



**Andrew Hobbs.** *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900.* Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018. 470 pp. \$46.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78374-561-6.

**Reviewed by** Eugenia M. Palmegiano

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At first glance, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900*, offers an ordered, albeit prosaic study of an often neglected journalism group. But this book is richer than it initially appears. It fits in neatly with the ongoing scholarly interest in newspapers after mid-century tax policies changed, a moment when local sheets faced a bleak future. Ironically, as Andrew Hobbs successfully shows, they emerged as winners by 1900. His extensive list of primary sources, gathered from British Library archives, locals' own records, and individuals' notable comments, underscores his case that burgeoning weeklies had a greater influence on Victorian culture than other print publications of the period.

Balancing this broad picture, Hobbs focuses on journalism in the town of Preston. He explains how shadowing mill workers, who went from listeners to readers buying papers and networking with compatriots, gave journalists clout. Their goal, largely accomplished he avers, was to lay a strong foundation for the ultimate triumph of the weekly by century's end. Essentials for this outcome are spelled out in chapters on who read, and where, when, and what they read.

Hobbs begins by noting how diverse readers shaped press content. Some he portrays as insatiable news addicts trying to absorb everything.

Others he dubs active correspondents enjoying exchanges with representatives of a variety of papers. He also introduces a third, flexible band, men and women ready to deal with specific topics as they came along. Ongoing shifts of ideas, he maintains, confirm that readers and writers molding the newspaper gradually produced a local core of identity acceptable to all.

In the early chapter "Reading Places," Hobbs defines location as a significant determinant of a person's reading habits. Whether in a church's quiet nook or on a street with lively newsboys, from exclusive meeting spots to swelling newsrooms, to him space counted. Consequently, he outlines how a plethora of textual interpretations can shape a subject's significance.

"Reading Times" is another category important to Hobbs. He points out how reader rhythm did not always accord with publisher planning, thereby regularly disrupting press alignment. For instance, readers of the ritual middle-class breakfast and after dinner evening papers distanced themselves from Sunday heralds that laborers increasingly favored. What overcame such divisions, he asserts correctly, was war, which drew myriad folks to papers with access to telegraphy.

After the foregoing introductory clustering of readers, places, and times, Hobbs presents two chapters labeled "What They Read." The first cen-

ters on press methodology in the 1860s, using journalist Anthony Hewitson as a model. Following the steps for a week of this printer, chief reporter, then editor and newspaper owner, Hobbs provides a close-up of the man's diaries, useful because they were more carefully drafted than those of contemporaries. Although Hewitson made the *Preston Guardian* a success in the 1870s, Hobbs notes that by the 1880s serious columns were losing ground as supplements crept into Sunday and even local weeklies. This turn, not overlooked here, coincided with the arrival of American New Journalism, whose format allegedly tempted British scribes to experiment with brisk copy that would raise pay and anticipate an expansive newspaper.

In chapter 6, "Who Read What," Hobbs recognizes duality in the relationships of readers, distinguishing morning/evening and daily/weekly newspapers, work/play magazines, even fluid class/gender productions. Since journalists tended to choose sundry careers, he includes here a large, varied number of graphics alongside text. Among his highlights are the weekly faced by the flourishing morning daily, the halfpenny p.m. profiting from sports scores, the questionable *Illustrated Police News* and its ilk, and the blossoming women's religious and fashion publications.

Drawing on material in chapter 6, Hobbs in its successor, "Exploiting a Sense of Place," seems to take somewhat parochial notice of the tie between a local press promoting common identity to sell papers and local readers buying papers to certify identity. Nonetheless he lays out at length press interest in utilizing space, designing an imprint valuable for understanding the closing constructs of this book.

By contrast, the narrower eighth chapter, "Class, Dialect and the Local Press: How 'They' Joined 'Us,'" devotes considerable ink to dialect, tracking it in the press from a class marker in the late 1850s to the early 1870s when reader-workers began to adopt Standard English. As they do so,

Hobbs watches dialect move to literature and the newspaper to commerce.

Conversely, Hobbs pinpoints an excellent example of connectivity between press and public in the 1880s, when football allegedly "made" the local evening chronicle and it "made" football. Hobbs implies, referring to the chapter's title, "Win-win," that it meant press-game sharing of rewards. Here the local tribune allegedly created, then enlarged a public sphere for the game, and the game benefited from the income generated by the new press.

In the last chapter, "How Readers Used the Local Paper," Hobbs summarizes locals' assets and liabilities. The leading advantage was popularity due to circulating information openly while protecting local identities privately. Simultaneously he cites opportunities to discuss how reader links materialized. Among the keystone ones were ease of correspondence, openness to facts and forums, pride in status originated by publications, and overall mutual respect for a town and its people.

Hobbs "conclusions" confirm that every chapter except 7 is thoroughly documented. His emphasis throughout on promotion of local events that contributed to town culture and commerce and his attention to consequential, previously overlooked data attest to his organizational skill. But he does not make clear how the intersection of new genres or the emergence of a literate, quasi-classless society operated, thus setting the stage for further investigation. Given that chapter 7 is a solid backdrop, he is free to answer critics and to rethink how press positions interrelated at the era's finish, a fitting topic for a next book.

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