

# **BREAKING THE NEWS**

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**Large print guide**

**Please do not remove  
from the exhibition**

**In today's world, we can find news quickly and easily, and in any form that suits us. The news has also never been so hotly debated. Yet no matter how much we argue about it, we continue to seek it out.**

**This exhibition explores 500 years of the news in Britain through news stories. Each one tells us something different about why the news matters.**

What makes an event news?

## **What makes an event news?**

Not everything that happens makes the news. Certain types of events have always dominated the headlines. We are drawn to these stories because they tell us how our lives may change, or because they speak to our emotions. They fascinate, disgust, shock or entertain us. But while the themes may feel familiar, each story in this part of the exhibition was shaped by the time, place and audience for which it was produced.

What makes an event news?

## **Crime and sensationalism**

Sensationalised reports of crime, sex and subversion are a staple of news.

We want to be shocked, offended and occasionally excited by people who commit dark or disturbing acts.

The more lurid the description and loaded the headline, the more we buy into a story and a particular news maker's take on events.

What makes an event news?

**‘The tabloids  
were able to  
tease out two  
stories: the virgin  
and the whore,  
and to exploit  
both of them.’**

**Errol Morris, filmmaker (2010)**  
The Wall Street Journal

What makes an event news?

## **‘Sex-in-chains kidnapping case’**

**The Daily Express, 22 May 1978**

The story of Kirk Anderson and Joyce McKinney is a classic example of a sensationalist tabloid story, treating serious allegations in a salacious way. Anderson, a Mormon missionary, accused McKinney of kidnap and rape. She was arrested but denied the charges, insisting they were in love and he had been brainwashed. In this exclusive interview with the Daily Express, McKinney used a fairytale-gone-wrong narrative to cast doubt on her alleged crimes.

**LD3**

What makes an event news?

## **‘The Real McKinney’**

**The Daily Mirror, 22 May 1978**

On the same day that the Express championed Joyce McKinney, the Daily Mirror exposed her. No expense was spared to uncover her past. Nude modelling photos, acquired from an associate in LA, were splashed across this front page and throughout the paper to discredit McKinney (as well as the Express). McKinney has always insisted that the photos were faked.

**LD4**

## What makes an event news?

### **A monster infests our streets**

#### **Newspaper cuttings book, 1788-90**

Between 1788 and 1790, over 50 women were pricked with a sharp object on the streets of London. With no suspects arrested, the press labelled the assailant the 'London Monster': a 'foreigner' who evaded the police, 'infested' the streets and was a master of disguise. This generated a climate of fear and hysteria. Sarah Sophia Banks collected this material first-hand and participated in vigilante searches for the Monster.

**L.R.301.h.3**

What makes an event news?

## **Jack the Ripper strikes again**

**The Illustrated Police News,  
22 September 1888**

Between 1888 and 1891, five women were brutally murdered in Whitechapel. The Illustrated Police News transformed the tragedy into a sensational story. This issue depicts Annie Chapman's fatal injuries in invasive detail. The press descriptions reduced the victims to 'fallen women'. Accuracy was sacrificed for the sake of shocking readers. The reality was they struggled with hardships such as poverty, alcoholism and domestic violence. Misconceptions about the victims persist today.

**NEWS11833**

What makes an event news?

## **Witches in Leicestershire: where next?**

**The wonderful discoverie of the  
witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillipa  
Flower, 11 March 1618**

Sensationalism can trigger fear, panic and paranoia. The witch hunts of the 1500s and 1600s resulted in the deaths of thousands, most of whom were women. The trials and executions were accompanied by an explosion of pamphlets alerting the public to the evils of witchcraft. These pamphlets fuelled mass hysteria and suspicion within communities, sparking more and more witch hunts.

**C.27.b.35**

What makes an event news?

## **Scandal**

Scandal sells. We love to see those in the public eye brought down by their own bad behaviour. Whether the scandal is sexual, financial or political, exposure in the news shocks and entertains. Nevertheless, the ability to report on scandals can be essential to democracy, as it holds those who are in positions of power to account.

What makes an event news?

**‘I took on the sins  
of everybody, of a  
generation, really.’**

**Christine Keeler (2001)**

The Observer

What makes an event news?

## **Profumo quits!**

**The Daily Express, 6 June 1963**

The Profumo Affair had all the classic ingredients of a juicy scandal: sex, spies, lies, politics and power. The fallout had far reaching consequences for all involved and contributed to the toppling of a Conservative government. This front page report was the climactic moment of the scandal. John Profumo resigned as Minister of War after admitting he had lied to the House of Commons about his relationship with Christine Keeler.

**LD3**

# What makes an event news?

## **The face of a scandal**

**Life**, 21 June 1963

Christine Keeler was a young, working class woman who enjoyed a glamorous lifestyle. Her role in the Profumo Affair was exploited by the news media.

When the press couldn't name and shame Profumo, they used her image instead.

In the wake of his resignation, Keeler was scapegoated by the establishment and imprisoned. This article in *Life*, a popular American magazine, demonstrates the international obsession with her looks and sexuality.

**5208.91**

What makes an event news?

## **One rule for them**

**The Daily Telegraph, 21 May 2009**

The Daily Telegraph broke the parliamentary expenses scandal in a series of explosive front pages. Set against the backdrop of recession, the story outraged the public with revelations of how taxpayers' money was being spent. This cover, with a mix of serious and ridiculous examples, exposed abuses of privilege. The story resulted in resignations, sackings, de-selections and retirements. Seven politicians were convicted and imprisoned.

**LD7**

What makes an event news?

## **Oscar Wilde behind bars**

**The Illustrated Police News, 4 May 1895**

This is the Illustrated Police News' take on the trial of Oscar Wilde, one of the greatest celebrity scandals of the Victorian age. Wilde was convicted of 'gross indecency' after details about his relationships with men were exposed. At the time, sexual activity between men was illegal. The revelations sparked a frenzy of newspaper coverage. An outraged public followed the story as Wilde was imprisoned in Reading Gaol.

**NEWS11833**

What makes an event news?

## **A very royal scandal**

**The London Chronicle, 1-5 September 1820**

The unhappy marriage of Caroline of Brunswick to King George IV was the first royal relationship where private details were reported in the press. George was already illegally married in secret before their engagement, causing uproar. Caroline's unconventional lifestyle led to rumours of affairs and George had numerous mistresses. George attempted to divorce Caroline in 1820. The press covered events in salacious detail by transcribing these proceedings from the House of Lords.

**NEWS11674**

# What makes an event news?

## **Conflict**

From the battlefields of Henry VIII to the digital arena of 21st-century conflict, war has always generated headlines. We seek out news from war zones because we need to know who won and who lost, and what the consequences might be for us. Reports of war can be thrilling. But they also speak to our humanity, allowing us to bear witness to the suffering and casualties of war.

What makes an event news?

## **What really happened in Raqqa?**

**Bellingcat, 13 July 2018**

Bellingcat is an online collective that uses freely available digital and social media content to investigate and fact check information from otherwise inaccessible locations – going where traditional journalists cannot. This article attempts to uncover what really happened in Raqqa at a time when the world's attention was on the Syrian Civil War.

**Read the full article here:**



### **Images:**

Official Twitter and Facebook accounts of the Russian Ministry of Defence

Wikimapia

Syrian Network for Human Rights/Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently

A'maq News Agency, IS's auxiliary media wing

Christiaan Triebert

liveuamap.com

What makes an event news?

**‘Syria really is the first war that has been fought on social media... never has there been so much information but so much misinformation as well’**

**Lyse Doucet, Chief International Correspondent,  
BBC (2018)**  
iNews

What makes an event news?

## **‘The worst I have ever witnessed’**

**Channel 4 News, 21 February 2012**

In this broadcast, Marie Colvin, a seasoned war correspondent, focussed on the civilian cost of the Syrian government’s bombardment of Homs. She described the situation as ‘the worst I have ever witnessed as a war reporter’. Her deliberately emotive report humanised a distant war for audiences in the UK. She was killed the day after broadcasting this report.

**Move your hand over the blue sensor below to listen**

**Duration: 2 minutes**

**BNT000016878**



# What makes an event news?

## **War on the continent**

**Corante, or Newes from Italy, Germany, Hungarie, Spaine and France,**  
24 September 1621

This is the first newspaper published in England to survive. Due to strict censorship laws under King James I, the Corante contained no English news. This issue reports on the Thirty Years War. Audiences sought news of the conflict because it was changing the balance of power on the continent.

The outcome would impact finance, trade, statecraft and religious supremacy both at home and abroad for the rest of the 1600s.

**C.55.I.2.**

What makes an event news?

## **Victory for the English army**

**Hereafter ensue the trewe encounter and batayle lately don between Englade and Scotlande, 1513**

Victory has always been a staple of news. This is the earliest surviving piece of printed news in Great Britain, and the only complete copy known. In 1513, the English and Scottish armies clashed at Flodden in Northumbria. The English won the bloody conflict and King James IV of Scotland was killed on the battlefield. As soon as word reached London, Richard Faques printed this pamphlet to spread the word.

**C.123.d.33**

What makes an event news?

## **Scottish king: imprisoned or killed on the battlefield?**

### **A Ballade of the Scottysse Kynge, 1513**

This ballad about the Battle of Flodden, from the same printer, was written by poet John Skelton. It is arguably the earliest English ballad ever printed, and this is the only known copy. Skelton and Faques were so eager to print news of the glorious victory that they got their facts wrong. The ballad mistakenly describes James IV being imprisoned. Ballads, read and performed communally, served as both entertainment and news.

**C.39.e.1**

What makes an event news?

## **‘D-Day has come’**

**BBC News script, 6 June 1944**

As the historic events of D-Day unfolded, the BBC reported news of the Allied invasion of Normandy. This is part of the radio script from the midday BBC Home Service broadcast on 6 June 1944, read by presenter John Snagge. Plans for the invasion were kept highly secret. This report was the first time that details of the D-Day landings were announced to the British public.

**British Library / BBC**

Move your hand over the blue sensor on the right to listen to the original broadcast

**Duration: 1 minutes 47 seconds**

© BBC Archive Radio



# What makes an event news?

## **Celebrity**

Celebrities make the headlines, and headlines make celebrities. They satisfy our need for heroes and villains, and we compare their lives to our own. It is our fascination with celebrities which makes their day-to-day activities newsworthy and can spark discussion about broader social issues.

What makes an event news?

## **Jade: life and death in the spotlight**

23 March 2009

Reality TV star Jade Goody was, by turns, loved and loathed by the nation. Tabloids charted her rise to fame from humble beginnings and, later, condemned her for racist bullying in the Celebrity Big Brother house. However, her very public struggle against cervical cancer was personally felt by many, and her early death inspired widespread grief with extensive coverage in all the national newspapers.

# What makes an event news?

## Top to bottom:

The Daily Star / Reach plc

The Daily Mirror / Reach plc

© Guardian News & Media Ltd 2021

© Times Newspapers Ltd

‘Goody dies as she had lived In the Spotlight:’

Sarah Knapton, The Daily Telegraph, 23 March 2009

© Telegraph Media Group Limited / Stuart Wilson /  
Getty Images

The Independent

The Daily Mail / dmg media licensing / Chris Jackson  
Collection / Getty Images

The Daily Express / Reach plc

‘Reality TV as a matter of life and death’, By Matthew  
Engel, Opinion, FT.com, 23 March 2009. Used  
under licence from the Financial Times. All Rights  
Reserved/SWNS

The Sun © News Group Newspapers Ltd

What makes an event news?

**‘One has to ask a different question: has MR JAGGER received the same treatment as he would have received if he had not been a famous figure, with all the criticism and resentment his celebrity has aroused?’**

William Rees-Mogg

**‘... Surely the best way to kill a trend is to attach little importance to it - the best way to encourage it is to give it publicity.’**

Letter to The Times from Charlotte Russell

## What makes an event news?

### **Rolling Stones drugs bust**

**The Times, 1 July 1967**

Mick Jagger was sentenced to three months in prison in 1967 for possession of drugs without a prescription. The case sparked national debate about drugs, sex and new 'permissive' attitudes. In this famous piece in The Times, editor William Rees-Mogg argued that the court's harsh treatment of Jagger was a result of his celebrity status. This defence of Jagger marked a turning point in the establishment's attitudes to popular culture in the 1960s.

#### **LD1**

**Left:** The Rolling Stones leaving Chichester Court.  
Graham Wood / Stringer via Getty Images

**Above:** Extract from 'Who Breaks a Butterfly on a Wheel' © Times Newspapers Ltd

What makes an event news?

**‘I awoke one  
morning to find  
myself famous.’**

**Lord Byron (1812)**

What makes an event news?

## **Byron's private poems leaked!**

**The Champion, 14 April 1816**

Lord Byron wrote 'Fare Thee Well!' and 'A Sketch From Private Life' in response to his scandalous separation from Annabella Milbanke. Originally authorised by the poet for a limited print-run, these verses were leaked to The Champion. Their publication caused a frenzy of gossip and condemnation, forcing Byron to leave England, never to return. The newspaper viewed Byron's initial willingness to publish as an invitation to turn his personal life into current affairs.

**NEWS11674**

**Left:** Lord Byron by Richard Westall, 1813

© National Portrait Gallery, London

What makes an event news?

## **#WagathaChristie**

Twitter, 9 October 2019

Coleen Rooney's shock accusation that fellow footballer's wife Rebekah Vardy (or someone using her Instagram account) had been selling personal stories about her to The Sun went viral. The celebrity story was picked up by traditional news media, appearing alongside headlines about Syria, Conservative in-fighting and Brexit. The staggering number of likes, shares and comments the original post received demonstrated that this was a news story the nation was interested in.

© **Coleen Rooney**

**Top left:** Coleen Rooney

© Max Mumby / Indigo / Getty Images

**Bottom left:** Rebecca Vardy

© PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo

## What makes an event news?

The contents of this tweet are the subject of a defamation case brought by Vardy against Rooney. Vardy argues that she has been defamed by Rooney, Rooney denies this. The allegations described in the tweet have not yet been proven either true or false. It is yet to be determined whether the claim in defamation by Vardy against Rooney has been proven. The case is ongoing before the High Court.

What makes an event news?

## **Disaster**

Stories of disaster play to our fears. Whether natural or caused by humans, their apparent unpredictability makes them compelling news. We feel sympathy for the victims, but also relief that – this time – it did not happen to us. Questions are asked, though not always answered. Could this have been avoided? What can we do better in future? But we know the next disaster story is coming. We just don't know when.

What makes an event news?

## **Grenfell residents ignored**

**Grenfell Action Group, 22 November 2016**

Often the voices of marginalised people are ignored until disaster strikes.

The Grenfell Tower fire that killed 72 people was a preventable tragedy.

The Grenfell Action Group published this warning about the unsafe living conditions and the neglect of health and safety legislation six months before the fire.

It was overlooked by decision-makers and the media until it was too late.

Read the full archived blog post here:



**Edward Daffarn and Francis O'Connor, Grenfell Action Group blog post**

What makes an event news?

**‘Right, you didn’t come here when people were telling you that the building was unsafe! That is not newsworthy. You come here when people die. Why?’**

**Unidentified resident of Grenfell Tower (2017)**  
Viral video tweeted by BBC reporter

# What makes an event news?

## **Grenfell: we demand answers**

**The Listening Post, Al Jazeera English,  
24 June 2017**

Residents of the Grenfell Tower and local community, many from disadvantaged migrant communities, had questions for both the authorities and the media. This Al Jazeera report asks why the foreseeable disaster was not prevented, placing some of the blame on a news media that residents passionately argue did not represent them.

**Duration: 2 minutes 5 seconds**  
**BNT000101080**



What makes an event news?

## **London burns**

**London Gazette, 3-10 September 1666**

This report about the Great Fire of London was printed in the London Gazette. At this time, disasters were reported in sensational pamphlets, and often interpreted as warnings from God. The London Gazette, as the government newspaper, usually stuck to official news of politics and foreign affairs. However, the fire was so disastrous that the Gazette made an exception, printing a 'true account' of the tragedy to inform anxious readers.

**Burney 65a**

What makes an event news?

## **Railway bridge collapse: terrible loss of life**

**The Aberdeen Journal, 2 January 1880**

The railway passes across the Firth of Tay in Scotland via the Tay Bridge. When it opened, the bridge was hailed as a feat of engineering. In 1879, less than two years later, it collapsed in a freak storm with terrible loss of life.

This article, published several days after the train crashed into the river, played on the Victorian public's anxieties about the dangers of rail transport.

**NEWS10553**

What makes an event news?

## **Disaster at Aberfan caused by negligence**

**Western Mail, 22 October 1966**

On 21 October 1966, a coal waste tip on the mountainside above the village of Aberfan collapsed. An avalanche of slurry engulfed homes and a junior school, killing 144 people. 116 of the casualties were children and the disaster profoundly shocked the nation. This front page report showed the full horror of the disaster – and noted that the former Mayor of Merthyr had warned of the danger from the tip.

**NEWS97**

# What makes an event news?

## **Power**

Fights for political power and influence have always enjoyed dramatic coverage in the press. Stories about general elections, political plots and falls from power make great entertainment.

But campaigners outside the circles of government and the media have to fight for recognition. Sometimes this fight becomes the story itself.

What makes an event news?

**‘It was treachery.  
Treachery with a  
smile on its face.’**

**Margaret Thatcher (1993)**

Thatcher: The Downing Street Years, BBC1

# What makes an event news?

## **Thatcher triumphant**

**Recording from the House of Commons,  
22 November 1990**

The contest for political power always provides us with compelling news stories. This clip of Margaret Thatcher's appearance in the House of Commons is from the day she announced she would not be continuing as prime minister. Among those Conservative party colleagues laughing alongside her are those manoeuvring to succeed her.

**Duration: 2 minutes 5 seconds**

UK Parliament / Parliamentary Recording Unit



What makes an event news?

## **Peterloo Massacre: peaceful protestors killed in Manchester**

**‘Massacre at St. Peter’s or  
“Britons strike home”!!!’, 1819**

Thousands protested peacefully for parliamentary reform at St Peter’s Field, Manchester, in August 1819. On the orders of local magistrates, soldiers violently broke up the protest, killing 20 and injuring hundreds. This brutality made the headlines, igniting wider debate about reform. This satirical piece by George Cruikshank was published in London that same day. The event became known as the Peterloo Massacre.

**British Museum 1876.0510.980**

What makes an event news?

## **Mangrove Nine acquitted**

**Kensington Post, 24 December 1971**

In 1970, nine Black activists were accused of inciting riot after the Metropolitan Police targeted the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill, London. All were acquitted of the main charges, and the trial was the first time a judge acknowledged racial prejudice within the police. This article in the Kensington Post, a local paper, reported the judge's findings. This case marked a key moment in the British Black Power movement.

**LOU.4325 [1971]**

**Above: All images by Tom Picton in 7 DAYS**

What makes an event news?

## **Death at the races**

**The Suffragette, 13 June 1913**

Between 1903 and 1918, the Women's Social and Political Union campaigned for votes for women. Their acts of civil disobedience and protest were reported on in mainstream newspapers. However, establishing their own newspaper, *The Suffragette*, enabled them to get their demands for equal representation across directly. This issue commemorates Emily Davison, who died after trying to tie colours to the king's horse at the Epsom Derby as a protest in 1913.

**RB.31.c.808**

# What makes an event news?

## **Celebration**

Some events become news because they are a moment of collective celebration. A discovery, a rescue, a sporting triumph – such stories bring us together and make us feel connected to the world around us. Celebratory news stories reinforce a sense of community and remind us what we're proud of. These stories show us that news can be happy too.

What makes an event news?

**‘A wonderful show...  
Fantastic to celebrate  
achievement instead  
of hearing all the  
bad and depressing  
news, good things  
do happen.’**

**Christine, Coventry (2012)**  
MailOnline comment

What makes an event news?

## **The Great British Paralympics**

**MailOnline, 29 August 2012**

This MailOnline photo story on the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games captured the euphoria of a national celebration, through dazzling, explosive images.

See the full photo story here:



**Left:**

**dmg media licensing**

**Gareth Copley / Staff via Getty Images**

**and Dan Kitwood / Staff via Getty Images**

**Far left, top to bottom:**

**Gareth Copley / Staff via Getty Images**

**PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo**

**Stefan Wermuth / Reuters Pictures**

**Hannah Peters / Staff via Getty Images**

**Dan Kitwood / Staff via Getty Images**

**Stefan Wermuth / Reuters Pictures**

**Dan Kitwood / Staff via Getty Images**

What makes an event news?

## **#IsItOk?**

**The Last Leg with Adam Hills, Channel 4,  
20 August 2012**

The Last Leg with Adam Hills was launched during the London 2012 Paralympic Games to round up the day's sporting news and celebrate the triumphs of Paralympians. This clip from the first episode demonstrates the gentle yet humorous approach adopted to introduce Paralympic sport to a wider audience.

**Move your hand over the blue sensor below  
to listen**

**Duration: 2 minutes 5 seconds  
BNT000022689**



What makes an event news?

## **The Great Boxer of England**

**Illustrated Sporting News and Theatrical and Musical Review, 14 February 1863**

This celebratory illustration of leading British boxers includes Bob Travers (centre, second from right). A Black American who came to Britain as a child, Travers would have faced racism in his daily life. Yet here he is included – and celebrated – for his sporting achievements as a fearless bare-knuckle fighter alongside his white competitors.

**NEWS11783**

What makes an event news?

## **Millions celebrate moon landing**

1969

Some celebratory news stories are local. Some are national. Some belong to everyone. The moon landing of 20 July 1969 was an American triumph but was something that the whole world could celebrate, a huge achievement for humankind. 650 million people (around 20% of the world's population) watched it on television, either live or in later news programmes.

### **Left to right:**

People watching the moon landing on television:  
Central Park, New York (© Donal F. Holway / NYT)

Germany (Alamy Stock Photo)

Italy (Claudio Luffoli / AP / Shutterstock)

Japan (Associated Press)

Trafalgar Square, London (Evening Standard / Getty Images)

What does a free press mean?

## **What does a free press mean?**

We value the idea of press freedom – a news produced without fear or favour. But when powerful media owners claim to have swayed elections, have they become too powerful? If secret documents that may endanger others are leaked, should they always be published? And what would our world look like if the press did not have the freedoms it enjoys? These stories explore how the news in Britain has been suppressed, censored and fought over.

What does a free press mean?

## **Suppression**

The suppression of news is as old as news itself. Those in power, those with vested interests, or simply those who do not like being written about, have sought to silence what others believed should be told. Suppression has taken many forms – government censorship, legal action, the threat of imprisonment or death. These stories explore how news makers responded when told not to publish.

Redacted text:

Frederick Knight Hunt (1850)

The Fourth Estate: Contributions towards a history of newspapers, and the liberty of the press

# What does a free press mean?

## **Guernsey occupied**

### **Guernsey Evening Press, 1 July 1940**

The Channel Islands were the only part of the British Isles occupied by Germany during the Second World War. One of the Germans' first actions after the invasion was to seize control of the local press. The brutality of this announcement of absolute authority in the Guernsey Evening Press contrasts with the quaint normality of advertisements for fertiliser and the Home Circle Library ('Business as usual').

**NEWS2122**

What does a free press mean?

## **Guernsey fights back**

### **GUNS (Guernsey Underground News Service), August 1943**

There are few more powerful expressions of the desire for a free press than Guernsey Underground News Service. It was produced between 1942 and 1944 at great personal risk. Five islanders were sent to prisons in Germany for distributing the paper, where two died. GUNS, printed on tomato-packing paper, published transcripts of BBC news broadcasts obtained in secret. This issue reported Allied successes on the front line to boost morale.

**Loan courtesy of the Priaulx Library, Guernsey**

What does a free press mean?

## **Gay News wins obscenity case**

### **Gay News, Issue 3, 1974**

Gay News was a campaigning newspaper first published in 1972. This was five years after the Sexual Offences Act legalised homosexual acts between men aged twenty-one and above, if consensual and in private. In 1974, the publisher successfully challenged an obscenity charge over this cover photograph of two men kissing. The result of the court case contributed to changes in public perceptions on what was obscene.

**CUP.713/65**

What does a free press mean?

## **Controlling the press**

### **Considerations and Proposals in Order to the Regulation of the Press, 1663**

After Charles II returned as king in 1660, his supporter Roger L'Estrange wrote this pamphlet calling for printing presses to be shut down and licences to be issued only after interrogation. He wanted penalties for protecting seditious printers and authors, and rewards for exposing them. He suggested particular publications, such as *Mercurius Britannicus*, should be banned outright. L'Estrange was appointed Surveyor and Licenser of the Press shortly afterwards.

**523.g.32**

What does a free press mean?

## **Censored! The unseen photo of the Blitz**

### **The Daily Mirror Censors Book, 1942**

During the Second World War, the Daily Mirror kept this book recording which photographs were approved by the War Office or the Ministry of Information.

Censors' comments are in red, noting decisions to prevent publication.

The Censors Book shows how only positive, heroic images of the London Blitz were permitted. Photographs such as this one, taken from St Paul's where the flames threaten to overwhelm the iconic landmark, were 'stopped'.

**The Daily Mirror / Reach plc**

What does a free press mean?

## **Tax dodger**

**Berthold's Political Handkerchief,**  
8 September 1831

From 1712 to 1855, the British government imposed a high tax on newspapers through the Stamp Act to control the press. Berthold's Political Handkerchief urged revolt against national debt and the government. It was printed on cloth, a cheeky attempt to avoid the tax and escape censorship by claiming it did not qualify as a paper. It was short-lived, but 'unstamped' newspapers continued to defy attempts to suppress working class access to news.

**74/1880.c.1.(148.).**

What does a free press mean?

## **Chaos**

What connects the English Civil War in the 1640s and debates around Brexit in recent years? Both happened at times when new types of media were emerging and old models of control collapsed, resulting in division and chaos. However, a lack of formal regulation also allowed people with different viewpoints the opportunity to tell their version of the story.

What does a free press mean?

## **Civil War: the pamphlet effect**

The breakdown of regulation and enforcement during early years of the English Civil War led to a boom in news production. Unofficial printing presses sprang up as state censorship weakened, allowing more diverse voices, viewpoints and versions of events to be circulated. Through pamphlets like these, women, religious minorities and political dissenters were, for the first time, able to report and comment on the news as it occurred.

**Selection of printed pamphlets from the Thomason Tracts collection**

# What does a free press mean?

## **Free speech**

### **Areopagitica, 1644**

This pamphlet by John Milton sets out a philosophical defence of a free press while passionately opposing government censorship. Making use of the chaos of the Civil War, it was published illegally in response to Parliamentary efforts to regain control of the press. Milton's arguments form the basis of modern justifications for freedom of speech.

**C.55.c.22**

What does a free press mean?

## **Brexit: the Facebook effect**

Social media isn't regulated in the same way as the established news media.

On platforms like Facebook, we can share, dissect, ridicule and amplify news stories and political events. One of the most polarising national debates in recent years has been Brexit. Many users took sides, joining grassroots Facebook groups that made and shared content about Brexit. These memes from both sides of the debate provided a commentary on some of the key moments as they happened.

# What does a free press mean?

## **Satire**

The freedom of the press means the freedom to criticise, and at times to ridicule. News satire is a particularly potent means of holding truth to power, and so plays an important part in delivering the news. At its most telling, it sums up what many think of the news of the day.

What does a free press mean?

**‘Satire is traditionally  
the weapon of the  
powerless against  
the powerful.’**

**Molly Ivins, American journalist (1991)**  
People magazine interview

# What does a free press mean?

## **Grope not hope**

**Private Eye, 14-27 October 2016**

The front pages of Private Eye magazine often use photographs, bold headlines and speech bubbles to satirise politics and current affairs. This cover, published after the 2016 US presidential election, plays on Shepard Fairey's celebrated 2008 poster of Barack Obama. It paints a stark contrast between Obama's message of hope and the sexual misconduct allegations that were made public during Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

**Cup.702.d.1**

What does a free press mean?

## **The dead duck in danger**

**The dead Duck in danger, 4 June 2019**

Satirical cartoonists know they work within a grand tradition. Guardian cartoonist Steve Bell's homage to Gillray's 'The Plumb-pudding in danger' features Theresa May being carved up by President Donald Trump and British foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt. Boris Johnson and Michael Gove appear under a toilet seat on Trump's head. Gove, Hunt and Johnson were competing to replace May as prime minister. Trump was on a visit to the UK.

**P3409**

What does a free press mean?

## **The Plumb-pudding in danger**

**‘The Plumb-pudding in danger, or, State Epicures taking un Petit Souper’, 1805**

The satirical prints of James Gillray were as eagerly viewed for their take on current events as any newspaper in the Georgian era. Gillray’s celebrated satire, ‘The Plumb-pudding in danger’, shows British Prime Minister William Pitt and Emperor Napoleon of France carving up the globe. The illustration is detailed but the point is clear – the age of Western imperialism was underway.

**74/745.a.6**

What does a free press mean?

## **How did you get your knighthood?**

**Have I Got News For You, BBC One,  
21 April 2006**

Have I Got News for You is the UK's longest-running television satire programmes. Its success lies in the panellists' ability to criticise and question the news events of the week while making us laugh. Guest hosts, such as respected ITN news presenter Sir Trevor McDonald, heighten the sense that the show strips back news stories to what really matters.

**Move your hand over the blue sensor below  
to listen**

**Duration: 2 minutes**

**© Hat Trick Productions**



What does a free press mean?

**‘I had them on my  
list too.’**

**David Low (1945)**

The Manchester Guardian

What does a free press mean?

## **Cartoonist on Nazi arrest list**

**Evening Standard, 10 June 1940**

David Low's iconic cartoons for the Evening Standard summed up the fears and beliefs of a nation facing Fascism and war. This image shows Himmler (head of the SS) and two SS officers descending on Belgium with a 'death list'. His cartoons got the attention of the Nazis, who added Low's name to their list of people to arrest after invading Britain. Low's response? 'I had them on my list too'.

**Tate: Presented by the artist and the Evening Standard 1944**

# What does a free press mean?

## **The partisan press**

Freedom of the press protects the news from external interference, but it also allows new makers to publish stories that reflect their own political allegiances. Media owners have – or have claimed to have – swayed elections, changed public opinion and established alternative versions of events.

What does a free press mean?

## **Victory against the Fascists**

**The Daily Worker, 5 October 1936**

The Daily Worker, which represented the Communist Party of Great Britain, celebrated the Battle of Cable Street as a victory for the working classes of East London. This article recounts the coming together of 'Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Labour and Communist, men, women and children' to ensure that Fascism 'did not pass'.

**LD20**

What does a free press mean?

## **Victory against the ‘red mob’**

**The Blackshirt, October 1936**

Anti-fascist demonstrators prevented members of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) from marching down Cable Street on 4 October 1936. Nevertheless, this edition of *The Blackshirt*, the official newspaper of the BUF, claimed they triumphed against the ‘Red mob’. It claims the fascists enjoyed ‘unbelievable scenes of enthusiasm’ and that ‘East London says Britain first!’ Some national newspapers echoed this bias against the Jewish, Irish and left-wing anti-fascist demonstrators.

**PENP.NT123**

**Above:** Police officers arresting a demonstrator during the Battle of Cable Street ©Topical Press Agency / Getty Images

What does a free press mean?

## **Corruption and bribery**

**Grub Street Journal, 26 October 1732**

The news industry was rife with corruption in the 1700s. Politicians often funded newspapers or bribed printers with financial handouts. This satirical illustration shows a printing press in London's notorious Grub Street. The printers, with ridiculous animal heads, are printing newspapers alongside obscene publications. The devils symbolise the printer's apprentices. The double-dealing master-printer has two faces, printing pro-Whig newspapers on one side and pro-Tory on the other.

**Burney 284B**

# What does a free press mean?

## **Northcliffe vs the government**

5 September 1914

Lord Northcliffe owned The Times, The Daily Mail, The Daily Mirror, and was a maker and breaker of governments. In 1914, The Times published a damning exposé about heavy British losses on the Western Front. In this letter, a furious Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, calls it 'panic-stricken stuff'. This was the beginning of Northcliffe's campaign against what he saw as an incompetent wartime government.

**Add MS 62156**

What does a free press mean?

**‘I was very private, and seriously employed in making a Key to open the Kings Cabinet:**

**For it will yield us at least a Moneths sport ; and I mean to anatomize every Paper, week after week, till I have gone quite through; keeping still to my old Motto, For the better Information of the People.’**

**‘The taking of the Kings cabinet, a great mercy.’**

What does a free press mean?

## **Exclusive: King's private letters revealed!**

**Mercurius Britannicus, 1643**

Marchamont Nedham was an opportunist who wrote for both sides during the English Civil War, depending on who was winning. When Charles I's private letters were seized on the battlefield in 1645, Nedham published them in his Parliamentarian newsbook *Mercurius Britannicus*. It was the ultimate scoop. The king's pro-Catholic tone caused uproar and increased support for parliament.

**E.293**

What does a free press mean?

## **The Sun wot won it**

**The Sun, 11 April 1992**

In this notorious headline, The Sun openly boasted that it influenced the outcome of the 1992 General Election. While it's a difficult claim to prove, the newspaper campaigned aggressively against Labour leader Neil Kinnock in the build-up to the election. The Conservatives won. Rupert Murdoch, the newspaper's owner, backed the Conservative party before his switch to support New Labour in 1997.

**LD5**

**Above: The Sun, 9 April 1992**

© News Group Newspapers Ltd



What are the ethics behind the news?

## **What are the ethics behind the news?**

News makers face profound ethical questions about the news they produce. News in Britain is grounded in ideals such as the public interest and transparency. But what happens when these principles get in the way of a 'good story'? Can the end ever justify questionable means, or should some stories simply not be told? The stories in this part of the exhibition explore these ethical choices.

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Public interest**

What does the public need to know?  
News makers often work on the principle that the press has a duty to share information that affects our daily lives. But what happens when this need to know comes into conflict with other considerations, such as the right to privacy, issues of national security or commercial interests?

What are the ethics behind the news?

**‘The public  
interest is not  
always the same  
as the national  
interest.’**

**Edward Snowden (2014)**  
TED Talk

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Guardian's computers smashed**

2013

In 2013, National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden leaked classified information to journalists. The resulting stories alerted the world to civilian surveillance and breaches of privacy by the US and its allies. It was also argued that it impeded defence operations and put lives at risk. This computer used by The Guardian to store the leaked material was destroyed, under the supervision of British security services. However, the data had already been shared.

**Guardian News & Media Archive**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **British concentration camps**

**Manchester Guardian, 19 June 1901**

During the Second Boer War, Boer women and children and Black South Africans were imprisoned in British concentration camps. This newspaper article revealing the terrible conditions in the camps was based on the first-hand accounts by social campaigner Emily Hobhouse. Public opinion was overwhelmingly pro-war, and any opposition was seen as unpatriotic. The report was highly controversial and the Manchester Guardian lost advertising revenue as a result of publishing it.

**Below left, with extract left: LD28**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Eyewitness report: ‘to keep these camps going is murder to the children’**

**Emily Hobhouse’s notes, 1901**

**Entrance ticket for camp hospital at Mafeking, 1901**

Living conditions in British concentration camps during the Boer War were appalling. Food was scarce, sanitation non-existent and medical aid hard to come by. Emily Hobhouse witnessed the camps’ shocking conditions herself and tried to help where she could. These notes from her time in the camps formed the basis of her later published reports.

**Left: The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS, Hobhouse 24, folder 6, fol.14r**

**Right: Add MS 42848 A, British Library**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Monarchy in crisis**

### **Sydney Walton's diary, 1936-37**

Out of deference to the royal family, Edward VIII's relationship with Wallis Simpson was not reported in the British press until just before his official abdication on 10 December 1936.

While the story wasn't considered in the public interest in the UK, it made headlines overseas. In this diary, Sydney Walton, a British publicist, kept and commented on an American news article (published 7 November) that openly discussed the relationship and its constitutional consequences.

**Below: Add MS 89009/20**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## Shoot to kill?

**This Week, ITV, 28 April 1988**

This episode of the documentary series This Week examined whether the deaths of three Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) members in Gibraltar at the hands of the British Special Air Service were lawful. The programme was condemned by sections of the press and members of the British government and was later the subject of an independent inquiry, which upheld the documentary's findings.

**Duration: 2 minutes 10 seconds**

Fremantle / Jean Sibelius Karelia Suite, Op.11, Intermezzo. Used by permission of Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden, Germany. Courtesy of Bob Randall.

Move your hand over the blue sensor below to listen



What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Image**

Images have become an integral part of communicating news. News makers have to decide which pictures will have the most impact while considering questions of consent, exploitation, representation and acceptability. Some of the most influential news images have stopped us in our tracks because they make us think. Others may make us wonder whether they should have been published at all.

What are the ethics behind the news?

**‘as a father, I felt  
deeply moved by  
the sight of that  
young boy on a  
beach in Turkey...  
Britain is a moral  
nation and we will  
fulfil our moral  
responsibilities.’**

**Prime Minister David Cameron (2015)**  
Sky News

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Somebody's child**

**The Independent, 3 September 2015**

The photograph of a three-year-old Syrian refugee, later identified as Alan Kurdi, was taken by Nilüfer Demir. This harrowing image of a dead child was a controversial choice for a newspaper front cover.

Much had been written about the plight of refugees following the Syrian Civil War, but arguably this one image made the crisis impossible for the public and politicians to ignore.

**NEWS REG 196**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Nazi death camp**

**Horror in our Time, Gaumont-British News, 30 April 1945**

The decision to show this cinema newsreel of the liberation of Belsen concentration camp in April 1945 was highly controversial. Some felt such horrors were too disturbing, while others worried the images were beyond belief. Newsreels of the camps changed ideas of what news the public could and should see.

**Duration: 1 minute 8 seconds**

**Source: Reuters via British Pathé**



What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Vietnamese children flee napalm attack**

**The Daily Telegraph, 9 June 1972**

Vietnamese-American photographer Nick Ut took several pictures of South Vietnamese children fleeing their napalm-bombed village on 8 June 1972. This photograph, focusing on 9-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phúc, came to represent the horrors of the Vietnam War. Her nakedness worried news editors, but they published because of the power of the image. It won World Press Photograph of the Year. Kim Phúc went on to form a foundation supporting child victims of war.

**LD7**

**Above:** Phan Thi Kim Phúc stands in front of the photograph of her as a child in Amsterdam, 2018  
© Robin van Lonkhuijsen / AFP via Getty Images

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Introducing Diana**

**The Sun, 18 September 1980**

Sun royal photographer Arthur Edwards' backlit photograph of an off-guard Diana Spencer introduced the anticipated bride of the Prince of Wales to the nation.

It also set the tone for how she would be treated. Young and glamorous, Diana was viewed as an exciting break from royal tradition. She would be pursued by cameras seeking the next revealing exclusive, until her untimely death 17 years later.

**LD5**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Roberta Cowell's own story**

**Picture Post, 13 March 1954**

Roberta Cowell is the first known British person to transition from male to female. A racing driver and Spitfire pilot, she underwent gender reassignment surgery in 1951. When the news broke, she chose to sell her story to Picture Post on the understanding that she would have control of her image. She trusted the magazine, in its words, to report in 'a straightforward, but sober and decent way'.

**NEWS12024**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Crossing the line**

A good story is often a controversial story. Journalists will go to great lengths to investigate and confirm their scoop, very occasionally crossing legal and moral boundaries in the process. Does the end justify the means, or is there a line that shouldn't be crossed? These stories demonstrate that news audiences, as much as the legal system, can influence what's acceptable and what's not.

What are the ethics behind the news?

**‘The press...  
wreaked havoc  
with the lives of  
innocent people.’**

**Lord Justice Leveson (2012)**

An Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics  
of the Press

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **The end of the World**

**News of the World, 10 July 2011**

This final issue of the News of the World has come to symbolise the phone hacking scandal, and the resulting Leveson Inquiry. The news gathering methods used by the paper – specifically accessing private voicemails – were found to be illegal. More importantly, they were unacceptable to its readers. Faced with considerable pressure from the public, News Group Newspapers made the decision to close one of the nation's most popular and longest-running Sunday newspapers.

**NEWS78**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Milly's mum: 'I didn't sleep for three nights'**

**ITV London Tonight, 21 November 2011**

The revelation that the News of the World accessed the voicemail of murdered teenager Milly Dowler was the tipping point in the phone hacking scandal. It decisively turned public and political opinion against the newspaper. This clip includes the victim statement given by Milly's parents to the Leveson Inquiry.

**Move your hand over the blue sensor below to listen**

**Duration: 2 minutes 32 seconds**

**BNT000014022**



What are the ethics behind the news?

## **The less than impartial journalist**

### **The Impartial Scout, 1650**

During the English Civil War, widow Elizabeth Alkin crossed the line to survive. A journalist by day and undercover informant by night, she reported royalist printers to government authorities to make ends meet. At the same time, she published her own radical newsbooks. Her fellow journalists condemned her activities and printed warnings about her in their own publications. This is one of the few surviving issues of *The Impartial Scout*, published by Alkin in 1650.

**Burney 36A**

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **Editor serves time**

### **W T Stead's prison uniform, 1885**

W T Stead's investigation into child sex trafficking crossed the line into criminality. He employed a former brothel-keeper to buy 13-year-old Eliza Armstrong from her parents to prove it was possible. Eliza was safely hidden by the Salvation Army and came to no harm. Despite being sent to prison, Stead enjoyed overwhelming public support and faced no further personal or professional repercussions. His report helped change the law.

**On loan from the Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, London**

Image courtesy of the Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, London

What are the ethics behind the news?

## **London's dark underworld exposed**

**Pall Mall Gazette, 6 July 1885**

Under W T Stead's editorship, the Pall Mall Gazette was at the forefront of investigative journalism in the UK.

This exposé of child abduction and forced prostitution was published in the most shocking and provocative terms. The newspaper's sales rocketed when the story was serialised over four issues. The nation's attention was focussed on the issue of child sex trafficking, which helped raise the legal age of consent.

**LD28**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Can the news ever be objective?**

How do we know which news we can trust? Recent debates have popularised ideas of 'fake news' and 'alternative facts', but they are not new. News makers have always presented different versions of events. Sometimes they have different information. Sometimes they are promoting interests or catering to the audiences they serve. The stories in this part of the exhibition explore truth and trust in the news.

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Alternative facts**

It's easy to trust news that supports our existing world view. However, without challenge or counter-balance, news bubbles are created where opinion and rhetoric can sometimes be mistaken for fact. 'Alternative facts' and conspiracy theories have been published as news for centuries, but are becoming increasingly common in today's algorithm-led world.

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘Our press  
secretary ...  
gave alternative  
facts to that, but  
the point remains.’**

**Kellyanne Conway, Senior Counsellor to President  
Trump (2017)**

Meet the Press, NBC

Can the news ever be objective?

## **'Fake news'**

**Reuters, 2016**

Donald Trump claimed that he attracted the largest crowd for a presidential inauguration ever. This photograph by Lucas Jackson exposed the relatively small turn-out compared to Barack Obama's first inauguration. The contrasting photographs went viral on social media. In response, Press Secretary Sean Spicer accused journalists of 'deliberately false reporting'. The White House's condemnation of mainstream journalism in favour of 'alternative facts' became a theme of Trump's presidency.

**Lucas Jackson / Reuters Pictures**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Forgery**

### **The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, 1920**

This is a copy of a notorious anti-Semitic conspiracy: a forged, anonymous document passed off as a Jewish plan for global domination. The Times denounced it as fake news in 1921 but, in a climate of anti-Semitism, it continued to be believed by many. It was used as propaganda by the Nazi regime and still gains traction today on social media and extremist websites. Conspiracy theories operate outside of the mainstream media.

**C.37.e.32**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Radical opinions divide country**

### **The World is Ruled & Governed by Opinion, 1642**

‘Alternative facts’ and opinions have long been considered dangerous. In this engraving, the blindfolded woman in the tree is a reversal of Lady Justice, a personification of moral force and justice. Here she is Opinion, watered by a fool and surrounded by pamphlets and ballads. At the time political, social and religious issues were being debated in an unprecedented way.

**British Museum 1850,0223.244**

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘Yesterday the Female Imposter who pretended to breed Rabbits in her Womb, made a large Discovery of her Cheat she had all this while carried on. Her Confession took up several Sheets of Paper; but we hear she refuses to name her Confederates, till she is assured of Her Majesty’s Pardon.’**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Woman gives birth to rabbits!**

**Brice's Weekly Journal, 16 December 1726**

Beliefs and cultural traditions can shape what people think of as objective facts. In 1726, Mary Toft gave birth to rabbits, or so it was reported in newspapers such as Brice's Weekly Journal. Many believed what a woman saw before labour could affect her offspring. This gave Toft's claim enough credibility to fool medical professionals and excite the public. She later confessed to the hoax and was imprisoned for fraud.

### **Burney 239B**

**Above:** Portraits of Mary Toft published across newspapers in 1726

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Flying serpent spotted In Essex**

**The flying serpent, or, Strange news out of Essex, around 1669**

This is the only surviving copy of a seventeenth-century news pamphlet reporting on a flying serpent rumoured to be living near Saffron Walden, Essex. Reports of strange creatures and other phenomena were not unusual in the 1600s. Pamphlets often exaggerated or transformed more ordinary things into fantastic happenings. Printers capitalised on widespread beliefs about magic and the supernatural to make money.

**1258.b.18**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Verification**

We want our news to be true, and rely on news makers to report it accurately. Stories should be checked and confirmed before publication. But sometimes the speed of events or the desire for an exclusive scoop have led to headlines that publishers later regret.

Can the news ever be objective?

## **The Titanic sets sail – or does it?**

**The Great Ocean Liner ‘The Titanic’,  
Topical Budget, 17 April 1912**

This newsreel footage of ‘the Titanic’, screened after she sank to satisfy a public desperate for information, was actually of her sister ship, the RMS Olympic. Before the disaster, camera crews had focussed on the Olympic because she was the ‘flagship’ – the first in her luxurious class.

**Duration: 1 minute 9 seconds**

**No audio**

**BFI National Archive**

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘At the very beginning, when the story is just developing, there’s so much confusion and everyone is doing everything they possibly can to grab any piece of information.’**

**Chris Sullivan, editor (2012)**  
Associated Press

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Revealed: the SOS telegram from the Titanic in her final hours**

15 April 1912

The Titanic's isolation and limited communication technology affected the early reporting of the disaster. Wireless operator Jack Phillips sent this desperate telegram as the Titanic started to sink. He included the old CQD and the new SOS distress calls. MGY was the code name for the Titanic. The message reached the SS Birma but she was too far away to help. Phillips did not survive.

**The National Archives, UK, MT 9/920/C  
(folio 526)**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Titanic sunk – no lives lost**

**Westminster Gazette, 15 April 1912**

Early reports of disasters are often confused and unreliable. When the Titanic sank, this issue of the Westminster Gazette initially reported that no lives had been lost. Radio operators desperately tried to discover the truth from wireless chatter. Had the Titanic sunk? How many passengers were in lifeboats? Messages about a ship being towed to Halifax with no casualties sparked widespread inaccurate reports when it was confused with the Titanic.

**NEWS12137**

Can the news ever be objective?

**All passengers  
Rescued this  
Morning**

**Unsinkable  
Reassuring statement  
Made in new york**

**1,455  
Passengers**

**Passengers safe  
All taken off the liner  
This morning**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Hitler hoax hoodwinks historian**

**The Sunday Times, 24 April 1983**

The Sunday Times thought it had the scoop of the century when Adolf Hitler's diaries were 'discovered' in 1983. These were only exposed as forgeries after the paper ran this 'world exclusive' on the story. Historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, Lord Dacre, had last minute doubts about their authenticity. Sunday Times owner Rupert Murdoch famously dismissed them with 'F\*\*\* Dacre. Publish'.

**NEWS111**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **King escapes the guillotine**

**London Packet, 18-21 January 1793**

Just before this issue of the London Packet went to press, the editors received a letter reporting that the French National Convention had sentenced King Louis XVI to exile. They faced a dilemma. Publish immediately or wait for French newspapers to verify the report? They published. Reports the next day confirmed the king had actually been executed. Letters sent via boat were slow and unreliable, but the only way of receiving news from the continent.

**Burney 852B**

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘As this paper was going to press,  
we received intelligence...**

**...That he should not be punished with  
death, but be exiled the territories of the  
republic.’**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Eyewitness report: imminent German invasion**

**The Daily Telegraph, 29 August 1939**

Most journalists take great care to verify breaking news stories. War correspondent Clare Hollingworth was the first to report the outbreak of the Second World War. Working for The Daily Telegraph, she confirmed rumours by witnessing German forces amassing on the Polish border on the 28 August 1939. Hollingworth's account made the Telegraph's front page the next day and was the first report the British Foreign Office received about the invasion.

**LD7**

Clare Hollingworth © National Portrait Gallery, London

**Above:** Extract from '1000 tanks massed on Polish frontier', The Daily Telegraph, 29 August 1939

© Telegraph Media Group Ltd

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘I looked into the valley and saw scores if not hundreds of tanks lined up ready to go into Poland.’**

**Clare Hollingworth (1939)**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Persuasion**

Most news publishers aim to persuade as well as inform. In times of crisis, there is an extra urgency in crafting a persuasive message, from supplying public information to overt propaganda. The points of view news makers promote can be influenced by advertisers, special interest groups, political parties, or the government. Whether we choose to believe them or not is a different matter.

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘I must give the  
British people  
a very simple  
instruction –  
you must stay  
at home.’**

**Boris Johnson (2020)**

Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19)

# Can the news ever be objective?

## Stay home

### Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), BBC One, 23 March 2020

In times of national crisis, we turn to television for reassurance, as the line between news and public information becomes blurred. On 23 March 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced strict restrictions on public life in response to COVID-19. Viewed by 27.1 million people, it was the most watched British television broadcast in years.

Move your hand over the blue sensor below to listen

Duration: 1 minute 54 seconds

BNT000174115

© UK Pool via BBC



Can the news ever be objective?

## **Stay alert**

### **Stay Alert campaign, 14 May 2020**

On 14 May 2020, almost every newspaper in England had the same words on the cover: 'Stay Alert'. This was part of the multi-million pound 'All In, All Together' partnership between news publishers and government-appointed media agency OmniGOV. It made for an extraordinarily unified message on news stands in England. However, disagreement over the meaning of 'Stay Alert' meant no newspaper in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland carried the same message.

**British Library newspaper collection**

Can the news ever be objective?

**‘Ye vipers of human kind!’**

**The Constitutional Courant,  
21 September 1765**

The Constitutional Courant contains an early example of visual propaganda. This news sheet attacked the Stamp Act, which taxed American paper goods to support the British army. It repurposed an early American political cartoon of a snake first used in 1754 to promote unity between British colonies in North America. The snake became a powerful symbol of colonial freedom during the American Revolution.

**85/Cup.651..e.**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Strike!**

**The British Worker,**  
9 May 1926

During the general strike of May 1926, most newspapers ceased publication because printers were on strike.

Two short-lived newspapers were created during the strike: the government's *The British Gazette* and the Trades Union Congress' *The British Worker*.

Each countered the other's message.

This issue of the *British Worker* responds to a BBC radio broadcast given by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin.

**LD6**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **War atrocities**

### **Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, 1915**

Known as the Bryce Report, this document collated accounts of alleged atrocities perpetrated by German troops in the First World War. Sponsored by the War Propaganda Bureau, a secret British government organisation, its findings were widely reported by the UK and international press. Though later discredited as unsubstantiated, the report helped shape public perceptions of the Germans as the evil enemy.

**B.S.18/28**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **‘Hideous forms of mutilation’**

**The Suffragette, 21 May 1915**

Stories from the Bryce Report were reproduced in many British newspapers, used to drum up anger and encourage recruitment into the armed forces.

The Suffragette was the newspaper of the Women’s Social and Political Union, which campaigned for women’s political representation. This article uses some of the report’s most lurid and questionable findings to describe what could happen to British women if there was a German invasion.

**RB.31.c.811**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **German corpse factory**

**The Daily Mail, 4 May 1917**

The press continued to print anti-German atrocity stories long after the Bryce Report. In this notorious case, newspapers owned by Lord Northcliffe reported that Germans were using fat from the dead bodies of their own soldiers in shells.

This photo in the Daily Mail appears to have been faked, and the story was soon dismissed. It was used by other countries to argue that the British were masters of negative propaganda.

**LD6**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Politicising the story**

News stories are often politically charged. This is particularly so at times of national crisis or during general elections, when it can seem that so much is at stake. Bitter debates and counter-narratives develop, often dividing opinions further and turning what may be a small story into big news.

Can the news ever be objective?

## **The boy on the hospital floor**

2019

A photograph of a four-year-old boy with suspected pneumonia lying on the floor of Leeds General Infirmary was one of the most politicised news stories of the 2019 General Election. This video shows how the story spread and evolved across social and traditional media.

**Duration: 2 minutes 20 seconds**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **The Horrid Hellish Popish Plot**

### **A True Narrative of the Horrid Hellish Popish Plot, 1682**

Fantasia and fraudster Titus Oates fabricated a Catholic plot to kill the king. There was widespread panic, followed by mass arrests and executions, fuelled by anti-Catholic feeling. The Whig and the Tory parties took advantage of the uproar to push their opposing political and religious agendas. This broadside printed in 1682 by followers of the Tory party is a satirical response to the hysteria, parodying Oates' account and the Whig response.

**British Museum 1849,0315.81**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Zinoviev sets the record straight**

26 October 1924

Grigory Zinoviev sent this telegram the day after the Daily Mail accused him of planning revolution. He furiously denied authorship of the 'Zinoviev letter' and condemned it as a crude fake produced as an 'election manoeuvre'. An official report published in 1999 found that the Mail's 'letter' was forged by an MI6 source and leaked by MI6 or MI5 officers to the Conservative Party. Its exact route to the newspaper remains unknown.

**Trades Union Congress Archive, Modern  
Records Centre, University of Warwick  
(MSS.292/947/43/1)**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Socialist plot exposed**

**The Daily Mail, 25 October 1924**

A vote of no confidence was passed against the first Labour Government after only eight months in power. Four days before the resulting election, the Daily Mail published this letter allegedly from Grigory Zinoviev, head of the Communist International, urging revolution and portraying the Labour Government as a puppet of Soviet Russia. The letter was immediately denounced as fake but public opinion had been swayed. Labour lost the election.

**Trades Union Congress Archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MSS.292/947/43/8)**

Can the news ever be objective?

## **Language**

Language is not neutral. It is a powerful tool that can be used to influence public opinion. It can help spread misinformation and inflame prejudices. But it can also be used by independent voices to amplify their stories. From headlines to hashtags, just a few carefully chosen words can be unforgettable.

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## **#BlackLivesMatter**

**Instagram and Twitter, 2016-2021**

There may be no more powerful tool in today's news world than the hashtag. A carefully chosen hashtag can encapsulate a strong message, link posts on a topic together, and amplify content across social media. #BlackLivesMatter, both a phrase and a movement, formed in 2013. The examples here use the hashtag to put the injustices experienced by Black British people often ignored by mainstream media back into the news.

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## Spot the difference

Instagram, 9 December 2018

Manchester City footballer Raheem Sterling posted this comparison of articles by the Daily Mail and MailOnline on Instagram. Both Tosin Adarabioyo and Phil Foden, at similar stages in their careers, had bought similarly expensive houses for their mothers. Sterling calls out the implicit racism behind the difference in tone between the two headlines. His analysis was widely reported in the mainstream press.

© Raheem Sterling

**Left:** Tosin Adarabioyo: Sam Bagnall – AMA – Getty Images.

**Right:** Phil Foden: © Philip Oldham / BPI / Shutterstock

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**‘Wicked  
machinations  
and  
damnable plots.’**

**Bloody newes from Norwich (1641)**

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## **Papists try to burn Norwich**

### **Bloody newes from Norwich, 1641**

Inflammatory language has whipped up public hysteria about marginalised groups since news began. Many anti-Catholic news pamphlets were printed after the 1641 Irish Rebellion, a violent conflict where Irish Catholics rebelled against Protestant English rulers. This frenzied account claims that papists (Roman Catholics) in Norwich attempted to 'consume the whole city by fire'.

**E.179(10)**

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## **'War on homosexuals'**

**Gay Times, March 1985**

This article by Terry Sanderson for Gay Times focuses on examples of reports in some of the British press about the AIDS crisis. He sets out how homophobic language, and the space given to such language, feeds prejudice.

**Cup.821.c.23**

# Can the news ever be objective?

## **The 'truth'...**

### **The Sun, 19 April 1989**

On 15 April 1989, at an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool FC and Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough stadium, a crush resulted in the eventual deaths of 97 Liverpool fans. With this explosive headline, The Sun reported allegations of repugnant behaviour by Liverpool fans as fact. Report and headline caused outrage in Merseyside, leading to a long-running and widespread local boycott of the newspaper.

**NEWS.REG103**

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## **...and the real truth**

**The Sun, 13 September 2012**

23 years later, following a long campaign for justice by survivors and families of victims, the Hillsborough Independent Panel concluded fans had been smeared and used as scapegoats for police failings and mismanagement by officials. The Sun published a front-page revision, 'The Real Truth', the editor admitting 'We said it was the truth - it wasn't'. In 2016, a new inquest exonerated fans from any blame, ruling that the victims had been unlawfully killed.

**NEWS.REG103**

Where do we find the news?

## **Where do we find the news?**

News maps out our world. Where we find our news shapes our response to the stories we see and hear. Over the centuries, news has reached us in many different ways. It has been shared with crowds, families and individuals, sometimes days or weeks after an event. Today, news can be highly personalised and available almost instantly. The way we discover the news is ever-changing, but our need to know what is happening is constant.

Where do we find the news?

## **The town square**

### **The Severall Places Where You May Hear News, around 1640**

In the era before newspapers, the latest news might be read out in a town square or even sung as ballads, then circulated by word of mouth. This print from around 1640, which draws on stereotypes of gossiping women, shows the news being shared in public and private spaces.

Today, sharing what we have learnt with others – online and in person – remains a key way we keep up with the news.

By permission of the Pepys Library,  
Magdalene College Cambridge

Where do we find the news?

## **The coffee house**

**Interior of a London Coffee-house,  
around 1690-1700**

Coffee houses appeared in London in the 1650s and soon spread across the country. Customers came not only to enjoy a cup, but also to read and discuss the news. Newsletters, newsbooks and some of the first newspapers were made available on long tables, as shown in this late seventeenth-century drawing.

© Trustees of the British Museum

Where do we find the news?

## **The print shop**

### **Spectators at a Print-Shop in St. Paul's Church Yard, 1774**

Eighteenth-century print shop windows displayed the latest news publications and satirical prints relating to the latest stories. In this print by John Raphael Smith, the viewers outside Carrington Bowles' shop at 69 St Paul's Churchyard, London, seem to recognise themselves in the caricatures, and one is being arrested. Newsagents today still display the day's headlines for the passer-by.

© Trustees of the British Museum

Where do we find the news?

## **The gentlemen's club**

**Benjamin Robert Haydon, 'Waiting for the Times on the Morning after the Reform Debate, 8 October 1831', 1831**

No image sums up the weighty authority of the broadsheet newspaper more powerfully than Haydon's 'Waiting for the Times'. Seated in a London club, a man swamped by his uncut copy of The Times reads about parliament's rejection of the Reform Bill, whilst another waits anxiously for his turn. Gentlemen's clubs were exclusively male spaces where an influential elite discussed the current news of the day.

On loan from Times Newspapers Limited / Archive

Where do we find the news?

## **The newspaper reading room**

**‘Working-men’s reading room, just opened at Carlisle’, The Illustrated London News, 20 December 1851**

Reading rooms in the 1800s made newspapers, until then mostly the preserve of elites, available to working class men. The Lord Street Working Men’s Reading Room in Carlisle, shown in this illustration, opened in 1851, charging 1d a week or no charge at all for the unemployed. There was tension, however, between middle-class benefactors who funded such spaces and radical readers, who resented rules preventing political debate in the reading rooms.

Look and Learn

Where do we find the news?

## **The newsreel cinema**

**Review of 1934, Pathe Gazette,  
27 December 1934**

Newspapers lost their monopoly on news when newsreels appeared in British cinemas from 1910. By the 1930s, there were over 4,000 cinemas in Britain, each showing a news bulletin such as this review of the year. Dedicated newsreel cinemas opened in shopping areas and at railway stations. Millions could now see the news as well as read it. Newsreels faded away once television came to living rooms in the 1950s.

**Duration: 9 minutes 46 seconds**

**No audio**

Footage supplied by British Pathé

Where do we find the news?

## **The train**

**Cyril Power, 'The Tube Train', around 1934**

The rapid spread of railways across the UK from the 1840s created a new kind of space for news. Commuters could easily catch up on the morning's news on their way to work. The tube travellers in Cyril Power's linocut are so absorbed that they have become one with the newspapers they are reading.

**© The estate of Cyril Power / Bridgeman Images**

Where do we find the news?

## **The radio set**

**Family relaxes at home on a Sunday afternoon in Taunton, Somerset, 1942**

Radio brought the immediacy of news into the living room. Speaking directly to the listener, it created an emotional bond that reached its peak with the nightly BBC broadcasts through the Second World War. Radio expanded post-war to encompass commercial and local radio stations. These provide vital information and connection for diverse communities across the UK.

© Imperial War Museum (D 12274)

**Below:** Listening to the radio in the West Indian War Workers' Hostel, England

© Imperial War Museum (D 6196)

Where do we find the news?

## **The television set**

### **BBC News at Ten, 24 February 2022**

Television dominated news from the 1950s through to the age of the internet. It gradually became more popular than radio news and drove newsreels out of business. The BBC and ITN (producer of ITV and Channel 4 News) have long competed for our attention. Sky News introduced 24-hour news in 1989.

Headlines – such as BBC News at Ten’s for the first day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine – powerfully establish the news agenda.

**Duration: 2 minutes 15 seconds**

© BBC

**Below: Daily Herald Archive / SSPL / Getty Images**

Where do we find the news?

## **The Internet**

The Internet has opened up a greater world of news than ever before, available in an instant. This installation shows live news coming to London from around the world. The headlines are aggregated from multiple news sources via the Google News feed. Whether tailored by humans or machines, the news is always shaped by who and where we are.

News breakers

## **News breakers**

Here we celebrate some individuals and some teams – not always journalists – who have pushed boundaries to get a story told. Their achievements show how individuals can make a difference to the way the news is reported and shared. Through the news, these news breakers have worked to change how we see the world.

### **The conversation doesn't end here**

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## Events

### **Have We Got News For You? with 5x15**

**With Ed Miliband, Gideon Rachman,**

**Rana Ayyub / Thursday 19 May**

**5 speakers with 15 minutes each to tell a story. We explore the news with those who shape it.**

### **Writing Political Satire and**

**News Inspired Comedy**

**Master the techniques of political satire /**

**Starts Wednesday 15 June**

**A three-week online course where you will learn a range of tools for producing topical comedy, with tutor Chris Head.**

### **Where Next?**

**From #fakenews towards a**

**compassionate media / Monday 11 July**

**Jennifer Nadel finds ways to restore trust, wellbeing and maybe even some happiness to the news.**

**Attend free exhibition workshops and events for school students and teachers  
[bl.uk/learning](https://bl.uk/learning)**

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**Kurt Barling, Professor of Journalism Practice, Middlesex University, London**

**George Brock**

**Jo Fox, School of Advanced Study, University of London**

**Kathryn Geels, Programme Director, European Journalism Centre**

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