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A black and white photograph of W. T. Stead, an elderly man with a full white beard, wearing a military-style uniform. He has two circular patches on his chest: the left one contains the letters 'B' and '2' over '8', and the right one contains the number '245'. The background shows a room with a large wooden cabinet and a vase of flowers.

W. T. Stead as New Journalist and Nonconformist, 1870–1912

Philip March

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*For Dominique
and
in memory of my parents*

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DNCJ</i>	<i>Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Northern Echo</i>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>PMG</i>	<i>Pall Mall Gazette</i>
<i>RoR</i>	<i>Review of Reviews</i>



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A *TITANIC* LOSS

At noon, on Wednesday, 10 April 1912, the White Star liner, the *RMS Titanic*, set sail from Southampton on its much-heralded maiden voyage to New York. Travelling at the invitation of the American Men and Religion Forward Movement was William Thomas Stead, the internationally renowned journalist, editor, and social-reform campaigner.¹ In the early morning of 15 April 1912, in a shocking reversal of all expectations, the *Titanic* struck an iceberg and sank near Cape Race off the North American coast. Although *The Times* initially published the heartening news from Reuter's that "No lives were lost," subsequent agency cables became increasingly sombre. It was finally reported that more than 1600 crew and passengers had died in an "ocean disaster" recalling many such sensationalist news stories of late-Victorian and early twentieth-century New Journalism. Amongst those who had perished, Stead's name figured prominently.² According to one account, as the ship was being abandoned, he had asked the *Titanic's* orchestra to play the Nonconformist hymn "Autumn," and the ever poignant "Nearer My God to Thee," with the express intention of stiffening resolve and offering spiritual comfort.³

Four days later, the Forward Movement's Christian Conservation Congress met in New York to hear addresses on "Social Service, Evangelism, Christian Unity, Publicity, Missions, Boys' Work, and Rural

Church”: central to the discussions held at the Carnegie Hall was the application to everyday life of the Christian religion.⁴ The news that Stead had drowned aboard the *Titanic* would have been greeted with great sorrow by all present.

At the well-attended memorial service held for Stead on the evening of 25 April 1912 in Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, *The Times* reported the presence of “People of all classes ... representatives of foreign States, distinguished pro-Consuls, Cabinet Ministers, workers in many fields of social reform, political organizers, representative journalists, and sympathizers of almost every shade of religious and political opinion.”⁵ Such a range of social status, nationality, reforming principle, political allegiance, and religious affiliation had brought together a full congregation united in affection and respect for the man and his achievements. Dr John Clifford, a leading London Baptist minister, Christian Socialist, and long-time friend, spoke of Stead’s “enthusiasm, his optimism, his restless and untiring zeal in all causes which appealed to his sympathies, and of his unflinching faith in God,” all characteristics that his family, friends, and colleagues would have recognised as defining the man who had so influenced the press development contentiously qualified as “new.”⁶

In a collection of essays published in 2012 to mark the centenary of his death, Stead is described as a “Newspaper Revolutionary,” “the most famous Englishman” aboard that ill-starred ship, a “mass of contradictions,” “a crucial figure in the history of the British press,” and “an extraordinary figure in late Victorian and Edwardian culture.”⁷ During his life-time, Stead was admired and loathed, praised as a major social reformer, and vilified as a gutter-press destroyer of public morals and cultural values. He had amongst his acquaintance major Church leaders, government ministers, leading members of the parliamentary opposition, figures from the worlds of the arts and of the sciences, and had corresponded internationally with the good and the great. At home, he highlighted the inadequacies of government social reform and contested British policy abroad. Nonetheless, soon after his demise, Stead’s reputation and achievements entered a period of relatively protracted public obscurity.⁸

LIFE, APPRENTICESHIP, INFLUENCES

Born on 5 July 1849 in Embleton, near Alnwick, in Northumberland, Stead was only a few months old when the family moved to the small industrial town of Howden, on the Tyne, about five miles from Newcastle,

where his father, William Stead, gave long service as the Congregational minister of the Independent Chapel.⁹ His early education was under the guidance of the latter until, aged twelve, he was enrolled at Silcoates school, originally founded for the education of the sons of Congregational ministers.¹⁰ He stayed for only two years but retained fond memories of the headmaster, the Rev. Dr James Bewglass, and a deep appreciation of the religious revivalist influence which had swept the community while he was there.¹¹ On leaving school, Stead spent his free time in voluntary charitable work and in helping his father with the Howden youth group.¹²

For almost twenty years, Stead was a strong advocate for the religious and civil rights of Protestant Dissent, firstly in the north-east of England, while at the Darlington *Northern Echo* (editor, 1871–1880), and, secondly, in London, at the *Pall Mall Gazette* (assistant editor, 1880–1883; editor, 1883–1889) where the form and politics adopted by the newspaper provoked Matthew Arnold, the cultural critic and poet, into writing of “a new journalism” that threatened the social stability of the country. As the founding owner and editor of the monthly *Review of Reviews* (1890–1912), Stead became a resolute campaigner for Christian reunion, an advocate for the federation of the English-speaking peoples, a forceful supporter of British imperial interests, a crusader for world peace, and a determined activist for Spiritualism. Stead invested the regional *Northern Echo* with the values of the Nonconformist Conscience while promoting the interests of the Pease family and Gladstonian Liberalism in Darlington and its environs. In the 1880s, at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Stead became a London-based, independently minded proponent of advanced Liberalism and launched political and social-reforming campaigns with spectacular effect even if ultimately to his reputational cost. At the *Review of Reviews*, he put into action his vaulting ambition to reach beyond a domestic readership to address English-speaking readers across the globe. Throughout, he employed the zeal characteristic of the evangelical to make of himself a recognisable and influential figure in the nation’s affairs.

Stead began writing for newspapers while working as an apprenticed accounts clerk for a company in Newcastle.¹³ In 1865 and 1868, he saw the publication of two press articles, the first on the assassination of President Lincoln in “a little Jarrow weekly paper,” and the second, for the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, on the disestablishment of the Irish (Anglican) Church.¹⁴ Stead wrote nothing more until 1870 when he began to send articles, occasional notes, and leaders to John Copleston, the founding editor of the *Northern Echo*.¹⁵ His first such contribution,

“Indiscriminate Charity,” was published on 7 February 1870 and, like his other freelance pieces, did not earn its writer any financial remuneration.¹⁶ Although Copleston was unable to meet Stead’s request for at least some token payment, the latter nonetheless continued providing material on an unpaid basis.¹⁷ It was in this largely informal way that Nonconformists were able to train up, and to try out, individuals motivated to enter journalism and thought capable of agitating for the political and religious aims of Dissent.

In the 1870s, Stead represented not so much a precocious press pioneer as one amongst other journalists of similar background who came to prominence during an important period of change for newspapers. This view resonates with Stephen Koss’s opinion that Stead was “more a popularizer than an innovator,” whose use of the interview and typographical experimentation, for example, drew on already existing practices.¹⁸ In reality, therefore, the view that Stead was a particularly gifted journalistic talent tends to ignore the presence of other individuals of similar age, background, and religious denomination, who had either already begun a purposeful press career or who were on the point of doing so. These journalists often shared Stead’s formative experiences which included a relatively foreshortened formal education, initial employment as a clerk in a commercial concern, a parallel interest in writing articles for the press, and the subsequent entry into the journalistic profession itself.

Such a path was taken, for example, by the Liberal, Congregationalist, journalist, politician, and educationist, Edward Baines (1800–1890). His father, also Edward (1774–1848), owned and edited the Whig-liberal *Leeds Mercury*, which campaigned for political reform and the extension of civil liberties, until surrendering the editorship to his son, who was later to offer the post to another Congregationalist. Aged fourteen, Baines had begun to teach in Congregational Sunday schools just as Stead had done for his Congregational minister father at Howden. Baines’s public actions were shaped by his Nonconformist faith and his opposition to London’s dominance of politics and to the power of Anglican landowners.¹⁹ Other significant newspaper figures included the Congregationalist H. W. Lucy (1843–1924), who was initially employed as a junior clerk to a hide merchant in Liverpool (1856–1864) before becoming chief reporter on the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*. Between January and June 1870, he was appointed to act as sub-editor of the newly launched morning edition of the evening daily *Pall Mall Gazette*, but the experiment proved to be unsuccessful and was therefore abandoned.²⁰ Another journalist, this time, like Stead, from

the north-east of England, Thomas Wemyss Reid (1842–1905), was the second son of the Newcastle Congregational minister Alexander Reid and of Jessy Elizabeth, the daughter of Thomas Wemyss of Darlington, a Hebrew scholar and noted biblical critic. Like Lucy and Stead, Reid began his working life as a clerk, this time in the offices of the Wentworth Beaumont Lead Company at Newcastle. Again, like Lucy and Stead, Wemyss Reid showed an early interest in journalism sending reports on local topics to the one-penny, Liberal, *Northern Daily Express*.²¹ In January 1866, he became the chief reporter of the daily *Leeds Mercury*, belonging to the Baines family, and, on 15 May 1870, was appointed as its editor in which capacity he succeeded in transforming the publication into the first provincial newspaper capable of competing with the metropolitan press.²²

Samuel Morley, the Congregational businessman, politician, and philanthropist, was born into a manufacturing family. Aged sixteen, he joined the accounts department of the London branch of the family's hosiery firm, and by the 1860s, he had risen to become the head of the company. Morley became the MP for Bristol (1868–1885) and sought to influence reform in Church-State affairs, education, and public morality.²³ He entered newspaper ownership by acquiring a major holding in the London *Daily News* founded in 1846 by the novelist Charles Dickens: under Morley's influence, the paper became a major promoter of Liberal ideas.²⁴ The Congregationalist, Edward Miall, first taught in several schools until, aged nineteen, he entered Wymondley College to train for the ministry. In 1844, he founded the British Anti-State Church Association, renamed in 1853 the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control. Miall had launched the London weekly *Nonconformist* on 14 March 1841 from Stoke Newington in London with the principal aim of campaigning for the abolition of compulsory church rates and for Church disestablishment in England and Wales. The paper was middle-class and pro-Liberal and covered politics, religion, trade, and commerce.²⁵

Congregationalists also established and contributed to the reviews. The Congregational minister, Robert Vaughan, began the high-quality *British Quarterly Review* (1845–1886) in January 1845. In part, this was because of his dissatisfaction with the Nonconformist monthly *Eclectic Review* (1805–1868) and its support for the militancy of Miall and, partly, in order to furnish Nonconformists with a review that displayed the same cultural values as other similar publications. These included the high-Tory, wide-ranging *Quarterly Review* (1809–1967), the Whig-supporting *Edinburgh Review* (1802–1929), and the Liberal, increasingly diverse

Westminster Review (1824–1914).²⁶ Vaughan's son, Robert Alfred Vaughan, also a Congregational minister and writer, contributed to the monthly miscellany *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (1830–1882) that propounded progressive views on politics and social questions and to the *British Quarterly*.²⁷ Yet another son of a Congregational minister, George Newnes, the newspaper owner and politician, had been a contemporary of Stead's at Silcoates. On 22 October 1881, Newnes established *Tit-Bits* which brought to a loyal upper-working and lower-middle-class readership short newspaper items, prize competitions, and insurance schemes.²⁸ Newnes and Stead eventually formed a partnership to launch in January 1890 the democratising, Christianising, compendium *Review of Reviews*, but the working relationship only lasted three months, leaving Stead as sole proprietor of what was to prove to be a very successful publication.²⁹

Another group of Congregationalists combined commerce, press, and Parliament. Sir William Pollard Byles (1839–1917) was twice a Liberal MP (first for the West Riding of Yorkshire and North Shipley [1892–1895] and then for Salford North [1906–1917]) and an owner of the *Bradford Observer*; Sir William Davies (1821–1895), a solicitor, town councillor, and Liberal MP for Pembrokeshire (1880–1892) launched the *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph* in 1854; Sir John Leng (1828–1906) became sub-editor of the *Hull Advertiser* in 1847, was appointed editor of the *Dundee Advertiser* in 1851, and served as the Liberal MP for Dundee 1889–1905. Peter Stewart MacLiver (1820–1891) worked on the *Tyne Mercury*, later editing the same newspaper under its new title of the *Newcastle Guardian*; in 1858, he established the first daily newspaper in the west of the country, the *Western Daily Press*, in 1859, the family weekly, the *Bristol Observer*, and, in 1877, the *Bristol Evening News*, and served as the Liberal MP for Plymouth (1880–1885).³⁰

Robert Milligan (1786–1862), the worsted-wool merchant, although at one time penniless, by 1810 had become a draper in Bradford where he served on the town council including as an alderman and the first mayor (1847–1848), and, along with Sir William Byles, was one of the founders, in 1834, of the *Bradford Observer*. He served as the Liberal MP for Bradford (1851–1857). Another founder of the same paper was the textile manufacturer Sir Titus Salt (1803–1876), the Liberal MP for Bradford (1859–1861), whose Saltire model village, begun in 1853, was notable for its provision of decent housing and amenities for his workers and their families. Sir Halley Stewart (1838–1937), the Liberal MP for Spalding,

Lincolnshire (1887–1895), and Greenock (1906–1910), was a partner in a Rochester cattle-cake manufactory, vice-chair of the London Brick Company, and editor of the *Hastings and St. Leonards Times* from 1877 to 1883. John Carvell Williams (1821–1907), the Liberal MP for South Nottingham (1885–1886) and Mansfield, Nottinghamshire (1892–1900), was an ecclesiastical lawyer, who, in 1855, became the first editor of the *Liberator*, the official journal of the pro-disestablishment Church Liberation Society. Joseph Woodhead, the woollen manufacturer, owned and edited the *Huddersfield Examiner*, served on the Huddersfield town council, and voluntarily stepped down as the Liberal MP for the West Riding of Yorkshire and Spen Valley (1885–1892) before unsuccessfully contesting the parliamentary seat for Huddersfield in 1893.³¹

Many of the journalists mentioned so far would have had some knowledge of the work of the one-time Methodist John Campbell (1795–1867), who became a Congregational minister and “one of the most successful nonconformist editors of his age.”³² Campbell was the founding editor of the weekly *British Banner* (1848–1858), but in 1856, he resigned after losing the confidence of the Congregational Union. In 1857, he launched under his own auspices the weekly *British Standard* (1857–1867) to which many readers previously loyal to the *British Banner* transferred. As R. Tudur Jones has written, Campbell was “an extremely pugnacious journalist” from whose attacks “no person or institution was safe.”³³ Campbell’s journalistic persona and press mission bear significant similarities to the path taken by Stead, and his potential as a source of inspiration merits further exploration in academic writing.

Overall, these journalists represent an array of Congregational influence and talent that contributed both to the radical campaigning mission of journalism and to the more respectable and less agitating dissemination of news and opinion. Stead’s evident potential for journalism saw him a Congregationalist, appointed in 1871 to the *Northern Echo*, founded at the suggestion of a Quaker family, the Peases, by John Hyslop Bell, a former Methodist minister turned newspaper owner.³⁴ At the *Northern Echo*, Stead was to become a nationally recognised journalist whose political influence and ability to work up a successful newspaper campaign made him someone of whom to take note and even of whom to be wary. This association of Old Dissent and Gladstonian Liberalism, on the one hand, and of the Nonconformist pulpit and the northern press, on the other, was part, then, of a wider pattern of unplanned alliance of Dissenting newspaper proprietors, editors, and journalists.

Particular influences on Stead's early journalism are difficult to identify as are the specific newspaper titles that principally attracted his attention. Certainly, Copleston, as editor of the *Northern Echo*, was able to provide advice regarding the contributions Stead regularly sent in before he officially joined the paper in 1871.³⁵ Moreover, when Stead took up his appointment as editor, he was fortunate to retain as sub-editor the experienced journalist Mark Fooks.³⁶ Stead also met Thomas Wemyss Reid, then editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, ostensibly to receive advice on how to run a newspaper although, in the event, he dominated the conversation through the confident exposition of his own plans. As Reid wrote of this encounter:

There was something that was irresistible in his candour, his enthusiasm, and his self-confidence. The Press was the greatest agency for influencing public opinion in the world. It was the true and only lever by which thrones and governments could be shaken and the masses of the people raised.³⁷

If Reid was tempted to think that his visitor "must be mad," later events proved him wrong on several counts as he recognised "in some daring development of modern journalism one of the many schemes which Stead [had] then flashed before [Reid's] eyes."³⁸

NEW JOURNALISM

Since the abolition of the taxes on knowledge (advertising [1853], newspapers [1855], and paper [1861]), the power of print and particularly the power of the printed newspaper had increased substantially.³⁹ The 1870s witnessed the emergence of a provincial press that came to rival the metropolitan newspapers in terms of quality, innovation, and influence: they responded to the new readerships created partly by improved educational provision, as legislated for by W. E. Forster's Education Act of 1870, and partly through the electoral extension enabled by the Second and Third Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884. By the 1880s, developments had become so far-reaching that Matthew Arnold's excoriating depiction of "a new journalism," published in May 1887, in an essay entitled "Up to Easter," in the Liberal monthly review, the *Nineteenth Century* (1877–1901), ignited a substantial debate over the role of the press that has never ceased to raise questions over methods and influence.⁴⁰

And yet, how new was this phenomenon that evoked such strong emotions for and against its seemingly inexorable development? Alan Lee has

noted that “Arnold’s strictures about the style of the ‘new journalism’ were no newer than some aspects of the style itself.”⁴¹ Having offered a brief, but highly instructive, survey of the New Journalism, Joel H. Wiener has declared: “Still the basic question remains: How new was this New Journalism?” and immediately follows with the observation that “perhaps surprisingly, the answer is that it was not as new as many writers assumed.”⁴² In his overview of the innovations in the press, J. O. Baylen observes that “the ‘New Journalism,’ a term used by Matthew Arnold to describe the new developments which he found objectionable and distasteful in the British press during the 1880s, as exemplified by W. T. Stead’s work in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was not really so ‘new.’”⁴³ Andrew Griffiths has noted that “the extent to which these changes were really new or revolutionary is unclear,” while Kevin Williams could hardly be more succinct in his view that “there was nothing much that was ‘new’ about the New Journalism.”⁴⁴ In many respects and in accord with these sentiments, the history of the term “New Journalism,” and of its principal connotations, is more a reflection of the general evolution of the press in the nineteenth century than the history of a momentous press revolution.

The emergence of the term “New Journalism,” and its position in relation to Arnold and Stead, will be discussed in Chap. 2. Here, it is important to emphasise that the expression is both fluid and viscous. Kate Campbell, for example, has written that by the 1890s, “in its inclusive usage, the term ‘new journalism’ is unexceptionable in referring to the accumulation from the mid-[nineteenth] century of formal, professional, technological, and commercial shifts which established daily newspaper journalism on a recognisably modern basis.”⁴⁵ Where Campbell highlights the way in which “new journalism” looks back to the multiple influences that have shaped its constituent elements, Lee has emphasised the historically prospective reach of the expression. Noting that the term “new journalism” rapidly became the expression of choice to describe newspaper developments from the 1880s onwards, he cautions that there should be nonetheless no expectations of encountering either a precise or a consistent application of the term.⁴⁶ In similar vein, Stephen Koss has remarked that by the end of the 1880s, “New Journalism” as a designation “had come to acquire an elasticity that stretched in every convenient direction,” and Lee Anne Bache has characterised the term as “a relatively baggy catch-all” expression, but one which is, nonetheless, useful as a marker of the changes introduced into newspapers.⁴⁷

As many scholars have noted, in its broadest sense, the term “New Journalism” has come to refer to the accrual of developments that coalesced in the late nineteenth century to produce a recognisably innovative and popularly influential press that principally concerned changes made in newspaper appearance, content, rhetoric, technological innovation, business practices, and readerships. New Journalism’s objectives were not just to entertain but also to educate its readers and to represent their interests to power elites who, through birth, gender, class, education, landownership, large commercial proprietorship, and religious affiliation, were accustomed to wielding power in municipal, regional, and national affairs.

Adjustments in typography and layout, for example, altered the noticeably dense appearance of the mid-Victorian press and gave increased importance to the role of visual display. Blocks of uninterrupted small newsprint became broken up by larger and more informative headlines, cross-heads, line-drawings, cartoons, half-tone illustrations, and “display advertising” spread across more than the usual single column. With the aim of attracting and concentrating readerly attention, a graphic, brighter, and more vivid writing style was introduced to reflect and complement the innovations being made in layout.⁴⁸

Newspaper content underwent significant changes. In-depth political analysis, verbatim parliamentary reports, and long leader articles gave way to news accounts, human-interest stories, sport, crime, tittle-tattle, and scandal. Other innovations concerned the increased personalisation of the press through entitled editorials, signed articles, interviews, and investigative reporting.⁴⁹ In the 1880s, in two essays devoted to the subject of New Journalism, T. P. O’Connor, the editor of the *Star*, founded in 1888, and Evelyn March Phillips, the critic, both noted grounds to admit such personalised language but warned against its overuse. While O’Connor deplored any excesses, such as the descent of reporting into slander, scandal, and mudslinging attacks, March Phillips, in a further assessment of press forays into private lives, was strongly opposed to the “cruel and vile” sensational accounts of divorce cases.⁵⁰

Technological advances, including the telegraph and the telephone, significantly increased the speed with which journalists could file reports with their offices. Such developments, moreover, came to shape the growing dominance of paragraph-length reports that allowed readers to avoid overly long and intricate accounts. Additionally, the emergence of large companies capable of generating and maintaining substantial sales of their

titles began to replace the press ownership model of single editor or individual family proprietorship. Changes in business practices, printing-press improvements, lower cover prices, and increasing circulations further contributed to the success of the press in its diverse forms.⁵¹

All of these changes owed much to individual editors and their publications encouraging observers to seek to identify the precursory editor and newspaper that generated particular transformations. New Journalism is said, for example, to have emerged from the popular radical press of the 1830s, the Sunday sensationalist newspapers of the 1840s, from the *Daily Telegraph* and its coterie of writers that included George Sala and other “young lions,” and from the *Pall Mall Gazette* under its founding editor Frederick Greenwood. Some cite the society journals of the 1870s, in particular Edmund Yates’s *World* and Henry Labouchère’s *Truth*. From the 1880s, George Newnes’s popular one-penny weekly news digest *Tit-Bits* furnishes a further notable contribution to the development of New Journalism. Other commentators look to the 1890s, where we are directed to the Harmsworth brothers’ *Daily Mail*, with its promotion of a Jingoistic imperialism during the Second Boer War (1899–1902) and to Arthur Pearson’s *Daily Express*. Other lines of enquiry emphasise the considerable transatlantic influence exercised by the American newspapers, including the New York *Sun* before they became common in the British and Irish press. By the end of the 1880s, however, Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette* and O’Connor’s *Star* had come to represent the principal exponents of a serious contribution to political and social debate that utilised New Journalistic practices.⁵²

Before leaving this review of some of the major characteristics that scholarship has attributed to the concept of New Journalism, it is important to note that within two years of Matthew Arnold’s condemnation of Stead and his conduct of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, J. W. Robertson Scott produced a signed essay, “The ‘New Journalism,’” published in 1889, in *Sell’s Dictionary of the World’s Press*, that represents the earliest in-depth discussion of what this journalistic phenomenon represented.⁵³ Robertson Scott’s examination can be read not only as a strong defence of Stead’s work, quoting at length from the latter’s two manifesto essays of 1886, but also as an important identification and evaluation of the innovations that constituted the New Journalism.⁵⁴ Recent scholarship, whether explicitly or otherwise, rests to a large degree on the import of this essay, which, produced in the heat of the debate over late nineteenth-century cultural changes and socio-political pressures, merits close reading.

Robertson Scott resolved to confront the question of how new the practices under review were, to identify their principal elements, and to elaborate upon the reasons for their implementation. In answering the question of novelty, he identified the readiness of cultural observers “to resolve journalistic history into convenient ‘periods,’” but warned that such designations were “wholly artificial.”⁵⁵ While we can question Robertson Scott’s emphasis on gradualism, of “the natural, evolutionary manner of [journalism’s] progress,” and of “a steady sure progressive movement throughout,” we can nonetheless accept his central point.⁵⁶ That is, the history of newspaper development is the story of the accumulation and the accretion of innovation and renewal rather than the emergence of a fully formed revolutionary series of practices adopted by one or another newspaper owner, editor, or journalist. As Robertson Scott asserts, change was inherent in the press: “Journalism is a ‘live’ thing, an up-to-date matter.”⁵⁷

Robertson Scott further recognised that the simple question, “What is the ‘New Journalism?’,” did not have a simple answer: “No two people seem to be able to agree as to what it really signifies.”⁵⁸ There were, however, matters upon which agreement could be reached: newspapers had adopted the personal and the sensational, the signed article and the interview, and a drive toward succinctness: people “want to get right at the heart of things at once; they have neither leisure nor inclination to wade through seas of shallows.” There had also been undoubted technological advances in the press and the exertion of a palpable influence on public affairs including through the gauging and publicising of public opinion.⁵⁹

Robertson Scott had questions of his own: Why should newspapers not use cross-heads and give titles to leading articles? Why exclude illustration and interviews? For to do so was the manifestation of “the absurd conservatism which solemnly forbids the employment of such in every way ... as incompatible with the ‘dignity of the press’ and respectable journalism.”⁶⁰ He also had a firm answer for those who saw in sensationalist reporting the grubby pursuit of monetary gain: “Of course if men are going to publish newspapers which are no newspapers; if their sole aim is to sweat dividends, however earned, out of their properties, that is another thing.”⁶¹ He had a different explanation for this newer style of journalism: “There is a call for a journalism with a mission.”⁶² Robertson Scott’s summing up of what needed doing left no doubt as to the socio-political importance of Stead’s contribution to the world of newspapers. It was to be found:

In the helping forward and the beginning of political and social reform, in the amelioration of the condition of the masses and the bearing of the light of publicity, not only to the Great Voiceless Multitude, but into the manner in which our local, national, and imperial government is carried on, and the way in which the responsible and intricate work of the navy and army is administered.⁶³

When Stead had challenged Arnold to clarify for the public his thinking regarding “a new journalism,” no answer was forthcoming. Robertson Scott, however, succeeded in mediating between the two through the pages of *Sell’s Dictionary of The World’s Press* in an article that has a claim to priority that has remained largely, if not completely, invisible in current scholarship.

STEAD STUDIES

Until the appearance of Stewart J. Brown’s *W. T. Stead: Nonconformist and Newspaper Prophet* (2019), surprise had periodically been expressed that no major scholarly biography of W. T. Stead had been published.⁶⁴ Robertson Scott, writing in the early 1950s, forty years after Stead’s death, describes the difficulties that surrounded the early efforts to produce such a work. Stead’s youngest son, John, considered that Frederic Whyte’s two-volume *The Life of W. T. Stead* (1925) was unsatisfactory: “I was profoundly disappointed with the book; adequate justice has not yet been done to my father.”⁶⁵ Robertson Scott himself believed that Whyte “might have done more for him” and regretted the delay in the book’s publication which had prevented a generation from having a real understanding of what Stead had achieved.⁶⁶ Shortly after the death of his father, Stead’s second son, Henry, had invited Robertson Scott to write a “Popular Life,” but the latter considered the enterprise “absurd” given the sheer wealth of material available. Robertson Scott instead suggested that E. T. Cook (1857–1919), Stead’s successor as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, should be asked to write a two-volume biography. In the event, Cook was engaged on other work while others considered for the role of biographer included Reginald Brett, Lord Esher (1852–1930), who was deterred by the complexity of Stead’s life and character; J. L. Garvin (1868–1947), who edited the *Pall Mall Gazette* 1912–1915 and started the project, but gave it up in favour of writing a biography of the industrialist, politician, and Unitarian Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914); and the journalist and

editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, J. A. Spender (1862–1942), whose offer to undertake the assignment was declined.⁶⁷

Before Whyte’s biography appeared, all that existed to commemorate Stead was his eldest daughter Estelle’s memoir *My Father* (1913) and his secretary Edith K. Harper’s *Stead: The Man* (1918).⁶⁸ The perceived enormity of the assignment certainly appears to have been one impediment whilst another was created by the perceived lack of empathy between possible (J. A. Spender) or actual (Whyte) biographer and subject.⁶⁹ Robertson Scott has written of “Stead’s plentiful MSS. and typescripts and other papers, all that exist—in weight not much less than a hundredweight!—placed at my disposal by the goodness of Professor [John] Stead and the continuous kindness of Miss [Estelle] Stead” and of Henry Stead having shown him “into a room full of Tate sugar-boxes, packed with carefully arranged papers.”⁷⁰ “Such unparalleled stores” seem rather to have repelled than attracted. Even when Whyte did step in, his “dilatatory” approach did not endear him to certain interested parties.⁷¹ Even though many thought that Whyte’s *The Life of W. T. Stead* could be improved upon, and despite the existence of such a huge amount of archival material, the arrival of a biography suitable for such a significant nineteenth- and early twentieth-century figure seemed to defy realisation.

The story of the Stead archive is as intriguing as that concerning the publication of a biography thought worthy of its subject. The official Stead archive, deposited by family members between 1986 and 1996, in 2012, and in 2019, is held by Churchill College at Cambridge University. The archive consists of fourteen boxes and sixty-one volumes containing mainly correspondence received by Stead, including from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), the writer; William Gladstone (1809–1898), the Liberal Prime Minister; and Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958), the leader of the Suffragettes, and of papers relating to his time in prison and to his various publications.⁷² Churchill College was chosen on the recommendation of the descendants of Admiral John Fisher (1841–1920).⁷³ That more archival material exists in private hands has contributed to a sense of incompleteness and even mystery. One item has created debate, Stead’s journal, or diary, which references in academic and trade literature place in the Churchill archives.⁷⁴ However, no such journal has ever existed in that location. Fortunately, both Whyte’s biography of Stead and Robertson Scott’s *The Life and Death of a Newspaper* include extensive extracts from Stead’s personal notes and correspondence sufficient to

more than suggest the principal lines of his personal attitudes and motivations.

In 1972, Raymond L. Schultz's somewhat overlooked *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* began a period of greater interest in Stead and his work.⁷⁵ In 1988, Victor Pierce Jones's *Saint or Sensationalist? The Story of W. T. Stead, 1849–1912* was published with a foreword by the Stead scholar, Grace Eckley. In the same year, Joel H. Wiener declared that “until the publication of Joseph O. Baylen's definitive study of Stead, the interested reader must make do with lesser goodies.”⁷⁶ In a note to “The British Press, 1861–1918,” an article which he contributed to *The Encyclopedia of the British Press 1422–1992*, it was announced that J. O. Baylen had “recently completed a biography of W. T. Stead.” This eagerly awaited news, however, proved either to be erroneous or, if such a biography exists, confusing as no such book has been published to date.⁷⁷ Baylen did, however, produce at least twenty-two articles on Stead including “The ‘New Journalism’ in Late Victorian Britain” (1972), which still represents a standard foundational piece in the field of Stead research.⁷⁸ In 1987, the late John Stephenson was appointed by Stead's grandchildren as the official biographer, but this too has led to no publication apart from a eulogy in memory of the Rev. William Stead and his family delivered in 1987.⁷⁹

In 2001, Owen Mulpetre launched the “W. T. Stead Resource Site,” to which is attached the domain name “attackingthediabol.co.uk,” as a valuable, free-to-use, online resource, which promotes general interest and academic scholarship pertaining to Stead's life and career.⁸⁰ In 2007, Grace Eckley published her *Maiden Tribute: A Life of W. T. Stead*, a substantial contribution to Stead Studies and the result of twenty-four years of research.⁸¹ The 2012 centenary of the sinking of the *Titanic* prompted renewed interest in Stead and saw the appearance of W. Sydney Robinson's popularly titled trade book, *Muckraker: The Scandalous Life and Times of W. T. Stead: Britain's First Investigative Journalist*. A short foreword by Tristram Hunt, the former MP, and now Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, testifies to the perceived potential for the commercial success of such a volume as well as to Hunt's being “amazed,” although erroneously, that, in 2012, “one hundred years after his death aboard the *Titanic*, this is the first biography of the truly extraordinary W. T. Stead.”⁸²

Stead Studies have prospered in recent decades, building on an important conference on New Journalism held in New York, 7–8 November

1986. The “CUNY (City University of New York) Conference on History and Politics” brought together around seventy-five delegates whose deliberations were published in *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, edited by the American scholar Joel H. Wiener. The British Library hosted a conference entitled “W. T. Stead Centenary Conference: Newspaper Revolutionary,” 16–17 April 2012, which led to the publication of the associated volume *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary*. Stead and his New Journalism were further discussed at the conference “Communities of Communication II: Newspapers and Periodicals in Britain and Ireland from 1800 to 1900” held in Edinburgh, 10–11 September 2015. Attendees at this gathering are amongst those who have contributed to the *Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press, Volume 2: Expansion and Evolution, 1800–1900*, published by the Edinburgh University Press in 2020. Stead also figured as part of the exhibition *Breaking the News*, organised in 2022 at the British Library, and is a subject of the accompanying book with the same title.⁸³

An area of study generally absent from scholarship pertaining to Stead’s contribution to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century press has been the subject of religion. Josef L. Altholz’s *The Religious Press in Britain, 1760–1900* (1989) represents the best overall survey of the religious newspapers available during the long nineteenth century and refers to Stead in the context of his launch of the spiritualist quarterly journal, *Borderland* (1893–1897).⁸⁴ More recently, the influence of Nonconformist religion in Stead’s work has received more explicit commentary. Laurel Brake has identified the role of evangelical rhetoric and pulpit sermonising in Stead’s personalising and sensationalist New Journalism and sets his journalistic practice and theorising within the pursuit “of a spiritually and socially responsible press.”⁸⁵ Simon Goldsworthy has explored Nonconformist influence upon New Journalism in his article, “English Nonconformity and the Pioneering of the Modern Newspaper Campaign,” with special reference to Stead and the “Bulgarian Atrocities” crusade he ran at the *Northern Echo*. While Goldsworthy’s important article places Stead’s campaigning journalism within an evangelical Nonconformist context, I have extended this to include a more specifically Congregational focus while giving indications of points of agreement with, or divergence from, other Nonconformist denominations.⁸⁶ Within the last decade, apart from his recent biography mentioned above, Stewart J. Brown has made two other important contributions on religion and Stead’s journalism: “W. T. Stead and the Civic Church, 1886–1895: The Vision Behind

‘If Christ Came to Chicago!’” and “W. T. Stead, the ‘New Journalism’ and the ‘New Church’ in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.”⁸⁷

APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGY

This book investigates Stead’s development of a democratising, re-Christianising press that sought to exploit the needs of evolving readerships and which proposed a New Journalism capable of effecting both social change and social cohesion. In exploring Stead’s press practice at the *Northern Echo* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, I have paid particular attention to the leader articles of both publications as best bearing the stamp of Stead’s views on a great range of issues. In examining the *Review of Reviews*, I have focused on Stead’s deployment of supplementary publications and on articles in the *Review of Reviews* suggested by the indexes that he introduced to this enterprise. I also consider Stead’s Christmas Annuals, his attempts to launch a new daily paper, and his claims attesting to the reality of a spiritual world and to the possibilities of communication through telepathic automatic writing.

My pluri-disciplinary research methodology has focused on the shifting cultural priorities, socio-political tensions, and changing religious attitudes of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain.⁸⁸ The fields of social, economic, political, and religious history, and of nineteenth and early twentieth-century periodicals have, therefore, informed the writing of this book. I have prioritised close reading of Stead’s editorials and major review contributions not only in order to place his writing in its historical and cultural context but also to anchor his religiously inspired journalism in the rhetorical and press strategies he adopted and adapted throughout his career.

As will become evident, I have given some prominence to Matthew Arnold’s essays in order to clarify, at least for myself, how he emerged as such an important influence in the story of Stead and his journalism. Religious newspapers that have merited particular examination include Hugh Price Hughes’s *Methodist Times*, the theologically moderate, Unitarian weekly *Inquirer*, Edward Miall’s *Nonconformist*, the Salvation Army’s weekly *War Cry*, and the non-denominational Nonconformist weekly *Christian World*.⁸⁹ The latter title represents an invaluable non-sectarian record of views and actions across the range of Nonconformist beliefs.⁹⁰

The subject of religion in Britain involves studying both the established Church and Nonconformist Protestantism. As Elisabeth Jay has remarked, “Many works on nineteenth-century religious thought shy away from the Dissenting world as being both peripheral to the intellectual life of the period and too diverse for brief justice to be done.”⁹¹ More recently, Goldsworthy has asserted that “media studies probably do not pay enough attention to theology, although the mass media have only recently succeeded organised religion as the main means of disseminating ideas and information within most societies.”⁹² Lyn Pykett has described the challenges facing the student of the Victorian periodical press, which include its inevitable interdisciplinarity and consequent complexity of assessment.⁹³ Since then, research has been facilitated by some important publications. The five-volume *Religion in Victorian Britain* (1988–1997), published by Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, comprises a valuable collection of essays and primary source materials.⁹⁴ Recent publications have added new perspectives that have greatly added to the study and understanding of nineteenth-century religion. Michael R. Watts’s third volume on the history of Dissent, *The Dissenters: The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (2015), brought to a conclusion a project that had begun publication in the mid-1980s; Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas have been responsible for the editing of the third volume of *The Oxford History of the Protestant Dissenting Traditions: The Nineteenth Century* (2017); and Rowan Strong has edited *The Oxford History of Anglicanism* that includes the volume entitled *Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion* (2017).⁹⁵ Of interest also is *The Routledge Research Companion to the History of Evangelicalism* (2019).⁹⁶

Newspaper and periodical research has benefited hugely from the launch and development of bibliographic indexes. Foremost amongst these figure *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*, edited by Walter E. Houghton, and *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800–1900*, edited by John S. North, with accompanying volumes devoted to Irish and Scottish publications. More recently, the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, edited by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, has furnished succinct accounts of a wide range of newspapers, periodicals, journalists, editors, and terms commonly associated with the field.

Scholarship on the press has benefited enormously from digitisation. The study of Victorian and early twentieth-century newspapers has been

greatly facilitated by the emergence and development of specialist websites, particularly those managed by the British Newspaper Archive, Cengage, and the News Vault. Brake has written of the appeal of digitisation to researchers as “digital formats offer distinctive finding technology” that can facilitate complex searches of the material being examined.⁹⁷ As Brake cautions, however, digitisation has not come without a cost in terms of a loss: “The digital edition has its own materiality. It is not the same as print, which has a different colour, size, texture, bulk, view of the page, and page turning; and often paratextual elements, such as covers and advertisements” are absent from “the one copy of the run that has been digitized or microfilmed.”⁹⁸

The digitisation of so many nineteenth- and twentieth-century newspapers has been of immense help to my own research while microfilmed and hard-copy newspaper titles have complemented the exercise. The British Newspaper Archive has also recently begun to include more religious newspapers in its considerable range of newspaper titles, including John Campbell’s *British Banner* and *British Standard*, and the *Methodist Times*.⁹⁹ It cannot be overemphasised how dramatically the word-search capabilities of newspaper databases have increased opportunities for scholars to explore the world of the periodical and to do so in a comprehensive and time-efficient manner. Research that has been informed by database use is, therefore, all the more indebted to scholars who opened up the field of periodical studies without the assistance of such provision and who, nonetheless, brought into the light of academic interest so many newspapers, reviews, journals, and specialist magazines with such insight, determination, and rigour. Joseph O. Baylen, Joel H. Wiener, and Laurel Brake figure prominently as scholars whose work on Stead’s career as a journalist and editor has so valuably paved the way for those fortunate enough to benefit from the information technological revolution.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Central to this study is the influence of Nonconformity and, in particular, of Congregationalism, on Stead’s New Journalism. Protestant Christianity underpinned and encompassed Stead’s evolving New Journalism in its moral imperatives, socio-political agitation, and rhetorical register. He developed the place of Nonconformist plain-speaking in his expression of uncompromising views and was determined, when necessary, to bring

before the public subject matter of the gravest and most disconcerting kind.

This present chapter explores Stead's newspaper apprenticeship and discusses the similarities with that served by other Congregational journalists and editors. I review the development and accretion of the journalistic elements that came to constitute what became known in the late 1880s as the New Journalism and to claim a place of priority for the seminal analysis offered by J. W. Robertson Scott. A review of Stead Studies, my methodological approach, chapter outlines, and a consideration of Stead's reputational legacy complete the Introduction.

Matthew Arnold occupies a prominent place in Chap. 2 and receives mention elsewhere in this study. While I argue that the attribution to Arnold of the coining of the term "New Journalism" needs re-gauging, the persistence of such an ascription testifies to its resilience and productive capacity. My revised reading places the first appearance of "New Journalism" within the historical context of cultural anxieties and opportunities concerning newspaper developments from at least the 1840s. More particularly, I explore the term's emergence within the context of the dispute between Stead and Edmund Yates (1831–1894), the editor of the *World*, that flared up in June 1884 and through close readings of Matthew Arnold's three articles of 1887 in which he examined Stead's journalism in the context of Gladstonian Liberalism and Irish Home Rule.

In Chap. 3, I discuss the role of the newspaper editor in terms of public intellectual and prophet for the times. I define my uses of "Secularity," "Nonconformity," and "Evangelicalism," and offer a re-dating of the concept of the "Nonconformist Conscience." I examine Stead's place of vocation in both the press and virtual pulpit, discuss the idea of "Prophetic journalism," and follow his trajectory to Christ-like activist. The chapter further discusses the periodical calls for a *daily* religious newspaper and the support that the *Methodist Times* brought to bear for such a project in 1885. I conclude by a close reading of Stead's two newspaper manifestoes, "Government by Journalism" and "The Future of Journalism," both published in 1886.

Chapter 4 examines the nine years that Stead spent at the *Northern Echo* in the north-east of England. I discuss the religious and political context of Stead's work in which Gladstonian Liberalism and Protestant Dissent forged a political alliance increasingly energised by the enfranchisement of Nonconformist urban voters. During this period, Stead became an effective exponent of the crusading press through his emphasis