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Scottish Newspapers and Scottish National Identity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

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Abstract:

Scotland is distinctive within the United Kingdom newspaper industry both because more people read papers and also because Scots overwhelmingly prefer to read home-produced organs. The London 'national' press titles have never managed to penetrate and dominate in Scotland to the preponderant extent that they have achieved in provincial England and Wales. This is true both of the market for daily and for Sunday papers. There is also a flourishing Scottish local weekly sector, with proportionately more titles than in England and a very healthy circulation total.

Some of the reasons for this difference may be ascribed to the higher levels of education obtaining in Scotland. But the more influential factor is that Scotland has retained distinctive institutions, despite being part of Great Britain for almost exactly three hundred years. The state church, the education system and the law have not been assimilated to any significant amount with their counterparts south of the border. In the nineteenth century in particular, religious disputes in Scotland generated a huge amount of interest. Sport in Scotland, too, is emphatically not the same as in England, whether in terms of organisation or in relative popularity. Additionally, the menu of major political issues in Scotland often has been and is quite divergent from England – for instance, the land question and self-government. Moreover, since the union of 1707, there has been no elected or representative forum within Scotland to debate these matters. As the government and the press in London both tended to ignore Scottish matters almost completely, the Scottish newspapers were the only available medium through which controversy and discussion on reforms and policy-formulation could be conducted. Scottish papers therefore tended to carry a great deal of material, both news and comment, which was specific to Scotland, and nowhere more so than in the sports pages

The creation of the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh in 1999 has been a boost for the Scottish press, since the deliberations of this body are not much reported in the national papers. But the Scottish parliament administers most of the internal domestic matters which affect Scotland, so there is naturally considerable interest among the citizens to be informed of proceedings there. The quality (i.e., non-tabloid) Scottish press has been diligent and thorough in meeting this obligation from the outset, so that they devote as much space to the parliament in Edinburgh as the equivalent national papers do to the parliament in Westminster.

Despite the fact that ownership of the Scottish dailies has for most of the twentieth century been in the hands of non-Scots, there has not been any dilution of the heavy Scottish content these papers contain. Indeed this remote proprietorship may well have been advantageous, as in the case of the rejuvenation of the Scotsman in the mid-1950s under a Canadian owner.

The Scottish press has a long history of willingness to innovate with new equipment, and this has persisted to the present, with use of e-mail and web-sites universal among the daily and Sunday papers, and spreading steadily through the local weeklies.

Newspaper readership in Scotland presents two particularly striking features.

Firstly, a larger share of the population reads papers than in the rest of Britain. A survey in 1982 established that in Scotland 84.6% of adults read a morning paper, whereas in England and Wales, the figure is 75.0%.¹ The difference in terms of circulation figures is equally evident: in 2001, sales of morning papers in Scotland amounted to 451 per 1,000 people aged 16 and over, against 271 in England and Wales. For Sunday papers, the difference is even wider: in England 292 copies are sold per 1,000, in Scotland, 501.²

Secondly, again unlike the rest of Britain, Scots overwhelmingly prefer to read regional papers (i.e., published in Scotland) rather than the 'national' titles originating from London. The 1982 survey remarked that 30% of Scots read their four regional morning dailies, while a mere 5% in England and Wales read their twelve regional morning titles. Even more tellingly, if the readership of two other papers with a heavy Scottish content were taken into account, the six Scottish dailies were read by 79% of Scots, while the nationals were read by 27%. The same pattern prevails in the Sunday market. In 1982, the three Scottish Sunday papers were read by 82% of Scots, but the London Sundays by 37%. In England and Wales, the regional Sundays are of little significance: in 1989, the Scottish Sundays sold 1,391,000 copies, the non-metropolitan Sundays south of the border had a combined circulation of 491,000.³ As the 1982 study observed, 'The suggested conclusion is that there is an overwhelming preference by Scots for their own Scottish media, catering for Scottish tastes and aspirations.'⁴

It may be appropriate to briefly outline the composition of the Scottish daily and Sunday press. The four main cities each produce a morning daily, all with a current circulation between 85,000 and 100,000.⁵ A noteworthy aspect is that none of them can be termed 'national', inasmuch they sell particularly strongly in their immediate hinterland, but are little bought elsewhere in Scotland. Thus the *Scotsman*, which claims, as its title implies, to be a paper for the whole of Scotland, was read in 1982 by 28.7% of the population in Lothian region, of which Edinburgh is the capital. But in neighbouring Strathclyde region, where Glasgow is the centre, a mere 1.3% read the *Scotsman*. It is worth remembering that Glasgow is 60 kilometres from Edinburgh.

These city dailies are all broadsheet in format and their niches are either 'middle-market' or 'quality', to use the terms applied to the London nationals. The 'tabloid' sector is dominated by a single Scottish paper, the *Daily Record*. It is a stablemate of the London *Daily Mirror*, but there is virtually no overlap in content, as the *Record* is full of Scottish material. The diverging sales trajectory of the two papers is illuminating: between 1984 and 1994, the *Mirror's* circulation fell by 28.1%, the *Record's* by only 0.1%. Until the 1970s, the *Mirror* was the largest selling paper in Britain, but since then its circulation has

plummeted, so that it has surrendered the top position to the *Sun*, and indeed has now been overtaken by the mid-market *Daily Mail*. The *Record* has withstood the challenge of the *Sun* more effectively than its London sister: in March 2002, the *Sun*'s sales in England were 2.9 million, the *Mail*'s, 2.2 million, and the *Mirror*'s, 1.9 million; but in Scotland, the *Sun* sold 362,000 copies, the *Mail*, 123,000, and the *Record*, 573,000.⁶ It is instructive that the *Sun* has only begun to make inroads in Scotland after it heavily reinforced staffing at its Scottish bureau and inserted a very strong Scottish content into its pages.⁷ This necessity for a Scottish slant was identified some 70 years ago, when Lord Beaverbrook founded the *Scottish Daily Express*. Of Scottish ancestry, Beaverbrook emphasised from the outset that this would not be a carbon copy of his highly successful Fleet Street *Daily Express*, but would have a high quota of Scottish material. Until the late 1960s, the *Scottish Daily Express* was the largest selling paper in Scotland, with a huge Scottish staff – at the closure of its Scottish operation in 1974 1,942 were employed in Glasgow alone.⁸

The Sunday market in Scotland has long been dominated by two titles: the *Sunday Post* and the *Sunday Mail*, the Sunday version of the *Daily Record*. These two have a huge circulation in Scotland: the 1982 study revealed that 67.3% of Scots read the *Post*, and 53.4% the *Mail*. In England, the biggest paper, the *News of the World*, was read by 28.2% of adults, but in Scotland, by 12.8%.⁹ There are two quality Sundays produced in Scotland, one linked to the *Scotsman*, the other to the *Herald*. These are relative newcomers, both begun within the past decade, so the ascendancy of home products in this segment of the market is less pronounced than in the popular press. But already they are selling about as well as the largest national quality, the *Sunday Times*.

Scotland has a long tradition of vigorous local papers. The standard catalogue of titles records some 1,100 journals existing at one point or another in the past 200 years.¹⁰ Throughout the twentieth century, the number of Scottish local papers remained at about 15% of the English total, although Scotland's population was 10% of England's.¹¹ Over the last hundred years, mergers and closures have whittled the number down, so that the current *Benn's Media* directory lists just over 100 such papers surviving, with a total circulation verging on one million - a sizeable tally in country with an adult population of just four million. But the pattern is not one of unremitting contraction: in the last 30 years, nearly 40 new local papers have opened, although not all have survived. The most renowned newcomer is the *West Highland Free Press*, which started in 1972.

Part of the reason for the higher quotient of readership in Scotland may be explained in terms of supply and demand. Demand may have been influenced by the fact that in the nineteenth century educational provision in Scotland was substantially more widespread than in England. Basic literacy statistics reveal that in the middle of the nineteenth century, the figure was higher for Scottish women (77%) than for English men (70%), and this differential persisted, albeit with a diminishing gap, until the turn of the century.¹² Although universal schooling was started in the 1870s in both countries, participation in education continued at higher levels in Scotland. The proportion of children staying on at school beyond the minimum leaving age and also acquiring paper certificates has been, and still is greater in Scotland. In 2000, 58% of Scottish and 50% of English schoolchildren emerged with 5 GCSE passes at C or above, while 56.8% of Scots of working age had qualifications to at least A-level standard, against 47.6% south of the border. Additionally, attendance at university has been pronouncedly more prevalent in Scotland than in England. Again, in the mid-nineteenth century (1865), those at university in Scotland comprised 1 in 1,000 of the total population, while in England the ratio was 1 in 5,800.¹³ Throughout the twentieth century, Scotland retained its superiority in this area, although, as with schooling, the gap has narrowed somewhat. To-day, 1 in 750 of the total English population is studying for an undergraduate course, in Wales, 1 in 705, and in Scotland, 1 in 650.

In the past, then, readership percolated further down the social scale than was the case in England. Alexander Russel, the great editor of the *Scotsman* in the middle of the nineteenth century, recalled that as he was travelling to Galashiels in the Borders:

He heard a voice crying, ‘Russel! Russel! He looked about and saw that the shout came from a ploughman who was at work in a field past which he was driving. The man pulled up his horses, left his plough stilts, ran down to the roadside hedge and asked over it: ‘how is the Irish Church Bill going?’

The person retelling this episode commented: ‘I wonder where else in all the wide world would an editor of a great newspaper have been accosted in like manner, or asked such a question by a peasant.’¹⁴ His comments have greater impact, as he was an Englishman who had worked for papers in both countries.

On the supply side, Edinburgh was - and remains - the most important publishing centre outside London, housing firms such as Chambers, Black, Constable and Bartholomew. Glasgow also had significant publishing sector, notably the firms of Collins and Blackie. Thus, there was a large pool of skilled printworkers (probably a consequence of the educational provision discussed above) who would provide the artisan skills necessary for producing a newspaper, and printing machinery would be easy to acquire. One consequence of the large stock of educated people might have been that while the traditional occupations for university graduates were medicine, law, teaching and the church, if these palled, it was not unusual for graduates to turn, as an alternative career, to journalism - a field in which Scots have long been prominent. Thus the first professional journalist to edit the *Glasgow Herald* was appointed in 1856, almost exactly 75 years after the paper began. He was succeeded, however, by a university professor, while the *Scotsman* at more or less the same time was edited by a former clergyman, who later became a barrister and ended up as an MP.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the more important mainspring of the success of the press in Scotland in resisting massive encroachments from the metropolitan papers with greater success than its English and Welsh provincial equivalents probably lies elsewhere. It is the nature of Scottish civil society and the peculiar constitutional arrangements which persisted after the union of Scotland with England and Wales in 1707 which had greater influence. For the union merged only the two parliaments, and so Scotland was left with a separate and quite distinct set of national institutions – notably church, education, poor relief and law. The administration of Scottish affairs, while nominally run from Westminster and Whitehall, was from the nineteenth century effectively left in the hands of Scots in Scotland. There was, for instance, no designated minister with responsibility for Scottish affairs between the 1820s and 1885. Even after the Scottish Office was set up, it tended to be a domain left unintruded upon by UK ministers and departments.¹⁶ There was, however, no debating forum where policy on matters affecting Scotland could be aired, and parliament in London was normally too preoccupied with Imperial and British-wide issues – and, in any event, both too ignorant of and indifferent to the peculiarities of Scotland. It was therefore difficult to have Scottish affairs fully discussed at Westminster; so the medium through which these topics could be taken up became the newspapers.

Religion bulked larger in nineteenth century public affairs in Scotland than in England (but perhaps not in Wales), and its importance persisted longer into the next century. Whereas the state church in England was Anglican, in Scotland it was Presbyterian, with Anglicanism a very small dissenting church. Accordingly, issues affecting the Church of England evoked little interest in Scotland, and Presbyterian controversies, equally, were not much covered in England. Additionally, Scotland was more Presbyterian than England was Anglican. In 1851, 47% of churchgoers in England were Anglican, in Scotland, 91% were Presbyterian.¹⁷ Moreover, the Scottish church was racked in the nineteenth century by divisions which did not obtain south of the border. A serious split – the Disruption - occurred in the Church of Scotland in 1843, with one third of the clergy and members departing to form a new church. This episode is frequently depicted as the most important event in nineteenth century Scottish history, and the newspapers were full of the ten year’s debate which preceded the Disruption.¹⁸ Indeed, several titles were established solely to

propound one side of the debate – mostly these were on the evangelical wing, who left in 1843.¹⁹ The best example is the *Witness*, founded in 1840 and edited by the famous geologist and naturalist, Hugh Miller.²⁰ In many places, too, existing newspapers would be drawn to one side or the other, as in Stirling, whose *Observer* became identified with the seceding party. The perpetuation of the bitter conflict for some 60 years after 1843 kept church matters to the fore in the papers. For instance, the regular meetings of the local presbyteries [regional committees] of the three main Presbyterian churches were reported and commented on editorially as fully as the deliberations of local town councils. Again in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland became a major agitation, far more so than its English counterpart, and again the press explored this question exhaustively. The forerunner of the *Daily Record* established its popularity by acting as the mouthpiece of evangelical disestablishers in the west of Scotland.²¹

Although religious adherence has declined in the twentieth century Scotland, the process has been less precipitate than in England: in the latter, Protestant church membership fell from 3.9 million in 1900 to 3.1 million in 1970, but in the former it moved from 1,164,000 to 1,179,00.²² In consequence, church matters could still generate news columns well into the second half of the century. The prime example of this is a ferocious campaign waged by the *Scottish Daily Express* between 1958 and 1968 against proposals to forge a degree of unity between the Church of Scotland and the Anglican church.²³ The *Express's* campaign was carried on in its news and comment sections, and when the unity talks were eventually abandoned, a leading Anglican participant, the bishop of Bristol, ascribed much of the responsibility to the paper's involvement.²⁴ It is extremely unlikely that the biggest-selling English daily would have embroiled itself in such a matter – indeed the efforts to merge the Church of England with the Methodist church, occurring at about the same time, drew little attention in the more popular press. It is interesting, also, that the *Scottish Daily Express's* circulation actually rose during its was against 'Bishops in the Kirk', while the national *Daily Express's* fell.²⁵

Another aspect which kept the Church of Scotland in the press's eye was that its annual General Assembly was sometimes portrayed as a surrogate parliament, so that the Assembly's pronouncements were seen as indicators of Scottish opinion on topical issues. The General Assembly did not confine itself to religious matters, but spoke regularly on wider themes – social, political and moral – throughout the twentieth century, and the Church of Scotland's support for Scottish self-government in the 1980s and 1990s was taken to mark a sea-change in attitudes generally. The attention given to the Assembly's proceedings was quite extensive, with as much space devoted in the quality Scottish press to the General Assembly as to proceedings in the Westminster parliament.

The significant differences in the Scottish and English education systems, already alluded to, meant that the former attracted little reporting in national London papers. Yet education was, as we have seen, a matter of major preoccupation for Scots. The universities were viewed as national institutions and so subject to public debate, whereas the older English ones were regarded as private bodies, immune from outside comment. The higher proportion of Scots, as compared to England, using schools in the state, not the private, sector heightened the widespread interest in education policy. The need for separate legislation underlined this distinctiveness. The press fully debated educational issues from the 1830s down to the present day.²⁶ The *Herald* and the *Scotsman* both have a weekly education page, entirely concentrated on the position in Scotland.

Scots law is radically different in several leading fields from English law – pre-eminently in the areas of property, family, obligations and criminal law and procedure. This means that separate legislation is frequently needed for Scotland, and again it is in the columns of the Scottish, not the national, press that public discussion takes place. Similarly, commentary on decisions handed down in Scottish cases almost never impact on non-Scottish newspapers, but are often debated here.

The political role of the Scottish press is also highly pertinent in explaining its persistent strength. As elsewhere in Britain, of course, papers were started up in the nineteenth century explicitly to serve party interests – the *Scotsman* was launched in an effort to counter the prevailing reactionary Toryism of the post-Napoleonic war era, and the Conservatives in turn spent heavily starting up party organs, notably in the 1870s and on the eve of World War I.²⁷

More vitally, there were issues of high priority in Scottish politics which did not always apply in England with the same intensity – disestablishment is a good instance. Two topics may be selected as examples of this trend. First, the land question, which acquired high saliency in late nineteenth century Scotland, mainly because of conditions in the Highlands. The resistance offered there by the crofters (peasant farmers) to landlords' evictions and harassment acted as a major catalyst in Scottish politics, even outside the region. Much of the credit for the crofters' successful struggle can be ascribed to the role of newspapers, notably the *Oban Times* and the *Highlander*, in promoting the cause and in linking the geographically disparate movement.²⁸ The issue was projected beyond the Highlands by, among others, by the radical Glasgow paper, the *North British Daily Mail*. Between 1906 and 1911, efforts to legislate for Scottish smallholders' rights aroused great passion in the newspapers, with the *Oban Times* once again prominent in the anti-landlord camp.²⁹ In the last twenty years, the rights of small, isolated Scottish communities to protect themselves from arbitrary decisions by landowners have been vigorously championed by Scottish papers, with the *West Highland Free Press* being perhaps the foremost in publicising these abuses to a wider public. It is highly significant that one of the major early priorities of the new Scottish Parliament has been to tackle this aspect of the land question, whereas there is pretty well complete indifference in England to this matter.

A second field is the demand for the establishment of a devolved legislative body with responsibility for Scottish affairs. The late nineteenth century campaign for the creation of a separate government department to deal with specifically Scottish matters resulted in the setting up of the Scottish Office in 1885. One of the most weighty influences in this campaign was the *Scotsman*, then probably at the peak of its reputation as an opinion-former second only to the *London Times*. The editor of the *Scotsman* liaised very closely with Lord Rosebery, the main political advocate of this innovation.³⁰ Thereafter newspapers took up the call for more self-government on an intermittent basis: for instance, Beaverbrook's *Scottish Daily Express* advocated the cause in the 1930s, largely as a circulation-boosting bid. It is significant that in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when a movement to demand a Scottish parliament was drawing considerable public support, the civil servants in the Scottish Office carefully monitored the local press within Scotland to ascertain the extent of backing for the demand. The conclusion drawn was that very few papers were sympathetic to the cause, and by the very early 1950s, both of the main parties – Conservative and Labour – had effectively decided to ignore the mass petitioning movement. The growing swell of public opinion since about 1980 for some greater Scottish control of Scottish affairs had been reflected in the disposition of the press. The *Scotsman* had been a firm supporter of home rule since about 1945, but its stance grew more explicit and insistent from the mid-1970s. Papers previously cool to devolution, like the *Daily Record* and the *Glasgow Herald*, became increasingly committed to constitutional change. By the late 1980s there was, in effect, almost no paper with a significant circulation in Scotland willing to adopt the anti-devolution standpoint.³¹

Perhaps the other significant aspect of the divergence between the Scottish and the national press is that within the last thirty years the political balance of the latter has tilted decisively towards the Tories. By 1980, only the much-shrivelled *Daily Mirror* was on Labour's side, and even it had lost its confident unwavering support of the immediate post-war years. The right had gained the adhesion of the largest-selling newspaper, the *Sun*, and the eclipse of the *Mirror* by the *Daily Mail*, a stridently pro-Tory organ, underscored the trend. But in Scotland, the *Sun* struggled until the later 1990s to challenge the dominance of the *Daily Record*, still more strongly pro-Labour than its Fleet Street partner, the *Mirror*. This may be adduced as part of the explanation why Scotland proved more resistant to the enchantments of Thatcherism

than the rest of Britain. Yet the political influence of the press on Scottish opinion may be overstated: the SNP rose throughout the last quarter century of the twentieth century without any newspaper giving it reliable support, until the *Sun* opted in the early 1990s to champion Scottish nationalism – partly in a bid to outflank the staunchly pro-Labour *Daily Record*.³²

The strong position of the Scottish press looks likely to be extended by the advent of the Scottish Parliament. Inaugurated in 1999, its responsibility covers a wide swathe of internal social, cultural, environmental and economic topics. These were matters which had always excited the Scots, and had proved a major determinant of their reasons for preferring Scottish to national newspapers. Additionally, the new parliament soon adopted different policies from the rest of Britain on several social issues – such as supporting university students and dealing with care for elderly. Furthermore, a number of purely political crises have added considerably to the high profile of the Scottish parliament. The coverage of the Edinburgh parliament in the national British press has not been regular or detailed, except when particularly headline-grabbing issues have occurred. But the treatment of the parliament in the Scottish press has been steady and in-depth. The four city morning papers all devote about a full page daily to parliament-related material, while the tabloids give more fitful reports. Sometimes this consists of opinion, commentary and background briefing, with some papers providing a light-hearted sketch on proceedings. In general, reporting of the Scottish parliament is about the same in extent, depth and tone as national newspapers deal with Westminster. For example, the web-page for the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* for 17 May 2002 listed three pieces on the Scottish parliament in its top five news stories, while only one item related to the Westminster parliament – and then only tangentially - and was placed seventh. It will be very interesting to see if the projected regional assemblies in England stimulate wider perusal of regional morning dailies in England.

Another important aspect of the Scottish press was its role in preserving the Scots language. The press has, however, not been very active in sustaining the Gaelic language. Efforts have been made from time to time to produce an all-Gaelic paper, but have been short-lived. It is perhaps ironic that the longest-lasting paper, *MacTalla*, was produced in Canada by the emigrant Gaelic community in Cape Breton Island from 1892 to 1904. Some papers with a readership based in the residual Gaelic-speaking areas have contributions in the language, and the *Scotsman* has a daily Gaelic column. These are usually, however, opinion or commentary, rather than news-based items. For news and information, Gaels are obliged to have recourse to radio and TV.

Scots, in contrast, experienced a resurgence in the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks to newspaper material in the language. The main medium was the radical *People's Journal*, which was widely read by the rural and urban workforce: by 1914 its circulation had reached 250,000. Radical propaganda in the *People's Journal* was conducted in Scots by the influential W.D. Latto, while in the north-east, William Alexander also used broad Scots in the *Aberdeen Free Press* to champion the lower rural social groups. At the end of the century, James Leatham wrote in the north-east press propounding the case for socialism in Scots. Elsewhere in Scotland, local dialects were aired in the newspapers of these communities. These writings commented on current political and social developments, and should not be confused with the sentimental 'kailyard' fiction school of the late nineteenth century, which was targeted at a non-Scots-speaking audience, with the Scots language inserted for comic effect.³³ After the First World War, this use of Scots in the newspapers petered out, except in special circumstances, such as reporting *verbatim* evidence given by witnesses in court cases. Unlike Gaelic, there was no church or equivalent cultural medium to sustain Scots, and it rarely appears in newspapers nowadays.

Sport has been an important factor in the resistance shown by Scots to reading national papers. It is not the case that Scots are more interested in this area: a study in 1982 showed that exactly same proportion of readers –22% - in England and Scotland stated that they bought their paper for football news- but it is the case that the Scottish angle is catered for solely by Scottish papers. There are two reasons for this. Firstly,

many sports, although common to England and Scotland, are organised in quite separate structures. Secondly, the relative popularity of certain sports is quite different north and south of the border. As to the first, the key sport is association football (soccer). From its inception as a rule-based sport in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the English and Scottish Football Associations have been totally distinct. The metropolitan press has always been preoccupied with the game in England, with the Scotland rarely being given more than a couple of paragraphs once a week. Scottish papers equally devote the preponderance of their coverage to football in their own country.

As to the second factor: the most traditional English summer game, cricket, is played but little – and to no high standard – in Scotland, so that neither English nor Scottish matches are much reported in Scotland. Golf is by far the more popular summer sport in Scotland, whereas in England it is still something of a recreation for a socially restricted segment. Accordingly, there is greater detail in Scottish papers on this sport, certainly relative to cricket, but in English papers the opposite is the case. It is instructive that the *Scotsman* has a special website devoted to golf, but none for cricket. As an example of these differences, the *Herald* for Saturday 11 May 2002, had four times as much text on Scottish as on English football, and cricket had one third of the space given to golf. In the London-based *Guardian* for the same day, there was no mention of football in Scotland, but 9.5 [tabloid] pages on the game in England, and nearly 5 times as much on cricket as on golf.

The ownership of the Scottish press has evinced two clear trends: consolidation into the hands of a few concerns, and control frequently located outside Scotland. Whereas until the Second World War, almost every local paper had its own proprietor, customarily either an active editor or manager, almost the entire local press is now effectively owned by half a dozen holding companies. The four largest combines are Scottish & Universal Newspapers [SUN], the Johnstone Press group, Scottish Provincial Press, and Clyde & Forth Press. About a dozen smaller regional groups also exist, usually with three to five titles in their portfolio. Of the larger concerns, SUN is a subsidiary of Trinity Mirror, an English based company which also owns a large number of English local papers, while the other three are Scottish-based – although Johnstone Press owns a substantial number of English weeklies..

Only one set of the daily and Sunday papers has been continuously owned by Scottish based business; viz., the Dundee *Courier & Advertiser*, and the *Sunday Post*, which are part of the extensive D.C. Thomson empire. Since the 1922 the *Daily Record* and the *Sunday Mail* have been components of British press conglomerates: firstly bought by the Kemsley Group, then in 1955 they were transferred to the Daily Mirror Group. From 1953 the *Scotsman* and, a couple of years later, the Aberdeen *Press & Journal* were bought by the Canadian press baron, Roy Thomson. Initially Thomson managed his British press interests from a base in Edinburgh, but after he acquired the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, his headquarters shifted to London.³⁴ More recently, the *Scotsman* has been acquired by two reclusive Scottish brothers, who reside on a small Channel Island, rarely visiting Scotland. The Aberdeen papers have also moved from the Thomson Group. The *Glasgow Herald* was acquired in 1979 by Tiny Rowland's multinational Lonrho Group, which had its headquarters in London and substantial business interests in Africa. A management buy-out returned the *Herald* to Scottish ownership in 1992. The largest-selling daily in Scotland for nearly 30 years, the *Scottish Daily Express*, was of course an offshoot of the Beaverbrook-owned *Daily Express*.

This surrender of ownership to non-Scots had not gone without concern in the country: Roy Thomson received a frosty reception when he arrived in Edinburgh in the mid 1950s, and there was great alarm at some of his modernising innovations. His attempt to buy the *Glasgow Herald* in the early 1960s prompted a concerted campaign to keep the paper in Scottish hands, with a strong appeal to quasi-nationalist opinion forming a major keystone in this ultimately successful strategy to deny Thomson.³⁵ But the fears that non-Scottish ownership would dilute the Scottish content in newspapers have largely been unfounded. The *Scottish Daily Express*, as we have seen, was a quite independent operation from its Fleet Street partner. Thomson pursued a policy of non-intervention in the policy stance of his papers, only asking that they

made profits. Rowland used Lonrho's ownership of the London Sunday *Observer* to mount a sustained harring campaign against his arch-rival, Mohammed Al-Fayed, on one occasion producing a mid-week edition solely to attack Al-Fayed. But the *Glasgow Herald* was left to plough its own furrow, with scarcely any editorial interference, especially after one bid to dictate content was rejected by the editor. When Lonrho was divesting itself of the *Herald*, an editorial in the paper warmly and sincerely praised the owners for their non-interventionist stance.³⁶ When the *Daily Mirror* acquired the *Daily Record*, the latter's political line was shifted from mild Conservatism to staunch Labour, in accord with the parent paper's position. But the *Record's* quintessential Scottishness remained, and when in 1986 there were fears that it might be compelled by its quixotic [and crooked] owner, Robert Maxwell to reduce its Scottish material, a strike of journalists attracted widespread popular support, and the proprietor was forced to back down.³⁷

The advent of outside ownership has, indeed, often been beneficial. Fresh new approaches, both journalistic and managerial, have been encouraged. When Thomson took over the ailing *Scotsman* from its decrepit former owners, he revolutionised its advertising and sales departments. News was put on the front page, a new editor introduced daily senior staff conferences to co-ordinate features, editorials and news pages, and the stuffy complacent tone of the paper was transformed. As a result circulation, wobbling at in the early 1950s, rose by 30% in less than a decade.³⁸ Secondly, these large companies have the resources to inject large capital inputs to modernise production processes. Thomson spent over £2 million in a short time in order to turn the *Scotsman* round. Also, thanks to the financial backing provided by Lonrho, the *Glasgow Herald* was able to move from its old cramped office building to a larger premises, with a new state-of-the art printing equipment replacing presses which had been installed in the 1870s.³⁹

Scottish newspapers have a long history of involvement with new technology. Somewhat complacently, a late nineteenth century editor of the *Scotsman* claimed: 'it is a noteworthy fact that England, in newspaper matters as in others, has followed Scotland. In regard to detail and general effectiveness, what the *Scotsman* has adopted to-day all English and Scottish journalism adopted on the morrow.'⁴⁰ This may be traced back to a determination to prevent metropolitan papers from securing a foothold north of the border. Thus in the 1860s and 1870s, a series of innovations were pioneered, principally by the *Scotsman*. Special trains were hired to have the paper delivered in Glasgow, the Highlands and the north-east of Scotland as early as local dailies. The *Scotsman* led a consortium of regional papers which negotiated an arrangement with the telegraph companies to have news despatched more quickly and more fully from London by means of a private line. At this time, too, new printing machinery was installed. In 1868 the *Glasgow Herald* followed the *Times* by ordering 2 Hoe (a New York company) 8-feeder printing machines, thereby replacing the original press, which had been in continuous use for nearly 90 years. In 1875 the same paper installed 2 rotary presses. The *Scotsman* almost simultaneously modernised its printing machinery.⁴¹

In the inter-war period, the *Daily Record* claimed a world first when it put colour photographs on its front page, depicting the exile of Emperor Haile Selassie from Abyssinia after the Italian invasion. In 1928, the *Scotsman* was the first British paper to have pictures telegraphed from Europe. Indeed, the quality of the photography in the *Scotsman* was a major feature of the paper's appeal throughout most of the twentieth century. So good was it that in the 1960s the *New York Times* approached the paper to ask for advice to improve its photography. In 1961, the *Scotsman* continued to modernise when it acquired a teletypesetter, at the time the fastest line-setter in the world.⁴²

Given this background, it is perhaps not surprising that the new printing techniques introduced in the last quarter of the twentieth century were rapidly applied in Scotland. The *Greenock Telegraph* was one of the first papers in Britain to switch to web-offset production, and when the *Daily Record* installed web offset printing in the early 1970s, it was claimed to be the largest plant of its kind in the world. In the later 1970s, the Johnstone Press, a local press group with nearly 20 titles, initiated the switch from traditional methods to web offset. In 1980 the *Glasgow Herald* abandoned old-style hot metal production processes,

replacing them with direct input photo composing, and the *Scotsman* and the *Press & Journal* soon followed suit.⁴³

Scottish newspapers have responded positively to the opportunities afforded by the arrival of the Internet and new electronic services. On the one hand, printing and production have been delocalised. For example, the text of the Clackmannanshire *Wee County News* is electronically transmitted every week to Hartlepool, some 350 kilometres distant in the North of England. The issue is printed there and brought back to central Scotland by road transport. Similarly, the SUN chain has centralised production of the various weeklies in one or two sites, while all 12 titles in the Johnstone Group are printed in England..

The four dailies and the Sundays all have web-sites, but of varying quality. Thus, while the Dundee *Courier & Advertiser* is a fairly basic production, the *Sunday Herald* produces unquestionably the most advanced, sophisticated and user-friendly web-site. The aim is ‘to create a comprehensive resource of all articles appearing in the *Sunday Herald*’.⁴⁴ Ease of accessing the contents of the paper is facilitated by: ‘the mailing list, a facility that sends a summary of the paper’s content, with links to the key articles and features, to your inbox every saturday [sic] night after the paper goes to the press.’ There are several extra features available, such as a search engine which gives access to an archive base going back to the paper’s origins. As a bonus, it is possible for Internet readers to forward any article to a friend by e-mail.⁴⁵ But the website goes beyond the mundane aim of making the printed version available: ‘the web pages of the *Sunday Herald* are intended to be an additional part of the paper, rather than just a Web version of the printed paper.’⁴⁶ The main facet of this expanded service is the ‘forum’, as the website home page declares: ‘Contribute to the *Scottish Herald* community by taking part in our online discussions of the hot topics shaping our world – or start your own Soapbox.’ The items offered for discussion on 5 May 2000 were: the resignation of a member of the Scottish parliament ministerial team; Scottish football; and ‘Have Your Say.’⁴⁷

The use of e-mail by the local press is patchy. Virtually all papers with a web-site have an e-mail facility, but some have the latter free-standing, so to speak. In 2000, *Benn’s Directory* records 10 papers with an e-mail address, and over nearly 100 without, but a year later the respective figures are 38 and 67. According to *Benn’s Media*, in 2000, 6 local papers (excepting free titles) had a website, and by 2001 this had risen to 27. The surge in papers with websites is almost entirely due to two groups, SUN and Johnstone Press, embarking on a programme to put their papers on the Internet. There is no particular correlation between either size of circulation or geographical centrality and engagement with new technology. The *Greenock Telegraph*, for instance, which appears daily with a circulation of 10,000, is currently only constructing its web-page, but the *Strathearn Herald*, selling 2,900 copies a week, already has one. The most remote newspaper of all, the *Shetland News*, has had its web-page for several years.

The web-sites for the weeklies are highly varied in the range of services on offer. Those members of the Johnstone Group essentially provide a reprise of the main contents of the printed edition of the paper, although the *Falkirk Herald*’s page offers a ‘Have Your Say’ facility, in which users have the chance to vote ‘Yes/No/Don’t Know’ on a current issue (on May 7 2002, the topic was ‘Should the BNP [British National Party, an extreme right-wing movement] be allowed to field candidates in local elections?’).⁴⁸ Those in the SUN group, however, have more adventurous items. As well as the contents of the paper being accessible, there are entries for ‘News archive’; ‘Have Your Say’; ‘E-mail the Editor’. The most innovative feature is the ‘Inside Scotland Discussion Board’, which declares, albeit with shaky punctuation:

Now it’s time to have your say!

Welcome to the Inside Scotland Discussion Board where we invite you to contribute your thoughts to a range of ongoing debates on all things Scottish

If there is something that winds you up or if you have an opinion to express this is the place to get involved.? [sic]

And if its [sic] an issue you want to raise please feel free to **Start a Discussion**

On 7 May 2002, the web page listed 65 topics currently open for discussion, ranging through: ‘Dutch democracy’, ‘Unemployment and Litter’; ‘Plastic jock’; ‘Loyalist Allegiances’; ‘gay men in oz’; ‘Plane Spotters’; ‘Read any good bumper stickers recently?’; ‘Electric brae’; ‘Home from the Sea’. The number of follow-ups logged to all 65 items was 296.⁴⁹ The Discussion Board is available on all the 18 SUN-owned papers, so this is a Scotland-wide forum.

Some of those weeklies outside the tent of the major combines also have interesting items. The *Inverness Courier* permits an archive search, while the *Northern Scot* ‘is an on-line paper for Scots both home and abroad providing both current and archived items.’ Three jointly owned Argyllshire titles announce that ‘news items relating to specific locations in the county have been abstracted [from the three papers] to provide easy access.’⁵⁰

In conclusion, it may be assumed that the prospects for the Scottish newspaper industry look secure, thanks to a combination of the continuing – possibly growing – sense of a separate Scottish national identity and the arrival of the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, along with a readiness to move forward by embracing new technology.

END NOTES

- 1 JICNAR, *National Readership Survey* [hereafter *NRS*] : *Scottish Regional Report, 1982* (London, 1982). Cf. JICNAR, *NRS, 1975* (London, 1975), where the figures are 70% for England & Wales, 78% for Scotland.
- 2 Based on Audit Bureau of Circulation [ABC], *ABC & VFD Regional Newspaper Data*, January – June 2001.
- 3 The population of Scotland is approximately 10% of that of England.
- 4 JICNAR, *NRS, Scottish Regional Report, 1982*, p. 4.
- 5 These are: the [Aberdeen] *Press & Journal*, the [Dundee] *Courier & Advertiser*, the [Glasgow] *Herald*, the [Edinburgh] *Scotsman*. Until 1991, the *Herald* was called the *Glasgow Herald*.
- 6 ABC, *UK National Newspapers*, March 2002.
- 7 M. Smith, *Paper Lions* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 153-4.
- 8 L. Chester & J. Fenby, *The Fall of the House of Beaverbrook* (London, 1979), pp. 54-5.
- 9 JICNAR, *NRS, Scottish Regional Report, 1982*.
- 10 J.P.S. Ferguson, *Directory of Scottish Newspapers* (Edinburgh, 1984).
- 11 *Willing's Press Guide* gives the number of Scottish and English local papers as, respectively: 1911: 254, 1,784 (14.2%); 1938: 183, 1,322 (13.8%); 1970: 160, 1,063 (15.1%).
- 12 R.D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People, 1750-1914* (Oxford, 1995), p. 305.
- 13 R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland* (1983), p. 157. Interestingly, the equivalent figure for Germany, widely regarded in later nineteenth century Britain as the exemplar for high levels of university attendance, was 1 in 2,600.
- 14 C.A. Cooper, *An Editor's Retrospect* (London, 1896), p. 282 .
- 15 A. Phillips, *Glasgow's Herald. Two Hundred Years of a Newspaper, 1883-1983* (Glasgow, 1982), pp. 68-81; J.C. Smith & W. Wallace, *Robert Wallace. Life and Last Leaves* (London, 1903), *passim*.
- 16 Cf. L. Paterson, *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 46-72, 103-31.
- 17 C.G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 46.
- 18 R.M.W. Cowan, *The Newspaper in Scotland: a Study of its First Expansion, 1815-60* (Glasgow, 1946), pp. 105-17, 224-53.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 133-65.
- 20 G. Rosie, *Hugh Miller. Outrage and Order: a Biography* (Edinburgh, n.d.).
- 21 J.G. Kellas, ‘The Liberal Party and the Scottish Church Disestablishment Crisis’, *English Historical Review*, 79 (1964), pp. 31-46; I.G.C. Hutchison, *A Political History of Scotland*,

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- 22 1832-1924 (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 147-9, 156-64, 183-5, 199-204, 208-9
- 23 R. Currie *et al.*, *Churches and Churchgoing* (Oxford, 1977), p. 31. The 1970 Scottish figure was a decline from higher totals reached between 1900 and 1970.
- 24 T. Gallagher, 'The Press and Protestant Culture: a Case Study of the *Scottish Daily Express*', in G. Walker & T. Gallagher (eds.), *Sermons and Battle Hymns* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 193-212.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- 27 See Cowan, *Newspaper in Scotland*, pp. 121-5, 262-4, 341-51 for press coverage in the first half of the nineteenth century.
- 28 Magnusson, *Glorious Privilege*, pp. 3-11; Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, pp. 114-5, 225.
- 29 E.g., 'Land Allocation in Morvern', *Oban Times*, 3 March 1883.
- 30 E.A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c1880-1925* (East Linton, 1995), pp. 124-43
- 31 Magnusson, *Glorious Privilege*, pp. 70-5
- 32 Smith, *Paper Lions*, pp. 13-52.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 106-14.
- 34 W. Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1986), pp. 1-71, 145-50.
- 35 R. Braddon, *Roy Thomson of Fleet Street* (London, 1965), pp. 191-249.
- 36 A. Kemp, *The Hollow Drum* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 39-40.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-50.
- 38 P. Meech, 'The Daily Record: A Century of Success', *Scottish Affairs*, 13 (1995), pp. 9-11.
- 39 Magnusson, *Glorious Privilege*, pp. 159-70; Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, pp. 193-209; A.M. Dunnett, *Among Friends* (London, 1984), pp. 129-40.
- 40 Magnusson, *Glorious Privilege*, pp. 172-4; Phillips, *Glasgow's Herald*, pp. 167, 170-4; D. Hutchison, 'The Ownership, Control and Finance of the Media', in D. Hutchison (ed.), *Headlines* (Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 85-6.
- 41 Cooper, *Editor's Retrospect*, p. 167.
- 42 Magnusson, *Glorious Privilege*, pp. 40-9; Phillips, *Glasgow's Herald*, pp. 70-2, 80-5.
- 43 Meech, 'Daily Record', pp. 2-3; Magnusson, *Glorious Privilege*, pp. 121-2, 175-6; Dunnett, *Among Friends*, pp. 141-2.
- 44 F. Johnston, 'The Press in Scotland', in D. Campbell (ed.), *The British Press* (London, 1978), pp. 44-5.
- 45 www.thecourier.co.uk; www.thesundayherald.com.
- 46 www.thesundayherald.com.
- 47 www.rampantscotland.com/newspaper.
- 48 www.thesundayherald.com.
- 49 E.g., the websites of the *Hawick News - Hawick Today* (www.hawicktoday.co.uk) and of the *Falkirk Herald - Falkirk Today* (www.falkirkherald.co.uk).
- 50 www.inside-scotland.co.uk/renfrewshire/express.
- www.inverness-courier.co.uk; www.rampantscotland.com/newspaper.