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The Restoration Newspaper and its Development

This book is a major survey of the English newspaper and the way it developed from 1660 to the early eighteenth century, a crucial period in its long history.

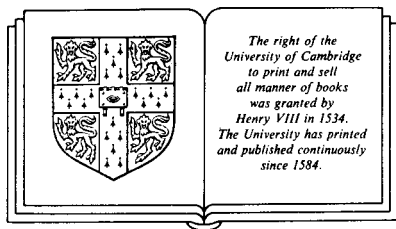
Professor Sutherland's approach is comprehensive and deals with a wide range of topics: the administration of newspapers, the source from which they obtained information, the state and reliability of reporting, the contributions of country and foreign correspondents, and the extent to which papers were able to print political news and express political opinions in a period of government repression. A final chapter provides an account of the chaotic and often dangerous lives of newspaper men and women. The emphasis throughout falls on how much was actually achieved in difficult circumstances, and how often modern developments were anticipated.

The importance of this book lies in the sustained effort to demonstrate how newspapers worked and how they changed; it will become a useful work of reference for scholars of seventeenth and eighteenth-century literature, as well as for political and social historians.

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Preface

The London newspaper was already forty years old when Charles II returned to England in 1660, to reign over his people for the next quarter of a century. During the Civil War there had been a vigorous growth of weekly news-books; that is periodicals in small quarto size of eight pages. I have not dealt with these here because they have been fully treated by Joseph Frank in his lively and well-informed work, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper* (1960). It is with the next forty years that my own study is mainly concerned. Although I have called it *The Restoration Newspaper*, I have felt free to take account of the small number of newspapers that made a brief appearance in the winter of 1688–9, during the uncertain weeks preceding and following the flight of James II to France, and of the new generation of papers that began to appear in the last five years of the seventeenth century. With the foundation of the *Oxford Gazette* in 1665, the format of the Restoration newspaper was a folio half sheet, printed on both sides in double columns.

The year 1660 did not inaugurate a new age of freedom for the periodical press: the King and his ministers disliked and distrusted newspapers, and did everything they could to get rid of them. A new Licensing Act in 1662 was the first step to their eventual suppression. By the autumn of 1666 the only paper the King's subjects were allowed to read was the official *London Gazette*, and from that they could learn little more than what was happening in foreign countries. By a lucky mischance, however, the reign of Charles II has a special significance in the development of the English newspaper. When, in 1679, the House of Commons introduced a bill designed to exclude his Catholic brother James from the succession, the King prorogued parliament, and on 12 July dissolved it. While this was happening, the Licensing Act, then due for renewal, was left in abeyance with other unfinished business. On 7 July, without waiting to see if the prorogued parliament might not be recalled, Benjamin Harris brought out the first number of his *Domestick Intelligence*, and it was soon followed by a succession of other newspapers. In the next three years from 1679 to 1682 almost forty different papers were published, a few hardly surviving their

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birth, but others lasting for several months, and some persisting for nearly two years. By the autumn of 1682, however, the government had regained complete control, and, without the introduction of a revived Licensing Act (for the King had now resolved to rule without a parliament), the newspapers were again suppressed.

It is this seminal period from 1679 to 1682, when the newspapers were legally free to appear, although not free from incessant prosecution and interference, that I have chosen for particular study. By taking a close-up view of the newspaper press at this time I have tried to show how it was establishing a pattern for much of its future development; and by treating this period in depth I have had the opportunity to indicate not only how the news was presented from day to day, but also the intense rivalry between papers of a different political complexion, the tricks they played on one another, their quarrels and the personal abuse that at once divided and linked them together. Since complete files of those newspapers are now available only in national and academic libraries (and even there for the most part in microfilm) I have quoted from them fairly liberally for the benefit of the general reader. I have envisaged this book, then, as a contribution to the history of the English newspaper in one of its most formative periods, taking the word newspaper in its usual sense of 'a printed publication containing the news, commonly with the addition of advertisements and other matters of interest'. Two notable periodicals of mainly political comment, *Heraclitus Ridens* and *The Observer*, began to appear in 1681; but although they contain some incidental news and they are cited here from time to time, I have not considered them as newspapers.

At an early stage it became clear to me that it would be impracticable and counter-productive to avoid all references to the newspapers of the early eighteenth century. In the first chapter, which is historical, I therefore thought it desirable to include the more important developments and innovations that took place in the first few decades of the new century, if only because I had occasion in later chapters to refer fairly frequently to the newspapers of that period for purposes of comparison or contrast. In the chapter dealing with foreign news, for example, I could not otherwise have checked the claims occasionally made by seventeenth-century newspapers to have their own foreign correspondents. Three chapters (2–4) are concerned with the domestic and foreign news. They deal with such questions as how the news was collected in London, and how it was obtained from the country districts and from abroad; what part was played by regular correspondents; how far papers took what they published from written

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news-letters, or stole it from one another; what sort of news interested the seventeenth-century reader, how reliable it was, and how it varied in kind from one newspaper to another. Since many of the Restoration newspapers were politically committed, a separate chapter on the way political issues were handled was clearly required. Here again I have concentrated on the years of political crisis from 1679 to 1682, dealing, *inter alia*, with the danger of publishing any news at all about the proceedings of parliament or the Privy Council, and the need to walk a tightrope between news and comment. I have also indicated some of the innovations in controversial technique devised by newspapers of the early eighteenth century, and some changes in the way that governments dealt with the opposition press. In the final chapter I have endeavoured, firstly, to trace the careers of a number of intrepid newspaper men and women, and the troubles they brought upon themselves by their own indiscretions; and, secondly, to point out the difficulties they had to face in producing papers printed by manual labour on a hand-press, and the extent to which such conditions prevented an orderly presentation of the day's news. In trying to establish the varying responsibility of author, newswriter, printer, publisher and proprietor for what appeared in the newspapers I have at times been forced to fall back on conjecture; but I take comfort from the words of Dr Johnson on a different occasion: 'There is no danger in conjecture, if it is proposed as conjecture.'

In conclusion, I have to add that I am not a professional historian, but I am deeply indebted to historians of the Restoration period, without whose guidance I might often have failed to realise the full significance of some piece of news or some statement in my newspapers. I am aware that I may be reproached for anticipating the use of the terms Whig and Tory by a few years in applying them to Shaftesbury's faction and the Court party before they had become fully current, but I took the chance for the sake of convenience. My main problem with English history in this book has been how to provide as briefly as possible some necessary historical background for the general reader, without over-simplifying or distorting the issues. This is never an easy thing to do, and I would be glad to think I have not set too many scholarly teeth on edge.