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British Periodicals Collections I and II

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With edits by the editors Chris Cotton, Peter White and Stephen Brooks.

Curious about Charles Dickens's opinion of Portuguese port wine? 'Be thankful for it!' Or the 19th-century auction of one of Charles II's oversized fleece wigs to a London theatre company? It turns out the great 'black forest of hair' was worn by the comedian Dicky Suett, who played the role of the fool, to rave reviews, in a production of Fielding's *Tom Thumb*, only to loose the frizzy bob in a fire that razed the Birmingham Theatre. Alcohol may have been a factor.

Speaking of drink and the 'merry monarch,' perhaps Charles II's rather imposing profile might have benefitted from the 'nose machine'? It pressed the unflattering features of one's protruding proboscis into a slightly more desirable shape with the help of some simple brass plates and screws. Gruesome, perhaps, but not to be confused with the powerful vice and battering machine (invented c. 1885) to help fishmongers shuck oysters without also slicing open their fingers and marinating potentially saleable mollusks in human blood.

I should mention that none of this has anything in common, except that it turned up in a simple keyword search for 'port wine' on ProQuest's remarkable *British Periodicals Collection I and II* [2]. With page images from 472 landmark British periodicals, published between 1681 and the late 1930s, ProQuest provides fully searchable, digital access to an enormous and wonderful cross-section of multidisciplinary journals and periodicals, including difficult-to-access issues obtained from some 100 libraries worldwide.

It is, to my mind, one of the most important digital repositories of materials pertaining not merely to the peculiar or the mundane, but to the major social, cultural, and political developments in British (if not world) history from the 17th century through to the early 20th. In one place, students and researchers can trace the creative and journalistic responses to nearly every important development from the era of William and Mary, the Georgian age of empire and sea power, Victorian industrialism, urbanism, imperialism, and reform, through to the First World War and the inter-war period. Moreover, if the 19th century was the 'age of the periodical,' then it has finally entered the digital era.

The database is composed of two parts, encompassing every variety of printed periodical, from penny weeklies, comics, and illustrated women's magazines to scholarly journals and magisterial quarterlies. Collection I consists of 162 journals that formerly constituted UMI's *Early British Periodicals*, amounting to

5,238 volumes. Collection II consists of 300 journals from UMI's *English Literary Periodicals* and *British Periodicals in the Creative Arts*, as well as 10 additional titles. Combined, the two collections amount to 6.1 million reproduced page scans, covering a wide range of topics from literature, philosophy, economics, religion, politics, and history to the fine arts, the sciences, the social sciences, and architecture. The comprehensiveness of the *British Periodicals* collections will also enable exhaustive study of the periodical press itself.

Collection I is host to, among other things, abolitionist magazines, including the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (1825–33) and *Freed-Man* (1865–8), which detail the social conditions of slaves and former slaves in the United States and Jamaica and provide accounts of parliamentary debates and anti-slavery movements. The list of 30 pre-1800 periodicals includes the long-running *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731–1907), well known not only for being Samuel Johnson's first place of work, as well as Oliver Goldsmith's decidedly lesser known, shorter-running *The Bee* (6 October 1759 – 24 November 1759), which for nearly three weeks published essays on only 'the most interesting subjects.' The latter is not to be confused with James Anderson's *The Bee: or Literary Weekly Intelligencer* (1790–4) or Eustace Budgell's *The Bee Revived: or the Universal Weekly Pamphlet* (1733–5), which ironically predates the other two.

Walter Scott, William Hazlitt, Thomas Arnold, and T. B. Macauley wrote for the Tory *Quarterly Review* (1809–1906) and for the Whiggish *Edinburgh Review* (1802–1906), both of which are included in Collection I, along with various incarnations of the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* (1778–1900), the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1888–1908), and the *Christian Remembrancer* (1819–40). The spectrum of British religion and religious dissent can also be traced in the Catholic quarterly *Dublin Review* (1836–1910), *Good Words* (1860–1906), the Cornish Methodist metaphysician Samuel Drew's Christian conduct newspaper, *Imperial Magazine* (1819–34), the short-running *Anti-Infidel* (June – November 1831), *Quiver* (1861–1926), *Saturday Magazine* (1832–44), and *Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* (1854–1900).

Subject options range from actors, agriculture, and Annie Besant, to liberalism, Lincolnshire, and literature, to violins, voice culture, and voyages. There are entries for Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, France and Germany, Poland and Russia, and Jamaica and India. Moreover, subjects with five or more titles include antiquities, archaeology, architecture, arts, book reviews, Christian life, English essays, English fiction and literature (including history and criticism), foreign news, Great Britain (politics and government, social life, customs, and conditions), illustrated periodicals, religious newspapers and periodicals, satire, theatre, and miscellanea.

Collection II covers the full chronological range of published periodicals, but focuses heavily on the 18th and 19th centuries. Essays and original serialized versions of texts by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Thomas Carlyle, Lewis Carroll, Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Johnson, John Stuart Mill, Bram Stoker, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Oscar Wilde, and countless other known and unknown writers, appear in the pages of *The Tatler* (1830–2), *The Spectator* (1753–4), *Macmillan's Magazine* (1859–1907), and many more.

Look here for first prints of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which appeared in *London Magazine* from September to October 1821, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, serialized by *Fraser's Magazine* from 1833 to 1834, and all 22 parts of Gaskell's *North and South*, serialized in *Household Words* (1850–9) from September 1854 to January 1855. Here, too, are early versions of Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), also in *Household Words*, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) in *All the Year Round* (1859–95), Hardy's *The Trumpet Major* (1881) in *Good Words*, *The Return of the Native* (1878) in *Belgravia: A London Magazine* (1866–99), and *Woodlanders* (1886–7) in *Macmillan's Magazine*. Collection II also includes original stories by George Gissing, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, and Henry Lawson and poems by Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and George Eliot, to name a few.

If *British Periodicals* can breathe new life into the study of the periodical press, it might also shed new light on the serial format. Other important titles in this collection include *The Athenaeum* (1828–1921), *The Black Dwarf*

(1817–24), *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817–1902), *Cambridge Journal* (1832–1900), *Examiner* (1808–81), *Fortnightly Review* (1865–1934), *The Idler* (1892–1911), *The Ladies Magazine* (1749–53), *The Leader* (1850–60), *The London Magazine* (1732–1829), *London Journal* (1845–1912), *Longman's Magazine* (1882–1905), *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record* (1849–87), and *Westminster Review* (1824–1914).

The creative arts are well represented in journals dating to 1770, from *The Fine Arts Quarterly Review* (1863–7), *The Art Journal* (1839–1912), *The British Stage and Literary Cabinet* (1817–1822), and *The Theatrical Recorder* (1805–6) to *The Musical Gazette* (1856–8), and the *Orchestra Musical Review* (1863–87), while the gadabout crowd is well accounted for in the pages of *Judy: or the London Serio–Comic Journal* (1867–1907), *The Dundee Wasp* (1897–1910), *The New Wonderful Magazine and Marvellous Chronicle* (1793–4), *The City Jackdaw* (1875–80), *The Badminton Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* (1896–1900), and *Fun* (1861–1901).

Users at institutions with subscriptions to ProQuest's *Periodicals Archive Online* or to its digital version of the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* can perform cross–searches. Better yet, the *Wellesley* index can track down keywords or phrases in periodicals that were unsigned by the original authors or written under a pseudonym. *British Periodicals* also comes with a handsome search interface of its own. Search results can be filtered by keyword, article title, author, journal title, journal editor, and journal subject or by content type, including advertisements, front and back matter, covers, drama, fiction, and poetry, letters, obituaries, recipes, and reviews. Searches can isolate cartoons, comic strips, illustrations, maps, music, and photographs. Results can be sorted by every variation of publication frequency or pinpointed by date. Meanwhile the contents of the 'Help' facility apply to every facet of the resource, including how to use the 'Help' function itself.

The digitization standards here are truly incredible, not only because of the enhanced searchability. Page scans are high–resolution grey–scale facsimiles and can be read on–screen or downloaded quickly as PDFs, which can in turn be printed or saved to a hard drive or accessed directly with durable URLs. Search terms are highlighted within the document view, while users can save their searches to a personalized, password protected account. This is, in other words, as close to the real thing as students and researchers can get. That this much material is indexed, searchable, and available electronically might even make ProQuest's *British Periodicals* better than the real thing, save perhaps for the familiar aroma of old paper.

To make this much material available online through university libraries is an incredible boon to students of British history, particularly to researchers without ready access to the hard copies themselves. This is the kind of resource that facilitates everything from undergraduate research essays, in both introductory survey courses and senior seminars, through to graduate–level dissertations as well as research for scholarly articles and books. Professors aiming to teach history through primary sources can build entire assignments or class discussions around *British Periodicals* or nuance their lectures with well–chosen articles and illustrations. Students could be encouraged to trace developments in prose styles, rhetorical trends, or metaphors and ideas across periodicals and through decades or centuries.

Electronic resources like these not only expand the opportunities available for teaching history; they also help to facilitate course assignments for large classes without exhausting library resources. Online digital archives such as *British Periodicals,* or the equally amazing *Times Digital Archive (1785–1985), Mass Observation Online, The Old Bailey Proceedings Online,* or the *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* online, can of course accommodate limitless students and more ambitious undergraduate and graduate research projects in ways that traditional library holdings simply cannot.

They also improve access to education for students who might struggle to purchase expensive course texts and readers or who attend smaller universities whose libraries have limited acquisition budgets. That said, I am also emphatically aware that the decidedly hefty institutional subscription rates for digital collections can be prohibitive, especially in this era of bleak and worsening university budgets – too many schools can do

little more than to put digital archives like *British Periodicals* on their wish lists and cross their fingers – and for this reason I encourage electronic publishers like ProQuest to find new, innovative ways to make their digital products more affordable to institutions and individuals alike.

I am reminded, too, of Patrick Kingsley's recent report on the slow–reading movement in *The Guardian*, which included commentary by the Oxford historian Keith Thomas and the technology guru Nicholas Carr about how pint–sized online articles are creating an epidemic of disengaged readers.(1) Students and researchers fortunate to have access to *British Periodicals* or any other digital database must at the same time avoid the pitfalls of analyzing sources with a search engine in place of reading the material in its entirety, let alone cherry–picking from the results of keyword searches, or clicking too quickly between periodicals without engaging with the content. My hope, in fact, is that rich, wide–ranging digital resources like *British Periodicals* may help to militate against today's less focused internet users or time–and–money strapped researchers. With 250 years or more of material at our fingertips, on our computer screens, and not going anywhere, we have no excuse but to sit back, read, contemplate, and correlate.

What I also like about the *British Periodicals* digital archive is that it still manages to facilitate a wonderful degree of serendipity. Researchers may just as easily stumble across an unexpected document online as they would in an archive. Unexpected search results may in the process help researchers to assemble new and broader source bases for their projects. *British Periodicals* not only promotes interdisciplinarity, but makes it altogether unavoidable. Better yet, resources like this one have the potential to push research projects and agendas in some unintended directions. In fact, my own work has been shaped very much by the otherwise indiscriminate algorithms that seek out and return search terms.

One of the challenges I faced while working on an interdisciplinary history of the crowd in late 19th–century London was not simply that of cultivating a primary source base, but of locating the crowd within it. As it happens, 'the crowd' is not a subject or category in any traditional library, archival search engine, or card catalogue. The crowd is usually treated as a phenomenon that was the product of another social, economic, or political event: London's Gordon Riots in the 1780s, for example; Protestant religious uprisings in response to the Catholic–friendly Papist Acts of 1778; the Swing Riots in East England in the 1830s; attempts by agricultural workers to halt wage reductions and the introduction of threshing machines; Food Riots throughout the 1700s and early 1800s as consumer protests over grain prices; Chartist suffrage demands in the 1840s; all of which are well and thoroughly accounted for in the pages of *British Periodicals* , but usually with only fleeting focus on the nature of the crowds themselves.

These, of course, were not histories of the crowd inasmuch as they were events or conditions that precipitated a crowd or, possibly, brought together the people who populated or responded to one. I realized, too, that there was no obvious or obligatory source base for the history of the crowd, compared, say, to a biography of a person ('free thinkers' have their own journal in *British Periodicals*, as do 'violinists,' and the German composer Richard Wagner) or a history of a movement (see 'temperance,' 'patriotic poetry,' or 'socialism'). The crowd produced no diaries, minutes, or papers, let alone a weekly periodical or a quarterly organ. Instead, the history of the crowd was and remains one of those topics that could be discerned only from what others had written about it. Thanks to the *British Periodicals* collections, I was also increasingly convinced that the late 19th–century crowd was a decidedly different phenomenon from its earlier incarnations.

In addition to otherwise predictable references to unruly mobs of boys or regular rioting in Clerkenwell or Hyde Park, as well as fairly detailed accounts of, say, the 1855 Sunday Trading Riots or the struggle for Trafalgar Square in the late 1880s, repeated searches for 'the crowd' using the *British Periodicals* interface also returned countless references to, among other things, 'overcrowding' – a compelling urban history phenomenon and certainly an important Victorian housing problem, expertly accounted for by the historians Gareth Steadman Jones and John Burnett, but not one regularly associated with the history of the crowd, public protest, or even rioting.

Report after report after mid century, in periodicals such as George Augustus Sala's *Temple Bar* (1860–1906) and the *Illustrated Review* (1870–4), spoke of the overwhelming extent to which London's poor were driven by metropolitan improvements and by the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Acts to herd together, sometimes 40 to a room. Urban–focused journals, and there are many of them divided across *British Periodicals Collection I and II*, repeated the same refrain: the poor lacked homes, neighbourhoods, and places of recreation, which was why the poor in turn filled the streets and public spaces of the metropolis, where they erected makeshift homes in places like Trafalgar Square or Hyde Park and served as a ready–made audiences for political or trade union demonstrations, many of which ended in violence and riot.

Meanwhile in the monthly review magazine the *Nineteenth Century* (1877–1906), Octavia Hill, the prolific housing and social reformer, insisted that what London's 'overcrowded' working families missed most was an outdoor space of their own, a personal garden, for children to play in, for the elderly to convalesce, and for the workingman to escape the street and the pub.(2) Not long after, Dickens himself toured London's slum neighbourhoods and expressed at length, in *All the Year Round* (1859–81), the successor to his *Household Words* (1850–9), his astonishment that so many poor men, women, and children managed to withstand homes that were so 'overcrowded' and in such advanced stages of decay.(3)

Elsewhere Dickens described the 'horrible entomological aroma' of 'overcrowded' working–class homes in Westminster parish, which reeked of decaying food, open drains, and unclean casual wards. Only by hanging out of a broken window in the stairwell of one house and inhaling the breeze was the author able to overcome the 'sickening sense of nausea … and look in–doors again'.(4) After a tour though an unfit dwelling in Stepney, East London, a social investigator for the *Ragged School Union Magazine* (1849–75), which in 1876 became the *Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, recalled 'a smell so thick and noisome, that for hours I afterwards seemed to taste the horrid flavour of the place'.(5)

Social investigative journalism by the likes of Dickens, Hill, W. T. Stead, George Sims, Andrew Mearns, and James Greenwood, which included detailed accounts of overcrowding, cholera outbreaks, stink, sewerage, and other public health concerns, along with debriefs of reports from voluntary sanitary aid committees in publications such as Annie Besant's *Our Corner* (1883–8), in the *Saturday Review* (1855–1938), in *After Work* (1874–87), or in the *Fortnightly Review* (1865–1934), revealed the compelling extent to which the history of public protest and the crowd in late—19th–century London was intimately connected to the appalling and inadequate private spaces to which the working–classes were relegated and from which they were desperately trying to escape.

In other words, while the more predictable search results using the *British Periodicals* interface allowed me to carry out the more ordinary tasks of identifying major instances of rioting and fleshing out empirical reconstructions of late 19th–century crowds, the more counter–intuitive search results revealed and allowed me to examine the crowd's relationship to public and private space; and to go further still by studying inter–related developments in hygiene and smell, the experience of publicness and privacy, and how these developments translated into popular culture, literature, and social investigative calls for reform. How many other projects, from the Civil Wars through to the Great War, might *British Periodicals'* digital search interface push in new unexpected directions?

What is so exciting about a digital resource like ProQuest's *British Periodicals*, then, is that it not only enhances history teaching and research, but it allows researchers opportunities to do what would have been difficult, if not impossible, with traditional print resources. It promotes new models of analysis, new collaborative and creative rubrics for classroom instruction, and new access to an enormous variety of primary source material covering, in this instance, nearly two and a half centuries of important developments and events through to the silliest or the most commonplace. *British Periodicals*, and other digital resources like it, is a resource and a tool that expands the audience and the potential for thoughtful, wide–ranging multidisciplinary study. It should be available to all students of history.

Notes

1. Patrick Kingsley, 'The art of slow reading,' *The Guardian*, 15 July 2010 < http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading [3]> [accessed 5 January 2011].Back to (1)
2. Octavia Hill, 'The open spaces of the future', *Nineteenth Century*, 46, 269 (July 1899), 26–36.Back to (2)
3. Charles Dickens, 'Home, sweet home,' *All the Year Round*, 15, 363 (April 1866), 303–6.Back to (3)
4. Ibid.Back to (4)
5. 'Homes of the poor,' *Ragged School Union Magazine*, (November 1868), 241–6.Back to (5)

Other reviews:
[4]

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[1] https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/5297 [2] http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do
[3] http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading [4] https://reviews.history.ac.uk/