKER, 1973, p. 117).

There have been studies of particular types of advertisements: Mark Dawson has mined the *Gazette* runaway and missing person advertisements to understand languages of description, and Sarah Tyacke has collected the map-sellers' advertisements (DAWSON, 2011; TYACKE, 1978). Advertisements were also placed to retrieve lost property and some of these advertisements were placed by very organised thief takers who managed thieves and claimed 'rewards' for the recovery of stolen items.

Advertisements in the *London Gazette* cost 10s each, which was four or five times the cost of a single advertisement in other newspapers in the 1690s (WALKER, 1973, p. 116). The *London Gazette* was competing with three tri-weeklies from 1695 and a daily paper from 1702. We need to be wary of considering the *London Gazette* in purely commercial terms. It was, in Michael Harris's words, a 'hybrid' operation that «was a commercial enterprise, run on behalf of individuals in and out of the Secretary of State's offices and sold by subscription or through the pamphlet shops in the same way as other forms of print», and it was also «a state-sponsored medium for the circulation of public information of all kinds» (HARRIS, 1998, p. 144). However, we can get some sense of

the relative importance of advertising to the *London Gazette's* income for some months in the 1705-1707 period, for which the most detailed accounts survive. For these months, sales receipts amounted to £2228 3s and 10.5d and advertising brought in £1390 10s, that is just over half the sales receipts<sup>4</sup>.

The 1712 Stamp Act introduced a duty of one shilling on each newspaper advertisement. R. B. Walker has charted the impact of this duty on newspaper advertising in the *London Gazette* and two competitor papers, the *Post Boy* and the *Spectator*. Unlike its competitors, Walker found that the *Gazette* had more advertisements after the introduction of the duty, but this was because insolvent debtors had recently been required to place advertisements in the *Gazette* (WALKER, 1973, p. 119). Advertisers were well aware of the extra cost of advertising in the *Gazette* compared to other papers. The person in charge of advertising books on behalf of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, in 1716, for example, noted that he had not advertised in the *London Gazette*, «because it could not be done under 11. shillings which will publish 3. advertisements in other papers» (SPCK Minutes, 24 May 1716, quoted in FERDINAND, 1998, p. 166).

While the *London Gazette* remained an important location for advertising into the eighteenth century, the types of advertisements became very limited and were dominated by the notices that Acts of Parliament required. Walker has found that in January 1731 there were 87 advertisements placed in the *London Gazette*, and «only three for real estate, one for a book, and none for goods or auctions» (WALKER, 1973, p. 118, n. 3). These legal notices were mostly placed as advertisements and presumably paid the costs of an advertisement. Two of these types of notices are worth noting: bankruptcy notices and notices placed by those who wished to take advantage of the regular insolvency acts to leave prison (INNES, 2009, p. 237). Other official notices were not required by Act of Parliament but filled its columns. The most notable of these were notices publishing the dissolutions of partnerships, which were ubiquitous later in the eighteenth century (SOLAR & LYONS, 2011).

We would like to take four single issues of the *London Gazette* to illustrate the variety of advertisements and the changes to advertising across the period. Issue number 385, dated Thursday 22 July to Monday 26 July 1669, contained only two advertisements, taking up less than a third of a single column. One advertisement concerned payments out of the Exchequer and the other a postal service between Oxford and Gloucester and Oxford and Bristol. Issue number 2995, dated Monday 23 July to Thursday 26 July 1694, had nearly a column of advertisements and had the most varied content out of the issues considered here. There were twelve advertisements. Four advertisements were for books; one for a sale of «old red Wood from Guinea» at Lloyds Coffee-house; three were for lost items – a note, a lottery ticket and a watch –; one was for a bagnio that Mr Alexander Wood had built in Oxford, «which is found to be of great use in the Curing of Aches and Pains, and many other Distempers, and is very pleasant and diverting»; one requested Robert Wrayford from Exon to return to his family now that his «business is composed»; and the last announced that the «Boarding-School for young Gentlewomen» had moved from Burford to Abingdon.

One and a half of the four columns of the single half-sheet issue number 5766, dated Tuesday 21 July to Saturday 25 July 1719, were taken up with 15 paragraphs of advertisements. One of these advertisements concerned recovering bills stolen from the Bristol mail and the other 14 were about commissions for bankruptcy or some processes connected to proving debts. Issue number 10959, dated Saturday 22 July to Tuesday 25 July 1769, was a two-page issue. Only just over half a column was devoted to news, with about a column and a half devoted to announcements

<sup>4</sup> Calculated from the figures presented in SYNDER, 1968, pp. 226-29. Walker has also undertaken calculations for some parts of this period (WALKER, 1973, p. 130).



from government departments (which earlier in the period would have appeared in the notices section of the paper), such as the invitations by the Victualling Office for beef tenders, and the payment of Navy Bills by the Navy Office, as well as announcements from companies like the East India Company publicising their General Court. Two columns of advertisements were dominated by bankruptcy notices as well a house sale, notice of the dissolution of a business partnership, and a request for the relations of the deceased John Sidbury of Devon to come forward to «hear of something to their Advantage». The last two pages of this issue of the *Gazette* were filled with lists of insolvent debtors who were imprisoned all over Britain and were taking advantage of the recent act to gain their freedom.

## 6. Readers

We can get some sense of who read the *London Gazette* from various records of who was subscribing to the *Gazette* or who was receiving it as part of various intelligence networks (CHRISTIE, 1874, pp. 161-165; HARRIS, 1975). In the early eighteenth century, the clerk Charles Delafaye was sending the *London Gazette* to readers who held government positions, as well as other members of the middling sort and elites (HARRIS, 1975, pp. 141-142). Other records indicate that the *Gazette* was also sent to readers ranging fairly widely across the social spectrum and also across the country, and to some extent the world (BLACK, 1987, p. 65; GLAISYER, 2017, pp. 262-263; O'MALLEY, 1986, pp. 32-33; PEACEY, 2013, pp. 405-406). G. A. Cranfield has shown that local corporations and councils in Liverpool, Bristol and Sheffield also subscribed to the *Gazette* (CRANFIELD, 1962, p. 182). The *Gazette* also reached those who strictly speaking may not have been its loyal readers. Responses to the crime advertising suggests the information contained in the *Gazette* could circulate widely (GASKILL, 2000, pp. 168-169, 267-269; O'MALLEY, 1986, p. 34).

Occasionally we get a glimpse of how a reader read the *Gazette*. James Wealy was a witness in the case of a theft of an «Iron Roasting-Jack» in December 1745. The summary of the *Proceedings in the Old Bailey* records what Wealy was doing as he saw the prisoner accused of the theft «come out of the Shop with something under his Great Coat»: on his way to church, Wealy «stopp'd at the Church Door to hear a Gentleman's Servant read the *Gazette*» (t17460117-18, James Woollard, 17 January 1746, [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org)). If this is an example of what might have been a widespread practice – reading the *London Gazette* aloud in a public place –, then it suggests that the *Gazette* might have reached many in the eighteenth century.

Diaries also give us some sense of how the *Gazette* was read. Samuel Pepys was an appreciative reader from the start, noting in his diary, on 22 November 1665, that the *Oxford Gazette* was «very pretty, full of news, and no folly in it» (LATHAM & MATTHEWS, 1971, p. 305). Pepys was very well connected and often heard news first (particularly at the Royal Exchange) before reading it. So for him, in the words of Kate Loveman in her study of his books and reading, the *London Gazette* (and other newsbooks) offered «confirmation or denial of oral reports» and also allowed readers «to identify the government's official line on an issue» (LOVEMAN, 2005, p. 85).

Sometimes we have glimpses of readers responding directly to what they read in the *London Gazette*. Thomas Turner, a shopkeeper in East Hoathly, in Sussex, reported military news from the *London Gazette* in his diary and then lamented «the poor degenerated people of England» in comparison to the King of Prussia in 1757; reflected that it was «acting the more humane part» to destroy ships rather than a town in St Malo in 1758, and celebrated «uncommon courage and resolution» of «our generals, officers and common men» in Quebec in 1759 (VAISEY, 1984, pp. 125, 154, 191). Before each of these comments, Turner had recorded in his diary the military events that he had read in the *Gazette*.

Samuel Jeake, a merchant, antiquary and astrologer based in Rye, in East Sussex, likewise recorded the news he read in the *Gazette*, as he did in the entry for 23 March 1687, when he noted in his diary «News also per Gazette of something preparatory to the Declaration for Liberty of Conscience» (HUNTER & GREGORY, 1988, p. 183). Jeake's diary also reveals that it was the *Gazette* (and letters) that confirmed that «a Trembling of the Earth under the Town of Rye; so as to make the houses shake; & household stuff move on the Shelves, but lasted not a minute», on 8 September 1692, was an «Earthquake» that was «felt throughout England France Belgium & part of Germany as far as Frankford» (HUNTER & GREGORY, 1988, p. 217).

In 1756, the *Gazette* had a particular role in the case of Admiral Byng's demise. Byng was condemned for his actions in Minorca, and for his failings in a naval engagement he was court martialled and executed. The *Gazette* covered the case and had a not insignificant role in printing a letter by Byng describing his actions. The editing of this letter to omit sections that may have redeemed Byng attracted much comment. Two diarists – Thomas Turner and Ralph Jackson (at this time, an apprentice merchant in Newcastle) – tracked the case through their diaries. Turner records occasions when he read pamphlets about the case, and at times Turner is sympathetic to the view that the *Gazette's* reporting was partial (VAISEY, 1984, p. 72). Ralph Jackson read the *Gazette* in coffeehouses; as he recorded on 29 June 1756, «I went to the Coffee house where I saw a Letter from Adml Bing (now in the Mediterranean) in the *Gazette* wherein he's thought to give a poor account of himself» (JACKSON, 1756: 29 June). Jackson read the *Gazette*, then, knowing already, or soon after, the commentary of others. The following month Jackson recorded reading in the *Gazette* at the coffeehouse of Byng's arrest (JACKSON, 1756: 30 July).

## 7. Reusing the *London Gazette*

The *London Gazette* was a source of international news for London papers and from the eighteenth century also provincial newspapers (BARKER, 1998, p. 36; BLACK, 1987, p. 64; CRANFIELD, 1962, pp. 29-31; GORING, 2018, p. 5; WILES, 1965, pp. 198-199). As Harris has written: «particularly in times of international crisis, its content was ruthlessly recycled in the commercial papers» (HARRIS, 2009, p. 420). The paper was sometimes wholly and partially reproduced in America as well with occasional reprinting also being undertaken in Boston (CLARK, 1994, p. 70).

The reproducing of news from London could lead to a strange situation where news from Scotland might travel via the capital through the *London Gazette* to reach local papers in York and Manchester and be very out-of-date, as R. M. Wiles has shown for news of the Battle of Culloden in 1745 (WILES, 1965, p. 236). Readers might be alert to the origin of their news as Thomas Turner was in 1758, when he was reading the *Lewes Journal* and recorded that he was reading «an extract from *The Gazette*» about the destruction of ships in St Malo by troops commanded by the Duke of Marlborough (VAISEY, 1984, p. 153). Such reproduction of *Gazette* news in the provincial newspapers might be very extensive. Cranfield has written: «British victories were described at inordinate length, considering the size of the newspapers, whole issues of the *London Gazette* being reproduced to the exclusion not only of the domestic news, but even of the profit-bringing advertisements» (CRANFIELD, 1962, p. 65). Likewise, issues of extraordinary *Gazettes* were reproduced in full. Wiles notes that in August 1758 the printer of *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser* reproduced the report of the surrender of Louisburg from an extraordinary of the *London Gazette*, both as an extraordinary issue of the *Advertiser* and again in the subsequent issue (WILES, 1965, p. 83).

But this reliance on the *London Gazette* could cause problems for provincial newspaper producers. Christine Ferdinand notes that Benjamin Collins, the proprietor of the *Salisbury Journal*, complained in March 1752: «All the News in this Day's *Gazette* is the King's Speech, a List of Acts pass (both which are in the former Part of

this Paper) and the Contents of a Memorial, signed M. De Behr» (*Salisbury Journal*, 30 March 1752, quoted in FERDINAND, 1997, p. 149). Cranfield argues that provincial newspapers' choice to reproduce abstracts of Acts of Parliament from the *London Gazette* was perhaps to avoid legal challenges about their right to print acts in full. In Cranfield's words, the abstract form of the acts in the *London Gazette* was «then regarded as fair game by the country printers» (CRANFIELD, 1962, pp. 165-166). Other types of official notices, particularly the bankruptcy announcements, were also systematically copied from the *Gazette* by provincial newspapers.

Advertisements too were taken from the *London Gazette* and reproduced in provincial newspapers. One product in particular – a medicine – was advertised repeatedly throughout the eighteenth century. «Scots Pill, or Dr. Andersons» was first advertised in the *London Gazette* on 13-17 October 1687 and last on 30 October 1804 (*London Gazette*, 2286, 13-17 October 1687; *London Gazette*, 15750, 30 October 1804: 1348; FURDELL, 2002, p. 114). Tellingly, both these advertisements contain the hallmark features of these types of advertisements in their claims to authenticity and their denunciation of counterfeiters. The advertisers of medicines in this period deployed multiple, bold, and in some cases, far-fetched strategies to advertise their wares: citing patents, testimonies, and royal associations among other strategies. The advertisements for Scots Pills were reproduced in provincial newspapers under the heading «From the *London Gazette*» (*Hampshire Chronicle*, 16 October 1775, p. 4, col. d; *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 1 July 1782, p. 4, col. a). Authenticity was often at stake and claims to be the vendor of the genuine product were vigorously defended against «counterfeits». So perhaps in noting the origin of the advertisements, the advertisers were using another technique to suggest authenticity; the advertisements themselves were 'genuine' and borrowed the status of the *Gazette* itself as «Published by Authority».

Although Henry Fielding, in his newspaper the *Champion*, described the *London Gazette* issues as surviving «little longer than the Life of that posting Insect, whose Flash of Being endures by six Hours» (*Champion* 328, 17 December 1741 quoted in ITALIA, 2005, p. 22) the newspaper was collected and had an afterlife as a «journal of record» (GLAISYER, 2017, pp. 263-264; HEYD, 2012, pp. 242-243).

## 8. The *London Gazette* from 1780 to the present

Before concluding, we want to make a couple of observations about the history of the *London Gazette* from 1780 to the present. As we have already seen, in the late eighteenth century the *London Gazette* stopped regularly reporting foreign news. In this sense, it stopped being a *newspaper*; the paper itself hardly features in modern histories of the nineteenth and twentieth-century British press.

Despite competition from the *Times* newspaper, the *London Gazette's* military dispatches retained their importance throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and were reproduced in London papers, provincial papers and international publications. (FAIRCLOUGH, 2013, pp. 195-204; MCLAREN, 2016, p. 40). So even though circulation was very modest, with Handover noting that it was under 1000 copies for issues in 1828 and 1853, the paper retained its high status (HANDOVER, 1965, pp. 68, 75). The military dispatches published in the *London Gazette* between 1914 and 1918 were, in David Reynolds words, «reprinted by the press and proved fundamental as instant histories of events and their meaning, around which interpretations and rebuttals became encrusted» (REYNOLDS, 2017, p. 199).

The *Gazette's* pages were dominated by commercial and official notifications that were in many cases required to be published there by law. Grain prices, bankruptcy notices, dissolution of partnership announcements, tenders

from various parts of government, official appointments, appeared alongside a huge variety of other materials. Handover notes that the need to include the private Acts of Parliament establishing the powers of railway companies led to longer issues that were published daily. She gives the example of the 15 November 1845 issue which alone had more than 500 pages (HANDOVER, 1965, pp. 70, 71).

While the *London Gazette* is not generally included in the histories of the nineteenth and twentieth-century press, it is yet to be included in the histories of governance and information, where it may, particularly after the end of the eighteenth century, more comfortably sit. Such a history of the *London Gazette* looking at its role in the circulation of information, its role in governance strategies and practices and the status of the information carried would need to be realised in a global context that took account, in particular of imperial connections and the timings of the exchange of information across considerable distances. Studies that make use of particular types of data, for example, the corn returns which gave the price of different grains across Britain during the long nineteenth century, are beginning to lay the foundations for this sort of history of the *London Gazette* (BRUNT & CANNON, 2013).

Currently, the *London Gazette* can be accessed through the official website: [www.thegazette.co.uk](http://www.thegazette.co.uk). This offers access to pdf files of individual issues from the first issue until the present day. It offers a full-text search based on optical character recognition. The *London Gazette* is also available through two subscription newspaper databases from Gale Cengage Learning: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century Burney Collection Newspapers and 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Nichols Newspaper Collection. Both of these offer more limited coverage of the *London Gazette*, but yield different outcomes for keyword searches, partly because of the quality of the images: the Nichols uses recently taken photographs and the Burney is based on images taken from a microfilm. As Prescott argues in relation to the Burney collection: «our use of the digital resource is still profoundly shaped by the technology and limitations of the microfilm set» (PRESCOTT, 2018, p. 51). For issues published before 1700, location information can be traced using the definitive newspaper short title-catalogue as well as searching the ESTC and COPAC, both of which also cover later periods (NELSON & SECCOMBE, 1987, pp. 314-407; [estc.bl.uk](http://estc.bl.uk); <https://copac.jisc.ac.uk>).

## Conclusion

The *London Gazette* is often seen to have a particular role in broader historical narratives and this, to some extent, has shaped how its own history has been written. «One reason why the *Gazette* has been neglected», O'Malley has argued, «is that much writing on the history of the press has concentrated on the struggle for a 'free' press – one free from government if not commercial pressures». So, the period that O'Malley is interested in, 1660-1685, has been seen «as a dark period dominated by the efforts of the restored government to control all forms of printed material, including newspapers», with the *London Gazette* being the 'dull mouthpiece of official views', and so, not «considered as an active force in late Stuart England» (O'MALLEY, 1986, p. 28). What O'Malley says also applies to the later seventeenth century and beyond as well. During the Exclusion crisis in the early 1680s, there was a brief period of increased press freedom and the establishment of a number of other newspapers. After this, press regulation was tightened and the *Gazette* once again became virtually the only newspaper until the lapsing of the licensing act in 1695.

The history of the *Gazette* after 1695 mostly continues to be side-lined, with the paper being seen as a 'dull mouthpiece', but also as increasingly unpopular, with falling sales, competition from other papers, and governments turning their attention to other loyal journalism. By the late eighteenth century, the *Gazette*, in the existing scholarship, only retains wider significance because of the military dispatches it published in wartime.

O'Malley's call to investigate the *Gazette*, «precisely because it was not free from government control», is very appealing (O'MALLEY, 1986, p. 28). Indeed, as we have suggested, it might be profitable to place the *Gazette* more squarely within histories of governance and information. Furthermore, there are hints that some elements of the broader narratives around the *London Gazette* may also need to be challenged. The significance of the *Gazette* has often been linked to its sales figures, but as we have seen – not least through the records of reading practices and the extensive reach of the criminal advertising –, the *Gazette* continued to have a wide circulation even after sales had fallen and that parts of its content were regularly reproduced in other papers.

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