



# The Celebrity Gossip Column and Newspaper Journalism in Britain, 1918-1939.

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*Sarah Newman*

## Short Abstract

### *The Celebrity Gossip Column and Newspaper Journalism in Britain, 1918-1939.*

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This thesis analyses the content, tone, form and authorship of the national newspaper gossip column 1918-1939, as a new means through which the qualities of the popular press in this period can be more closely defined. Often dismissed as an example of the sensational, Americanization of early twentieth-century popular culture, the celebrity gossip column has been loosely grouped with the friendly, informal language and bolder formatting of the 'New Journalism' of the late nineteenth century and the development of the dramatic 'human-interest' stories of 'everyday life' in the interwar period (LeMahieu, 1988; Wiener, 1988). Through a comparative study of six newspapers including the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *News of the World*, I analyse the changing representation of the celebrity subject, and, originally, the shifting character and persona of the gossip columnist. Whereas some historians have analysed the content of newspapers without considering the questions of the newspaper's production, I analyse newspaper employment records, gossip columnists' memoirs and their unpublished letters and diaries to define the specific economic, social and cultural circumstances which, I argue, influenced their public portrayal. Also, in examining the unpublished correspondence between editors, proprietors and columnists and the burgeoning print culture of journalistic training manuals and professional memoirs, I provide a history of the press's professionalization in this period. The national popular press has often been used as a historical source to define national character and national identity in the interwar period (Bland, 2008; Kohn, 1992). By scrutinizing the content and production of the gossip column and particularly the class, behaviour, interactions and subject matter of the columnist, I argue that the gossip column presented a version of 'Britishness' that was not so inward-looking and domesticated as so many accounts of interwar Britain suggest.

## Long Abstract

This thesis questions established historical arguments about why things changed in the popular press of interwar Britain through an analysis of the content and production of the newspaper gossip column in the national press. Historical narratives of the development of the popular press between the wars have been dominated by three themes: firstly, economic competition between proprietors and their primary focus on making a profit, secondly, the Americanisation of the content of the national press through the increased discussion of celebrity, and the simplified discussions of leisure and lifestyle over politics, and thirdly, the domination of the proprietor in determining newspaper content. This thesis begins by providing an alternative reading of proprietors' relationships with the content of their newspapers. By examining the newspaper office archives of the *Mail* and *Express* alongside detailed content analysis of six national newspapers (*Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *News of the World* and *Evening Standard*) over a twenty year period, I argue that proprietors like Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook sought to respond to and reflect modern 'life': a life that was defined, particularly in the 1920s, as focused on questions of lifestyle, consumerism and leisure. I will show that proprietors' renewed and increased focus on the gossip column in the interwar period was one new initiative that was part of this developing policy to connect the popular national press with its new mass readership in new, personal ways. Thus, I argue that the gossip column was part of a new post-war journalistic process which I term the personalisation of the press. One aspect of this process was that the content of the gossip column was focused on individual Society figures, the particulars of their dress and their social life at private parties and exclusive events. I will argue that another example of this personalisation process was the appointment of members of Society as gossip columnists from the mid-1920s, which

indicated the national press's desire to illuminate and expand the details of Society's social life even further. I also argue that the personable and often humorous writing style of many of the columnists developed from the mid-1920s was another new way in which papers engaged a mass audience with the content of the newspaper press.

Aside from this extensive content analysis of the national newspaper gossip column, my research methodology also includes the comparison of gossip columns with the content and production of other print genres including magazines and novels. If other historians have shaped their histories of the development of the interwar press through an account of persistent economic competition between newspapers and the technological advancement of printing and photography, this cross-genre approach offers some different reasons for change in the content and production of the gossip column. For example, chapter three explores the influence of Evelyn Waugh's bestselling novel *Vile Bodies* (1930) on the print persona of the gossip columnist, and chapter four examines the influence of the visual culture of Society periodicals like the *Bystander* and 'lowbrow' weekly papers like the *News of the World* and *World's Pictorial News* on the visual content of the gossip columns in the 'middle-class' *Mail* and *Express*.<sup>1</sup> Through this cross-genre comparison, this thesis emphasises the cultural complexity of the national press by studying the gossip column: a feature usually labelled as a superficial and 'brainless' example of the cultural downturn of modern newspapers.<sup>2</sup>

As well as offering a new cultural history of the press, the gossip column and the history of celebrity culture, this thesis is also a social history of interwar Britain. It analyses a number

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<sup>1</sup> E. Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London, 1930).

<sup>2</sup> J.H. Wiener, *Papers for the Millions: the New Journalism in Britain, 1850's to 1914: Conference on History and Politics: Papers* (New York; London, 1988).

of 'fan' letters from mainly middle-class readers to explore what it was about the newspaper gossip column that they enjoyed. Also, by examining the content of the gossip column over a twenty year period this thesis asks if Society continued to dominate the gossip column as they did pre-war and during the war. This thesis also considers if and how Society's representation changed over the period, and asks how their representation differed between newspapers, and if other types of celebrity subjects were included in the interwar years. In so doing it examines how historical ideas of the British upper-class met with more modern themes of celebrity culture represented in popular print culture, and particularly the gossip column, between the wars. Chapter two also examines the cultural and social circumstances surrounding a new development in the press from the mid-1920s until the end of the period: the employment of mainly upper-class, university educated men as gossip columnists. In analysing newspaper office archives including the correspondence between Beaverbrook and Rothermere and the letters between gossip columnists and proprietors, this thesis provides a new history of the development of the press 'behind-the-scenes'. It investigates journalists' working relationships and working conditions in interwar Britain and pinpoints new and evolving forms of journalism in the press, particularly the collaborative nature of the gossip column with work from columnists, illustrators and sub-editors included in the columns throughout the period. This analysis also develops Perkin's argument about the development of professional culture between the wars by arguing that the public persona of the upper-class gossip columnist of the national press represented a new theme in popular print culture in interwar Britain; that of the gossip columnist as a professional-gentleman.

Through systematic content analysis of the six national newspapers listed above, chapter one argues that *Society* was prominent within the celebrity culture of the newspaper gossip column between the wars. However it also argues that *Society*'s representation in the press responded to social, cultural and political change including the growth of a mass, national readership of newspapers and the effects of the economic depression on ideas of appropriate forms of social life, fashion and leisure culture. It argues that the celebrity culture of the press expanded to include other figures like sports stars from *Empire* and musicians and intellectuals from Europe after the war, and in so doing argues that there was limited 'Americanisation' of the celebrity culture of the gossip column in terms of the nationality of figures that were represented.<sup>3</sup>

The second chapter draws on the understudied diaries and unpublished scrapbooks of columnist Robert Bruce Lockhart, the family letters of Third Earl of Kinross Patrick Balfour, and the office correspondence of Viscount Castlerosse. It uncovers the 'private' reactions of these upper-class columnists to their professional and celebrity image as columnists. The first section refocuses on the 'private' views of the gossip columnist on his working life as a gossip columnist, bridging a fundamental gap in a historiography of the press between the wars that has normally focused its attentions on the personalities of newspaper magnates. Building on the links that Perkin makes between political and social change in the twentieth century and the rise of a professional society in late nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain, the distinctly modern interactions of the gossip columnists' personas as private gentleman, public celebrity **and** office professional between the wars will be identified and

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<sup>3</sup> Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism* (Basingstoke, 2011).

explored.<sup>4</sup> For instance, whereas Perkin focuses on the rise of traditional middle-class professions, I will focus on an understudied group of upper-class men that were forging a career in the new national newspaper industry. Exploring what I label the 'alternative', 'private' gossip columns of Balfour and Lockhart in their letters and diaries alongside the content of their printed columns, for the first time, reveals the established working limits, codes of conduct and editorial policies they negotiated in their public, professional and private guises. The upper-class's move into professional life and business after 1918 has been characterised as evidence of the public downfall of the upper-class by David Cannadine, this chapter will argue however that columnists like Castlerosse and Balfour, were, at least in the late 1920s, confident in their modern public roles on the press and proud of their public voice as gossip columnists.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter three argues that changes in Society's representation were perhaps most clearly seen in the formation of the gossip columnist's celebrity persona as a gentleman-journalist: a complex figure who balanced his active involvement within elite social life with a thoughtful, moralistic, sensible personality. The study of the print persona of the gossip columnist is a new historical approach which responds to the work of Ponce de Leon: whilst his study reveals the dominance of didactic celebrity profiles and printed interviews in the USA and analyses the public profile of the represented celebrity, this thesis exposes the journalists involved in this representation, namely the gossip columnist.<sup>6</sup> It argues that by the end of the period the columnist acted as an important mediator between celebrity lifestyles and audience lifestyles, a figure who had become a celebrity in his own right. A major aspect of this chapter is the exploration of the cultural relationship between Evelyn

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<sup>4</sup> H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1992)

<sup>6</sup> Ponce De Leon, *Self-Exposure* (2002).

Waugh, his novel *Vile Bodies* (1930), with its main character of the gossip columnist, and the formation of the celebrity gossip columnist as a public figure in interwar Britain. Focusing on the language of the 'star' columnists in papers including the *Sunday Chronicle* and *Sunday Express* in the early 1930s, this chapter demonstrates the columnists' real, imagined and intellectual interactions into political, social and cultural worlds that increasingly resonated with their readers' changing interests and lifestyles. For example, this meant that gossip columnists like Beverley Nichols in the *Sunday Chronicle* combined characteristics of the professional journalist, outspoken idealist and male heartthrob, to find the right balance between leisured sociability and political awareness, the high-life and high-principled morals to form what I argue was a modern gentleman-journalist persona.

Chapter four examines the photography, illustration and typography of the newspaper gossip column between the wars and argues that foregrounding the visual provides a more nuanced interpretation of the gossip column's cultural impact in interwar Britain. Until recently historians have tended to neglect visual aspects of the newspapers and have focused on analysing the language of the printed text. Mark Hampton's study of newspaper cartoons has begun to expose the ways in which visual culture can be understood, presenting a complex impression of social and political interchange between newspaper, artist, his subject and audience.<sup>7</sup> By charting the column's changing form this chapter will provide an alternative reading of the development of the mass press currently founded almost completely on textual analysis, emphasising the significant role of the gossip column within a new visual history of the national press. I will base my discussion on Michael Saler's

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<sup>7</sup> M. Hampton, 'Inventing David Low: Self-Presentation, Caricature and the Culture of Journalism in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20/4 (2009), pp. 482-512.

idea of the 'spectacularization' of mass culture c.1890-c.1940.<sup>8</sup> For instance I show that in June 1930, the *Mail's* column 'spectacularized', becoming an extraordinary visual celebration of modern Society and consumer and leisure culture, spectacular in terms of the diverse range of imagery of celebrity culture it contained. Yet Saler's terminology, I argue, can also limit the study of the column. It enforces an older notion of the mass press as lacking in intellectual content, undermining its moral worth by selling out to a sensation-seeking audience. Using the *Mail* as one case study, I argue that the complex, multi-layered form of the column represented a daily social and cultural commentary on modern society, created by a diverse artistic and journalistic team for readers in tune with a shifting celebrity culture. By analysing this paper against other newspapers including the *Express* and the much-less studied *Sketch* and Sunday paper the *News of the World*, the cinema fanzine *Picturegoer* and Society periodical *Bystander*, this chapter argues that focusing on the visual allows us to trace the formation of a mass culture in which visual devices circulated across the 'brows' of British print culture.

Through the detailed comparative analysis of the six main newspapers studied in this thesis, the final chapter analyses the depictions of European politicians and royalty in the *Mail*, *Express*, *News of the World* and *Sketch* and also analyses the depictions of French female celebrity in the columns of the *Standard* and *World's Pictorial News*. In so doing it questions the transatlantic 'star-system' proposed in the histories of Waters and Mayhall by exposing Europe rather than the USA as a major cultural device in the British newspaper gossip

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<sup>8</sup>M. Saler, "'Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes' Mass Culture and the Re-enchantment of Modernity, c.1890-c.1940", *The Historical Journal*, 3/46 (2003), pp. 599-622, p. 604,607.

column in interwar Britain.<sup>9</sup> This analysis also leads to a critical reassessment of the historical trope of Britishness and popular print culture put forward by Bland, Giles, Light and Walkowitz in early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>10</sup> For instance, I show that the culturally-maligned gossip column's international scope and its nationally-accessed cosmopolitan celebrity culture existed **alongside** the domesticated visions of Britain and femininity in the novels and newspaper articles that historians like Light discuss.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the middle-class readership of novels and the national press had access to competing and complex versions of the world between the wars: popular print culture was not quite as uniform and intellectually limited as has previously been thought.

By adopting a sustained comparative methodology which combines the study of well-known and now obscure newspapers within the broader cultural context of their production and comparison to other print genres, this thesis brings together a social and cultural history of the newspaper gossip column for the first time. Emphasising the context of Victorian and Edwardian newspapers and studying the memoirs of columnists after the Second World War also allows for a more nuanced assessment of change and continuity in the gossip column and celebrity culture between the wars. It allows for new developments like the

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<sup>9</sup> C. Waters 'Introduction: Beyond "Americanization": Rethinking Anglo-American Cultural Exchange between the Wars', *Cultural & Social History*; 2007, 4/ 4, pp. 451-459, and L. Nym Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales versus Clark Gable: Anglophone Celebrity and Citizenship between the Wars' *Cultural & Social History*; 2007, 4 /4, pp. 529-543.

<sup>10</sup>L. Bland, 'The Trial of Madame Fahmy: Orientalism, Sexual Perversity, Violence and the Fear of Miscegenation', in S. D'Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain: Gender and Class* (London, 2000) and Bland, 'The Trials and Tribulations of Edith Thompson: The Capital Crime of Sexual Incitement in 1920s England', *Journal of British Studies*, 47/3 (2008), pp. 624-48.

J. Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950* (Basingstoke, 1995), Giles and T. Middleton, *Writing Englishness 1900-1950: an Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity* (London, 1995) and Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004).

A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991).

J. Walkowitz, 'The "Vision of Salome": Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908-1918', *The American Historical Review*, 108/2 (2003), pp. 1-36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

'spectacular' visual format of the newspaper gossip column and the celebrity persona of the gentleman-journalist to be placed in a longer-term cultural context in the history of modern Britain.

*For Michael, B.N.E.*  
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## Introduction:

### Why Study the Newspaper Gossip Column in Interwar Britain?

A sad man is the grounds man at Phyllis Court. He was saying yesterday that there is no hope whatever of repairing the damage done by the bachelor party last week, members of which tried to set the Thames on fire with petrol. Instead of a row of rose bushes there is now nothing but a line of blackened stumps, and the ivy and the creepers on the bank, of which he was especially proud, have been completely destroyed. For a space of 20 yards the grass too has been blackened, while the lovely oak trees, 10 yards back from the river, are now withering and turning brown.<sup>12</sup>

This paragraph from the *Daily Mail's* new gossip column of 1927, 'People & Their Doings', presents what this thesis argues became several key themes in the interwar newspaper gossip column: the behaviour and social lives of British Society and the moral, sensible, thoughtful persona of the columnist as social commentator. Writing under the militaristic pseudonym 'A.D.C.', the columnist reported on the actions of the 'bachelor party' at the private gentlemen's club Phyllis Court in Henley-on-Thames, famed for its annual Society regatta. Presenting the drama of the fire and the distress of the ordinary 'grounds man', 'A.D.C.'s' writing reflected the growing prominence of what Daniel LeMahieu describes as the 'human-interest story...news...outside...politics and business...which drew upon the emotions' in the interwar press.<sup>13</sup> The columnist, a role which LeMahieu states had its origins in the 'Americanized', sensationalized styles and forms of the 'new journalism' of the 1880s, also appeared anxious about the destruction of the English garden on the Thames

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<sup>12</sup> *Daily Mail*, 7 June 1927.

<sup>13</sup> A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 19, D. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 22-25, and, H. Macgill Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story* (Chicago, c.1981) quoted in, LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p.25.

banks.<sup>14</sup> While distancing himself from the actions of this elite social group, 'A.D.C.' also suggested a certain familiarity with the exclusive Phyllis Court evidenced through his vivid descriptions of the grounds and personal conversation with the grounds man.

Evidence suggests that the gossip columnist and gossip column were an important part of popular print culture in interwar Britain. For example, the *Political and Economic Planning: Report on the British Press* (1938) states that by the end of the period the gossip column was 'at least glanced at' by 'two-thirds of newspaper readers' and it had become the subject of the bestselling novel, Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930).<sup>15</sup> For newspaper historians including Hannah Barker and J.H. Wiener, the post-war development of features like the celebrity gossip column signalled the national press's shift from an organ of formal political commentary to one associated with entertainment, leisure and consumerism.<sup>16</sup> These historical approaches have been heavily influenced by the work of academics like Queenie Leavis in the 1930s, who argued that the 'mass press' promoted a 'facetious denigration of serious values' with 'their glorification of food, drink, clothes, and material comforts, their determined inculcation of a higher standard of living...'<sup>17</sup> According to Adrian Bingham, the introduction of new 'human-interest' items like the 'women's pages', with their focus on community life and their new personal advice columns, were the result of a national mood that retreated from big questions of the national economy and foreign affairs after the First

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-46.

<sup>15</sup> Political and Economic Planning (PEP), *Report on the British Press: A Survey of its Current Operations and Problems with Special Reference to National Newspapers and their part in Public Affairs*, (London, 1938), p. 252. E. Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1930).

<sup>16</sup> H. Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855* (Harlow, 2000). J. H. Wiener, *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850's to 1914: Conference on History and Politics: Papers* (New York; London, 1988), pp. xi- xii.

<sup>17</sup> Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, 1932, 1968 edition) p. 178, quoted in Bingham, *Gender* (2004), p. 44. Leavis, *Fiction* (1932), pp. 14-22.

World War.<sup>18</sup> For Ross McKibbin, the Society gossip column, and its popularity with the expanding middle-classes in particular, represented a damning example of the period's social and political conservatism. McKibbin writes that Society celebrities dazzled a consumerist middle-class audience into an unquestioning acceptance of a pre-war 'conservative social hierarchy'.<sup>19</sup>

By systematically analysing the content of the newspaper gossip column from 1918-1939, this thesis traces and seeks to explain the shifting persona of the gossip columnist and the changing representation of Society in the interwar national press. The gossip column, I argue, represented a personalisation of the national press in interwar Britain. The thesis explores this process by analysing the content, tone, authorship and production of the gossip column alongside its criticism found in novels, periodicals, journalist training guides, memoirs and fan letters. I argue that examples of the personalisation of the press can be seen in the writing style of the gossip columnist: chapters two and three argue that the columnist developed an increasingly lively writing style and friendly tone through which to draw in readers from the mid-1920s. Building on this analysis I examine the correspondence between newspaper proprietors and columnists to explore the personal nature of their ostensibly professional relationships in chapter two. I scrutinize pay records from the *Express* and *Evening Standard* in chapter four to argue that the restructuring and expansion of newspaper staff in the interwar period to include illustrators, photojournalists and gossip columnists provides evidence of the ways in which newspapers constantly reconsidered their 'news values' in complex, multifaceted ways. One theme was how to make the content of the press more personal: a key aspect of the transformation of the press was an

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<sup>18</sup> A. Bingham, *Gender* (2004), pp. 43-45.

<sup>19</sup> R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), p. 31.

editorial concern with the question of how best to convey news clearly to readers and maintain their interest. By analysing the content of the gossip column I will argue that the means of attracting and engaging a mass audience were increasingly complex and multidisciplinary with combinations of photography, illustration and text.

### **1) The Historiography of the Interwar British Press and Gossip Column.**

A key starting-point in the debates around the interwar press is the question of the role of the gossip columns in the 'newspaper wars', or periods of intense economic competition, between newspapers, of the interwar period. For journalist and *Daily Mail* owner Northcliffe, the end of the war marked a key moment in both the business structure and journalistic culture of the *Mail*, announcing on 2 January 1919 that: 'The era of somnolence in journalism is now past and all papers will be fighting for all they are worth.'<sup>20</sup> Historians like Bingham and Aled Jones have shown how rival papers battled for readership and dominance of the newspaper market.<sup>21</sup> This marked the first major period of readjustment in the market of the national press and the increasing dominance of press barons like Northcliffe's brother Viscount Rothermere. There is evidence from the *Mail's* archive to suggest that the gossip column played an important part in attracting new readers after the war. Northcliffe highlighted the inadequacies of this feature when he described it as a dull 'chronicle of the obvious', and its author and its content, 'completely out of touch with the great world'.<sup>22</sup> The social definition of this 'great world' was made clear when the gossip column's staff were condemned for missing 'the chief talking point of the day' including 'the

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<sup>20</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, Lord Northcliffe's Bulletins to the *Daily Mail*, MSS.Eng.hist.d.303-5, 1919-1920, 2 January 1919.

<sup>21</sup> A. Jones, 'The British Press, 1919-1945', in, D. Griffiths (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of the British Press, 1422-1922* (Basingstoke, 1992), pp. 47-55. A. Bingham, *Gender* (2004), pp. 1-50.

<sup>22</sup> Bodleian Library, Northcliffe's Bulletins, MSS.Eng.hist.d.303-5, 1919-1920, 2 January 1919.

death of Lady Paget' and 'the marriage of Lord Ribblesdale and Mrs J.J. Astor.'<sup>23</sup> This criticism was provided by Northcliffe in memorandum or 'staff bulletins' suggesting the levels of communication between managers and journalists in this period of economic competition and the resulting transformation of journalistic styles and formats. The memoranda, I argue, reveal two important themes regarding the changing nature of journalism and its personalisation immediately after the war. Firstly, Northcliffe wished to close the gap between authorship and content: the gossip column needed to relay the personal experience of its author in order to engage its readership. This meant employing a gossip columnist who was at least interested in and could relate to the daily lives of Society, and ideally was a 'man of the world' who actively partakes and 'moves in the social world.'<sup>24</sup> Secondly, this new type of columnist needed to be able to convey their personal experiences in a personable and lively style. This new journalistic role resulted in a professional reorganisation of staff on the *Mail* to employ as an editor of the gossip column the experienced, highly-trained journalist Valentine Williams to manage the Society column's contents. His social and professional background and reasons for employment on the gossip column are analysed in chapter two.

Bingham argues that another period of 'bitter' economic rivalry in the national press occurred after the re-launch of the *Daily Herald* by Odhams Press in 1929, which according to Bingham became the first newspaper to sell two million copies in 1933.<sup>25</sup> Bingham describes a 'spectacular' visual transformation of the *Herald*, 'the amount of space given over to photographs, features and advertising increased dramatically'.<sup>26</sup> In terms of news

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2 June 1919, 21 May 1919.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 21 May 1919.

<sup>25</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004), p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

content 'human-interest entered' as did gimmicks to attract readers including 'canvassing and free gifts'.<sup>27</sup> If the visual and written content of the *Herald* emanated a sense of exuberance and vitality then the correspondence of *Mail* proprietor Rothermere and *Express* owner Beaverbrook had a foreboding and bleak tone as they discussed their responses to the *Herald's* dramatic rise in sales. Also reacting to the economic depression, Rothermere wrote to Beaverbrook on 2 December 1931 in despair: 'I do not know what to say. I think 1932 is going to be an exceptionally bad year. [The revenue from] Advertisements may easily be worse than any we have seen'.<sup>28</sup> On 19 December 1931, he wrote that 'some elimination would help' going on to explain in February 1932 that he and Beaverbrook should 'continue the economy campaign, and cut off all we can' in the *Mail* and *Express*.<sup>29</sup> I argue that one result of these concerns was a major change in the content and tone of the *Express* gossip column in the early 1930s. Chapter three argues that the gossip columnist became less focused on promoting Society figures and their social life in his column in the early 1930s, and Chapter four that the visual culture of the gossip column became less spectacular in the early 1930s with much less use of photographs and illustrations than there had been in the late 1920s. The *Express* (which as Bingham points out superseded the sales of the *Herald* and *Mail* from 1933 until the end of the decade) and in particular its gossip column therefore presents an important cultural counter-example to the 'spectacular' themes and consumerist content developed in the paper traditionally associated with the Labour movement, the *Herald*.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Parliamentary Archives, BBK/C/284a (Beaverbrook Papers), Correspondence between Beaverbrook and Rothermere, 2 December 1931.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 19 December 1931, 22 February 1932.

<sup>30</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004), p. 43.

Another question in the historiography of the interwar British press is the enduring influence of Victorian and Edwardian forms of journalism after the war. As chapters one to three show, celebrity gossip columns like those by Viscount Castlerosse began to be signed with their author's name in the mid-late 1920s. The *Daily Sketch's* 'Echoes of the Town' was the first of the national dailies to use a byline within the gossip column, in this case 'Mr Gossip'; introduced in 1913, maintained into the 1930s.<sup>31</sup> As Laurel Brake and Julie Codell have argued, the byline was used in the Victorian Periodical Press and it had historic use in both the 'serious' journalism of foreign correspondence and social investigations as well as articles attached to leisure, fashion, consumerism and femininity.<sup>32</sup> For example, *Illustrated London News* had a regular fashion feature signed by the female author 'Felice' in 1842, and Margaret Beetham has analysed a number of magazine articles signed by female authors in the nineteenth century including 'Debates of the Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society' by 'Ex Cathedra' in the Ladies Edinburgh Magazine from 1878.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, James Vernon has discussed the development of the byline and the eyewitness account through his analysis of reports about the Irish Famine in the *Illustrated London News* in the 1840s.<sup>34</sup> Within the national dailies like the *Daily Mirror*, there were examples of book reviews 'What to Read' signed with the initials 'W.M.' on 30 July 1909.<sup>35</sup> Also, there was a piece of foreign correspondence with the byline 'Hannen Swaffer' on 12 June 1907 entitled 'Norway Moves with the Times' and on 16 March 1907 'H. Hamilton Fyfe' was stated as the author of an

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<sup>31</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 24 June 1913, 6 June 1917, 4 January 1932, 7 January 1933, 4 January 1938, 13 June 1938, 6 August 1938, 5 November 1938.

<sup>32</sup> L. Brake and J. Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers* (Basingstoke, 2005). Brake, B. Bell and D. Finkelstein, *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Basingstoke, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 14 May 1842, 28 May 1842, 25 June 1842, 2 July 1842, 9 July 1842. Articles by 'Ex Cathedra' and 'Ella' are quoted in full within, M. Beetham and K. Boardman, *Victorian Women's Magazines: an Anthology* (Manchester, 2001), p. 29, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> J. Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge; Massachusetts and London, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 30 July 1909.

opinion piece called 'How to Stamp Out Nasty Novels'.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore possible to place the content, form and authorship of the interwar gossip column in a historical context of Victorian and Edwardian magazine and newspaper journalism: and the gossip feature's use of the byline as an extension of traditions of both 'human-interest' and political journalism in the nineteenth century. In these Victorian examples we can also see the origins of what this thesis argues was the further personalisation of newspaper journalism between the wars, for example, eyewitness accounts and 'local knowledge' were key components of the gossip columnists' celebrity and working persona in the interwar period.

Michael Saler, Brake and Marysa Demoor have analysed the content of illustrations and technological advancement in printing modes to suggest that a personalisation of magazine and periodical journalism took place in Victorian Britain.<sup>37</sup> Brake and Demoor describe the sensory 'lure' of illustration and define the personalised styles of writing in popular periodicals which they argue made readers feel that they had 'personal...encounters' with authors and editors.<sup>38</sup> Brake also argues that the inclusion of illustrations in the popular periodical press, produced in their early form in the 1840s from woodcut engravings, allowed readers to gain a deeper understanding of periodical and newspaper content.<sup>39</sup> As well as having personal benefits for the pleasure and comprehension of the individual reader, the visual transformation of the press can be understood in broader economic and social terms: the press had transformed to include ways of both attracting a paying

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12 June 1907, 16 March 1907.

<sup>37</sup> M. Saler, "'Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes" Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c.1890-c.1940', *The Historical Journal*, 3/46 (2003), pp. 599-622. L. Brake and M. Demoor, *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press* (Basingstoke, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Brake and Demoor, *The Lure of Illustration* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 1-6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

audience and meeting a mass audience's needs as literacy levels improved as a result of the Education Acts of the nineteenth century.

James Mussell also examines the introduction of halftone lithography in nineteenth century periodicals which allowed the mechanically complex and expensive format of photography, illustration and new styles of typography to be included in one feature.<sup>40</sup> LeMahieu's content analysis of the interwar press discusses the increasing use and technological development of halftone lithography in the national press between the wars. His analysis is mainly focused on titles that still exist today like the *Express* and the *Mirror* and argues that the technological developments that occurred in Victorian periodicals like the use of 'graphics, mastheads' and innovative uses of 'layout' and types and sizes of 'paper' were mainly seen in the national press after the First World War. Yet the examples below from the *Daily Sketch*, which ceased publication in the early 1970s, show that a visual transformation of the gossip column had taken place between 1904 and 1909, a single column becoming a three column feature that included photography, illustrations and varied styles of typography. The gossip column of this 'pictorial paper' can therefore be used as an early example of the visual transformation of the press before the war:

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**Fig. 1. *Sketch*, 16 June 1904.**

**Fig. 2. *Sketch*, 15 June 1909.**

Evidence from the visual culture of the gossip column between the wars, including the examples from the *Evening Standard* and *News of the World* below, also challenges

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<sup>40</sup> J. Mussell, 'Science and the Timelessness of Reproduced Photographs in the Late Nineteenth Century Periodical Press' in, Brake and Demoor, *The Lure of Illustration* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 203-219.

LeMahieu's argument about the progressive refashioning of the visual content of the national press throughout the period, and particularly the 'modern' appearance of papers

like the *Herald* and the *Express* in the 1930s.<sup>41</sup> LeMahieu argues that the *Express* ‘carried forward the revolution in layout begun by the *Daily Herald* in 1930’, and under the editorship of Arthur Christiansen a former ‘typographer, illustrator and writer...of headlines’ created a visual culture for ‘the Common Man, the typical *Express* reader’ that was ‘simple, immediate, personal and visually astonishing’.<sup>42</sup> In the 1930s, he suggests, Christiansen transformed the *Express* into a ‘printed newsreel’ introducing ‘banner and streamer headlines on the front page, enlarging the print with a more appealing typeface and employing multi-column headings on the lower half of the page, or below the fold’.<sup>43</sup> According to LeMahieu, Christiansen also began the process of improving features which had been begun by his predecessor Baxter in the 1920s with ‘photographs’ of ‘celebrities’ and ‘larger headlines’.<sup>44</sup> Yet the lack of change in the visual culture of the gossip features of the *News of the World* and *Evening Standard*, or the use of new printing and photographic technologies throughout the period is striking. I argue that this lag in the deployment of new visual technologies can be explained by the conservative editorial policies of both these papers and the personalities of their editors and proprietors: for example, proprietor and editor-in-chief of the *Standard* Beaverbrook regarded the ‘Londoner’s Diary’ as his own ‘private fiefdom’ and the conservative, respectable visual culture of the feature throughout the period reflected his own political conservatism. As chapters two and five analyse in detail, it continued its central focus on national political affairs.<sup>45</sup> The ‘lowbrow’ *News of the World*, although regarded as at the opposite end of the newspaper spectrum to the *Standard* in terms of audience and its ‘sensational’ news content, also had a politically

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<sup>41</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p. 258.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

<sup>45</sup> R. Wilkes, *Scandal* (2008), p. 161.

conservative editor who by 1939 had been in the role for nearly fifty years.<sup>46</sup> Described by biographer Adrian Smith as ‘always sensitive to middle-class opinion’ and accepted into the establishment social elite when he was knighted in 1918, Carr was regarded as ‘a pillar of respectability, successfully distancing himself from even the sauciest front page story’ of the paper.<sup>47</sup> The decision to maintain the visual culture of the *News of the World’s* gossip column could be regarded as both an adherence to respectable journalism with the similar traditionally-columned and sparsely-illustrated format of the ‘Court Circular’ in the elitist *Times*, and also as a way of visually representing an editorial respectability and social conservatism amongst the scandalous stories found on the paper’s front pages.<sup>48</sup> Chapter four argues that the visual content of the gossip column exposes the diverse visual culture of the national press in the interwar period, and the chapter also examines the changing ways in which messages about celebrity were conveyed throughout the period. Drawing on a range of examples, it argues that following a narrative of the technological advancement of printing is not the only way to interpret the changing content of the visual culture of the press between the wars. For instance, through a detailed comparative analysis of the visual culture of the gossip column, this chapter argues that the column’s appearance was shaped by the print persona of the gossip columnist and that this was a responsive culture in that it reflected economic and social change and the ‘news values’ of individual papers. Rather than focus just on the impact of technology on the visual culture of the press, an original contribution to the historiography is also shown in chapter four, which emphasises the collaborative work of columnists, photographers, and illustrators, arguing that this was a

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<sup>46</sup> A. Smith, ‘Carr, Sir (William) Emsley (1867–1941)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006 [<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/48272>, last accessed 5 July 2013].

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *News of the World*, 20 June 1920. *The Times*, 1 June 1920, 3 June 1920.

new feature within the interwar national press. As this chapter shows, the changing appearance of the column was directly influenced by Society magazines like the *Bystander*, and that the collaborative nature of magazine work with their illustrated articles crossed over into news culture in the interwar years in the gossip columns of the national press.

The *image* originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 3. *Standard*, 24 June 1920.**

The *image* originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig. 4. *Standard*, 4 June 1928.**

The *image* originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 5. *Standard*, 16 June 1936.**

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**Fig 6. *News of the World*, 20 June 1920. 'Gossip' is in the far-right column.**

The *image* originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 7. *News of the World*, 17 June 1928. 'Gossip' is in the far-right column.**

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**Fig 8. *News of the World*, June 1936. 'Gossip' is in the far-right column.**

## 2) What can the History of the Newspaper Gossip Column add to the Social, Cultural and Political History of Interwar Britain?

This thesis argues that studying the content and production of the interwar gossip column can add important historical detail to some of the major topics within the history of interwar Britain, shedding new light on histories of masculinity, femininity, popular politics, Britishness, and the development of popular print culture. The identification of the gossip columnist as a gentleman, for example, became increasingly pronounced from the late 1920s onwards as columns were signed, signatures printed and photographs of the male columnists added. All were visual signifiers of a stronger identification of the gossip column with these wealthy but professional male figures.<sup>49</sup> Aside from a two-year stint in the *Sunday Dispatch* by Lady Eleanor Smith, the paragraphs sent to papers by freelance journalists, and anonymous or pseudonymous contributors on a newspaper's staff such as the working-class Howard Spring, the figureheads of the columns were all men of Society.<sup>50</sup> Whereas there have been detailed studies into the public and private lives of the gentleman by Corfield and Tosh, and some comprehensive histories of the developments in the content and production of the press in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the First World War has been understood as a watershed moment in both these histories.<sup>51</sup> The demise of the

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<sup>49</sup> *Sunday Express*, 1 August 1926, 2 January 1927, 3 June 1928, , 20 January 1929, 8 January 1933, 18 June 1933, 9 June 1935, 11 August 1935, 22 January 1939, 4 June 1939. *Weekly Dispatch*, 30 January 1927, 3 July 1927, 21 August 1927, *Sunday Dispatch*, 23 December 1928, 30 December 1928, 27 January 1929, 1 September 1929.

<sup>50</sup> M. Joseph, (ed.), *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (London, 1929), M. Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time* (London, 1972-3), M. H. Spring, 'Spring, (Robert) Howard (1889-1965)', rev. Katherine Mullin, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/36223>, last accessed 7 July 2009]. H. Spring, *In the Meantime* (London, 1942). Spring *et al.*, *The Autobiography of Howard Spring* (London, 1972).

<sup>51</sup> H. Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855* (Harlow, 2000). Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998). Barker and S. Burrows, *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 2002). P. Corfield, 'The Democratic History of the English Gentleman', *History Today*, (1992). P. J. Corfield, 'The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentleman' in N.B. Harte and R. Quinault (eds.), *Land and Society in Britain*,

officer-gentleman on the battlefield, and the technological modernisation of the printing industries leading to a boom in cheap and more varied forms of popular print culture in this period, have encouraged a distancing from both topics. Popular understandings of the upper-class in the 1920s have been dominated by the fickle, leisure-obsessed and morally decadent post-war generation of Evelyn Waugh's 'Bright Young People', and press historians have distanced themselves from any detailed study of the development of a newspaper industry regarded to be increasingly obsessed with advertising consumer culture and the sensational life-stories of a new group of film stars from the United States.<sup>52</sup> As a result, both the popular press and the upper-class have been treated warily by intellectual and political historians as leisure-obsessed and increasingly out of touch with a dominant narrative of class politics associated with the emerging Labour Party.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, histories of Britishness by Marcus Collins and Peter Mandler have continued to regard the upper-class gentleman as a central aspect of British national identity in this period.<sup>54</sup> Collins and Kelly Boyd have identified the persistence of specific qualities of gentlemanliness in literature on national identity ranging from academic commentaries to boys magazines.<sup>55</sup> In these commentaries the class markers of elite forms of leisure such as hunting, and accounts of public school education are combined with the qualities of the gentleman that represent forms of power and control or governance. For example, for Boyd, the gentleman's expressions of 'fair play' and sporting behaviour in the decent and

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1700-1914 (Manchester, 1996), pp. 1-33. M. Roper and J. Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> D.J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: the Rise and Fall of a Generation, 1918-1940* (London, 2007). R. Wilkes, *Scandal: a Scurrilous History of Gossip* (London, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> McKibbin, *Classes* (1998).

<sup>54</sup> M. Collins, 'The Fall of the English Gentleman: the National Character in Decline, c.1918-1970', *Historical Research*, 75/187 (2002), pp. 90-111. P. Mandler, *The English National Character* (New Haven and London, 2006). P. Mason, *The English Gentleman: the Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London, 1982). J. Paxman, *The English: a Portrait of a People* (London, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> K. Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York, 2003).

civilised treatment of their fellows was translated into their ability to provide fair and democratic leadership towards 'lesser' subjects in terms of class or race.<sup>56</sup> Yet these studies ride against the tide of an important body of literature by historians like Alison Light and Susan Kingsley Kent which associate interwar national identity with representations of femininity.<sup>57</sup> The decimation of a significant number of the male population in the war and the supposedly emasculating effects of shell-shock and disability, coinciding with the increase in consumer goods, popular literature and advertising which Bingham and McAleer suggest was specifically aimed at women, has meant that much of the focus on notions of Britishness in this period links with themes that are traditionally associated with women; including domesticity, consumerism and leisure.<sup>58</sup> By analysing the understudied private diaries and letters of a group of gentleman-journalists including Viscount Castlerosse, Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, Sir Harold Nicolson, Malcolm Muggeridge and Tom Driberg, I advance a reconsideration of the link between modes of gentlemanliness and national identity by thinking about how the 'professionalisation of British society' impacted on understandings of social status in this period and both incorporated and reshaped established social elites.<sup>59</sup>

As this suggests, we also might usefully bring the history of the interwar gossip columnist into dialogue with Harold Perkin's major history of professional society.<sup>60</sup> Although the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-70.

<sup>57</sup> J. Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950* (Basingstoke, 1995).

M. R. Higonnet, *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven; London, 1987). S. Kingsley-Kent, *Making Peace: the Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, 1993). C. Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60* (Manchester, 2000). A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004). C. Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars* (Stroud, 2005).

J. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune: the Story of Mills & Boon* (Oxford, 1999). B. Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke, 1986).

<sup>59</sup> H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-374.

aristocratic titles of columnists like Viscount Castlerosse informed the reader of his historic status as a gentleman, his ostentatiously public honourable and hard-working attitude links with Perkin's conclusions about the dominance of a new 'gentle man' of 'professional society' in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain: a middle or upper-class figure who was 'honest, upright, considerate and dedicated to the service of his fellows and his country', trained by the middle-class reformers of the Victorian public school.<sup>61</sup> Yet Perkin does not explore the representation of professional culture in the popular press, or figures within the industry, a striking gap in the historiography when we consider the rapid expansion of the newspaper industry in this period and the modernisation of its content and form.<sup>62</sup> Aside from the work of Mark Hampton on the Association of Journalists founded in 1884 and on cartoonist David Low, as well as the recent history of the National Union of Journalists by Tim Gopsill and Greg Neale, there has been little work on the development of the profession of journalism in the early twentieth century, particularly that analysing the experiences and self-fashioning of staff journalists rather than proprietors.<sup>63</sup> Engaging critically with this historiography, this thesis situates the experience of the gossip columnist within Perkin's bold narrative of social and economic change, formulated around 'a new principle of social organisation' in which 'a growing numbers of 'experts...dominate' and 'rival career hierarchies compete for society's resources'.<sup>64</sup> By focusing on the experiences and representation of the gentleman-turned-gossip columnist as set out in their published columns, office records and private diaries and letters, I consider the historical significance of their status as both gentlemen and journalists. In so doing I explore historical questions

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>62</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004). LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988).

<sup>63</sup> M. Hampton, "Journalists and the 'Professional Ideal' in Britain: the Institute of Journalists, 1884-1907", *Historical Research*, June 1999, 72/178, pp. 183-202. T. Gopsill and G. Neale, *Journalists: 100 Years of the NUJ* (London, 2007), Introduction, Chapter One.

<sup>64</sup> Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.2

regarding social leadership and class but also examine the changing professional structures of newspaper journalism between the wars.

Laura Mayhall relates the press representations of figures including the Prince of Wales, Edward VIII to national political reform and the formation of a mass democracy at the end of the First World War.<sup>65</sup> As well as considering the impact of the 'democratic ideal' on the Society gossip column, this thesis specifically considers the language, style and format of the newspaper gossip column as a new and complex type of celebrity journalism.<sup>66</sup> Examining the changing public personas of the gossip columnists, this thesis engages with Warren Susman's theories about the growing significance of 'personality' in the rapidly developing celebrity cultures of print and film in the 1920s.<sup>67</sup> It argues that a new kind of personal journalism was developed in the gossip column which not only offered a lively and friendly written style, but also included eye-catching photography, typography and illustration. Whereas Mayhall explores the celebrity of royalty and film stars in this period, I argue that the celebrity gossip columnist became a national celebrity figure in their own right, exploring his daily representations of his active citizenship.

### **3) The Ownership and Editorial Policies of the Interwar Press, the Development of Human-Interest Journalism and the Society Gossip Column.**

Historians have characterised the interwar period as an important period of change in the British press. Bingham writes that the end of the First World War was an important turning point because, 'it was only after 1918' that the sales of the 'national press eclipsed the

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<sup>65</sup> Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales Versus Clark Gable: Anglophone Celebrity and Citizenship between the Wars', *Cultural and Social History*, 4/4 (2007), p. 530.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 538.

<sup>67</sup> Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (1985), pp. 191-205.

provincial press' in Britain.<sup>68</sup> This was a period of monopolisation in the newspaper industry when, 'many provincial papers were forced to close or become part of national chains.'<sup>69</sup> By the end of the period the 'national market was characterised by fierce competition between a small number of newspapers, with the leaders obtaining mammoth circulations.'<sup>70</sup> These shifts in modes of newspaper ownership had their origins before the First World War however. Paul Manning writes that the early success of the *Mail* 'provided the platform for the construction of a family empire' including the Amalgamated Press (founded 1890) and Associated Newspapers (founded 1905) with newspapers including *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *London Evening News*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Record* and *Sunday Pictorial*. Manning likens interwar proprietors like Rothermere and Beaverbrook's domination of the national press to modern day media conglomerates like the Murdoch empire, writing that, 'in the last 150 years...the proposition that rich and powerful individuals use their wealth in order to purchase news media outlets which are then employed, in turn, to further consolidate their power and wealth, is hardly novel.'<sup>71</sup> The formation of newspaper cartels between the wars has been commonly interpreted as a final stage in the story of the decline of the 'free', radical press in modern Britain, after the 'golden' opportunity for bringing a political, educational press to a mass audience was missed in the wake of the mid- nineteenth century tax reform on print.<sup>72</sup> Yet Manning's appraisal, I argue, obscures the historical novelty and complexity of national press ownership and control in interwar Britain.

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<sup>68</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> P. Manning, *News and News Sources: A Critical Introduction* (London, 2001), p. 83.

<sup>72</sup> Hampton, "Rethinking", *Journal of British Studies* 43/2 (2004), pp. 278-290.

On Northcliffe's death in 1922, control of his newspaper empire passed to his journalist brother, the 'financially astute' Harold Harmsworth (made Baron Rothermere in 1914).<sup>73</sup> Rothermere sold *The Times* in 1922, but in that year had 'under his control three national mornings, three national Sundays, two London evening papers, four provincial dailies, and three provincial Sunday newspapers.'<sup>74</sup> Rothermere's dominance of the national newspaper market grew with his purchase of a 49% share in Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* (both bought in 1922 and sold in 1931), and his purchase with Beaverbrook of the Hulton newspaper chain in 1923 (including the *Sketch* and *Standard*).<sup>75</sup> Jones describes the existence of other interwar press barons aside from Rothermere, writing that the British press was dominated by three others between 1922 and 1945: Max Aitken (Beaverbrook), William Berry (Lord Camrose) and his brother Gomer Berry (Lord Kemsley).<sup>76</sup> 'By the end of the 1930s, these four men owned half the national and provincial dailies in the United Kingdom, with a joint circulation of 13 million.'<sup>77</sup> Jones argues that Rothermere's dominance of the newspaper market was challenged in 1924 with the formation of the Berry Brothers Allied Newspaper Group, which acquired Rothermere's Amalgamated Press and the Hulton chain in 1927; control of the *Sketch* passing from Rothermere to the Berrys in 1928.<sup>78</sup> By the end of the 1930s 'the Berrys were the market leaders and owners of more than 20 daily and Sunday papers'.<sup>79</sup> In terms of circulation however, Beaverbrook held a

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<sup>73</sup> 'Harmsworth, Harold Sidney, first Viscount Rothermere (1868-1940)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online Edition*, accessed 12 January 2009, at <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/33718>.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* Manning, *News* (2001), p. 83.

<sup>76</sup> Jones, 'The British Press', in Griffiths, *Encyclopaedia* (1992), pp. 47-55, p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

dominant position, his four national dailies 'commanding a vast joint circulation of more than 4 million copies.'<sup>80</sup>

James Drawbell, editor of the *Sunday Chronicle*, a popular weekly published in Manchester, gave some sense of the shifting popularity of national newspapers in interwar Britain and the rapid expansion in newspaper sales in his memoir of 1968.<sup>81</sup> He wrote that before the war the *Sunday Chronicle* had been a 'real leader' because of its liberal views, but after the war fell behind the *Mail* because of its new 'bright and lively' styles of journalism.<sup>82</sup> The 'independent, right-wing, Conservative' *Mail* had been the 'first British daily to attain a million circulation', with an average circulation of '1, 845,000' making it the largest selling daily newspaper in Britain by the end of the 1920s, with sales reduced to '1,580,000' copies in 1937.<sup>83</sup> For Drawbell the *Express* became the bestselling daily paper in Britain in the early 1930s because it 'extended' the *Mail's* new journalistic techniques.<sup>84</sup> The new 'bright and lively' human-interest styles of writing and reporting were thus seen as a key part of the sales of the 'Independent, Conservative' *Express* moving from 1,693, 000 in 1930 to an average daily 'circulation' of '2,329,000' copies in 1937.<sup>85</sup> Evidence from the content of the *Express* certainly demonstrates the use of eye-catching headlines but also that it was not only national but imperial and European stories that were of interest in the period. On the front page of 3 June 1938, four stories were featured with the headline: 'Frau Goering having a baby', 'Spain plea to Hitler', 'Jamaica Governor is dead', 'Father made son of seven hold hot coals.'<sup>86</sup> On page four was a 'Holiday Page for Cyclists' including an attractive

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> J. Drawbell, *Time on My Hands* (London, 1968).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> P.E.P, *Report on the British Press* (1938), p. 117.

<sup>84</sup> Drawbell, *Time* (1968), p. 26.

<sup>85</sup> P.E.P, *Report* (1938), p. 116.

<sup>86</sup> *Express*, 3 June 1938.

illustration of a young couple cycling with personal advice articles on 'How to pack your picnic', practical guidance about the Highway Code and the danger of cars. Page fifteen of twenty was made up of three human-interest stories from around Britain focused on crime and stories of family dramas, which had the sensational headlines: 'Police at dying girl's bedside', 'Widow accused of murder' and 'Expert says man tried to disguise writing'.<sup>87</sup>

Human-interest features like this were also a major part of the evening and Sunday newspapers analysed in this thesis. The *Evening Standard* was not strictly national in the scale of its audience but covered mainly national and international news stories rather than just London news in the interwar period. For example, on 15 June 1922 the front-page leading article was titled 'Mr Collins See Mr Churchill' which referred to the Anglo-Irish peace treaty talks.<sup>88</sup> On 13 June 1930, the front-page headline was 'Miss England Disaster' which described a high speed boat crash on Lake Windermere.<sup>89</sup> On 22 June 1938 there was a report from the 'Joe Louis' boxing match in New York.<sup>90</sup> The paper was read, according to historian Roger Wilkes, by a more upmarket audience than the majority of the popular press, 'catering mainly for the well-to-do of the City, the West End and the suburbs' and described as the 'house journal of the exclusive West-End'.<sup>91</sup> The *News of the World*, the lowbrow 'best-selling newspaper...that was denounced from the pulpit' for its sensational stories and headlines, also showed a massive expansion in its readership in the interwar period when circulation 'reached 3,850,000...in 1937...compared with 1,500,000 copies in

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Evening Standard*, 15 June 1922.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 13 June 1930.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 22 June 1938.

<sup>91</sup> Wilkes, *Scandal* (2002), p. 161.

1910'.<sup>92</sup> According to Drawbell, the personal appeal of human-interest journalism eventually reached its 'zenith' in the *Daily Mirror*, 'appealing to the masses with bright, snappy stories, big pictures and bold headlines.'<sup>93</sup> In the *Mirror* a combined effort of typographers, photographers and the new 'snappy' writing styles of journalists had worked to appeal to the 'masses'. The sales of this 'Independent, anti-fascist...pictorial' paper that gave 'little space to politics' were calculated to be 1, 71,000 in 1929 and 1, 367,000 in 1937.<sup>94</sup> By 1941 the *Mirror* had become so popular that it was known as the 'forces' paper' selling 'more than 1,700,000' copies.<sup>95</sup> The 'popular pictorial' the *Sketch*, described as holding an editorial policy that 'supported the National Government but gave little space to politics' had sales figures of 1,130,000 in 1929 that had reduced to 850,000 in 1937.<sup>96</sup> Like the *Mirror*, the *Sketch* was also classed as a 'pictorial paper' yet the photography it included did not seem to help the *Sketch's* sales figures in the 1930s. As chapter one will show, the *Sketch* had always paid great attention to Society lifestyle, and in 1938 the Political and Economic Planning Report on the press noted that out of the popular dailies it was the most widely purchased paper by the upper-middle class and upper classes.<sup>97</sup>

Where the *Sketch* failed and the *Mirror* succeeded may have been partly due to the print personas of journalists it employed. For example, Dennis Griffiths argues that the *Mirror* was known as an opinionated and 'outspoken' paper by the late 1930s.<sup>98</sup> He writes that the paper employed a number of 'campaigning' young male journalists in 1935 from a range of

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<sup>92</sup> A. Smith, 'Carr, Sir (William) Emsley (1867–1941)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006 [<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/48272>, last accessed 7 July 2013].

<sup>93</sup> Drawbell, *Time* (1968), p. 26.

<sup>94</sup> P.E.P, *Report* (1938), p. 120.

<sup>95</sup> Griffiths, *Encyclopaedia* (1992), p. 185.

<sup>96</sup> P.E.P, *Report* (1938), p. 121.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-150. Driberg, *'Swaff': the Life and Times of Hannen Swaffer* (London, 1974), pp. 58-65.

<sup>98</sup> Griffiths, *Encyclopaedia* (1992), p. 166, p. 178, p. 185, p. 602.

socio-economic backgrounds, including the Welsh Hugh Cudlipp, old Harrovian Peter Wilson and grammar-school educated Londoner William Connor. Connor was known for his 'hard-hitting style' and 'short, bittersweet articles' and was a critic of Nazism in the period of appeasement.<sup>99</sup> This new editorial policy was evident in the redirection of the *Mirror's* gossip column in the 1930s. For instance, Godfrey Winn, a 28-year old former actor and novelist from Edgbaston in Birmingham, described as 'the star columnist' of the *Mirror* from 1936-1938, wrote in an animated, personal and engaging style that spoke directly to the reader. On 7 June 1937 he thus declared his intimate and honest relationship with the reader, 'I have to be honest with you always, for otherwise this page can have no reality for any of us'.<sup>100</sup> He also presented himself on friendly and equal social terms to the reader and suggested that they shared hobbies and interests. On 27 June 1936 he wrote, 'Maybe if you are free on Saturday afternoon, I shall see you at the fair?'<sup>101</sup> Although he suggested some loose social connections with Society, 'I have never forgotten the advice I once heard Osbert Sitwell give a mutual friend who also suffered from party panic', it was his own personality and his interest in working-class figures that were a main feature of his column.<sup>102</sup> Rather than presenting himself as the expert on 'life' he often reiterated the 'advice' and opinions of 'ordinary' men and women he had met in London. On 27 November 1936 he described meeting some 'factory girls' in a café in London, described their conversation and stated that they gave 'serious' and 'sound advice on self-confidence.'<sup>103</sup> Whereas Patrick Balfour, Earl and gossip writer for the *Daily Sketch* in the late 1920s had argued that it was Society who were key in forming ideas about lifestyle in the national press of the early 1930s, by the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> *Mirror*, 7 June 1937.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 27 June 1936.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 18 August 1936.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 27 November 1936.

end of the 1930s in the *Mirror's* 'Personality Page' it was working-class figures who were offering their opinion on personal questions of 'self-confidence'.<sup>104</sup> By comparing the content of the *Mirror's* gossip column with other national daily and weekly newspapers, chapter one thus considers the shifting representation of Society and celebrity between the wars. In the case of the *Mirror*, the editorial policies of the late 1930s which emphasised 'hard-hitting', 'campaigning' styles of journalism seemed a key aspect of the gossip column's reinvention.

Balfour stated in his overview of the interwar national press that the Society gossip column was an important aspect of the transformation of the press with its new 'human', 'personal' types of content.<sup>105</sup> The tables below outline changes in the titles and authors of the gossip columns in the six main newspapers studied in this paper over the period:

**Table One: 1922**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Gossip Column</b>	<b>Author</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	'A Diary of To-Day'	'Mrs Pepys' <sup>106</sup>
<i>Daily Mail</i>	'Court, Society, and Personal'	Anonymous <sup>107</sup>
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	'To-Day's Gossip'	'The Rambler' <sup>108</sup>
<i>Daily Sketch</i>	'Echoes of the Town'	'Mr Gossip' <sup>109</sup>
<i>Evening Standard</i>	'The Londoner's Diary'	Anonymous <sup>110</sup>
<i>News of the World</i>	'Gossip of the Day'	Anonymous <sup>111</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. P. Balfour, *Society Racket* (London, 1933).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> *Express*, 2 January 1922, 28 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 20 November 1922.

<sup>107</sup> *Mail*, 3 January 1922, 30 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 9 November 1922.

<sup>108</sup> *Mirror*, 2 January 1922, 9 June 1922, 30 August 1922, 14 November 1922.

<sup>109</sup> *Sketch*, 25 January 1922, 5 June 1922, 11 August 1922, 13 November 1922.

<sup>110</sup> *Standard*, 2 January 1922, 13 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 28 November 1922.

**Table Two: 1930**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Gossip Column</b>	<b>Author</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	'The Talk of London'	'The Dragoman' <sup>112</sup>
<i>Daily Mail</i>	'People and Their Doings'	'Onlooker' <sup>113</sup>
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	'To-Day's Gossip'	'The Rambler' <sup>114</sup>
<i>Daily Sketch</i>	'Echoes of the Town'	'Mr Gossip' <sup>115</sup>
<i>Evening Standard</i>	'The Londoner's Diary'	Anonymous <sup>116</sup>
<i>News of the World</i>	'Gossip of the Day'	Anonymous <sup>117</sup>

**Table Three: 1938**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Gossip Column</b>	<b>Author</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	'These Names Make News'	'William Hickey' <sup>118</sup>
<i>Daily Mail</i>	'I See Life'	'Charles Graves' <sup>119</sup>
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	'Godfrey Winn's Personality Page'	Godfrey Winn <sup>120</sup>
<i>Daily Sketch</i>	'Wonderful London'	Noel Thompson <sup>121</sup>

<sup>111</sup> *News of the World*, 22 January 1922, 4 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 5 November 1922.

<sup>112</sup> *Express*, 28 January 1930, 30 June 1930, 15 August 1930, 8 November 1930.

<sup>113</sup> *Mail*, 9 January 1930, 5 June 1930, 4 August 1930, 28 November 1930.

<sup>114</sup> *Mirror*, 6 June 1930.

<sup>115</sup> *Sketch*, 15 January 1930, 10 June 1930, 2 August 1930, 17 November 1930.

<sup>116</sup> *Standard*, 8 January 1930, 13 June 1930, 18 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

<sup>117</sup> *News of the World*, 5 January 1930, 1 June 1930, 10 August 1930, 2 November 1930.

<sup>118</sup> *Express*, 21 June 1938, 24 June 1938, 28 August 1938, 9 November 1938.

<sup>119</sup> *Mail*, 11 January 1938, 21 June 1938, 3 August 1938, 9 November 1938.

<sup>120</sup> *Mirror*, 17 January 1938.

<sup>121</sup> *Sketch*, 4 January 1938, 13 June 1938, 6 August 1938, 5 November 1938.

<i>Evening Standard</i>	'The Londoner's Diary'	Anonymous <sup>122</sup>
<i>News of the World</i>	'Gossip of the Day'	Anonymous <sup>123</sup>

Comparing the columns over the period it is notable that the *News of the World* and the *Standard* retained the title and anonymous authorship of their gossip features throughout the interwar years. It seemed that the retention of title and authorship in these columns meant that the progressive history of the visual and stylistic transformation of the interwar popular press outlined by Drawbell did not seem to extend to these two columns; that celebrity culture was represented in the same manner throughout the period. Also the anonymous authorship of the *News of the World* and *Standard's* column imply that the 'personal' styles of journalism described by Balfour were not used in these columns. This evidence challenges the idea of a uniform national press in the interwar period and the suggestion that the celebrity culture of the press was a simple, 'brainless' construction. For example, in contrast to the *News of the World* and *Standard*, the changes in authorship and title of columns of the *Mail*, *Express*, *Mirror* and *Sketch* all suggest a period of creativity, imagination and constant reinvention. It is also noticeable that 'London' was an important feature of interwar gossip features as demonstrated in the titles of the column of the *Sketch* in 1922, 1930 and 1938, the 'Londoner's Diary' of the *Standard* throughout the period, and the *Express* column of 1930 'The Talk of London'. Just as the metropolis seemed to be an important feature of the celebrity culture of the gossip column, there was also a suggestion that Society remained integral to its content. For example, the names and pseudonyms of authors hinted at Society associations: 'Mrs Pepys' of the *Express* in 1922 was likely to be in

<sup>122</sup> *Standard*, 3 January 1938, 22 June 1938, 15 August 1938, 18 November 1938.

<sup>123</sup> *News of the World*, 9 January 1938, 19 June 1938, 7 August 1938, 20 November 1938.

reference to the wealthy man-about-town and seventeenth-century diarist Samuel Pepys; 'William Hickey' was also a Society man-about-town.<sup>124</sup> The author of the *Mail's* column Charles Graves was both a famous author and a Society figure in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>125</sup> The tables also show that women gossip columnists, or at least the columns that used a byline, were in the minority throughout the period. While, as chapters four and five show, women did play an important part in the authorship, production and content of gossip columns throughout the interwar period, it was mainly men who were presented as the experts on celebrity culture in the national press. As I argue, this reflected the professional, male-dominated world of the national press throughout this period, but also the ways in which the masculinity of the gossip columnists suited the different types of celebrity culture that were represented in their work. For example, chapter one shows that 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* was a highly active participant in the nightlife of the metropolis, freely moving from restaurants to night-clubs in the West End of London.<sup>126</sup> Building on this analysis, chapter three argues that by the early 1930s, the sensible, moralistic, respectable persona of male columnists like Beverley Nichols and Viscount Castlerosse informed a new critical, distanced attitude towards celebrity culture and Society nightlife often seen as dangerously feminized. Indeed, exploring in detail the print persona of the columnist over the period, examining the office records of national newspapers where they still exist (namely for the Beaverbrook Press and the *Daily Mail*), as well as the correspondence and diaries of journalists, editors and managers, offers a new, more detailed way of analysing the changing, specific details of editorial policies and the shifting working relationships and status of journalists in this period. Much historical work has used evidence from readership

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<sup>124</sup> See Chapter Three, section four.

<sup>125</sup> See Chapter One, section two.

<sup>126</sup> See Chapter One, section one.

surveys conducted by consumer and political groups working outside the press, studied memoirs of journalists published after the interwar period, or used academic surveys of the interwar press as an assessment of the policies and practices of the national press. This historical work is useful and valuable evidence that this thesis uses as context, but two of the key original contributions of this thesis are the extensive analysis of the content of the gossip column itself and evidence from those writing *at the time* about what they were writing or reading in the gossip column.

What historical factors shaped the development of the interwar gossip column and what editorial decisions prompted these developments? To answer these questions we have to first consider the work of Northcliffe, proprietor of the *Mail* immediately after the First World War. The *Mail* had been launched in 1896, and Northcliffe's so-called 'principles' for its production and content included the adoption of the 'populist tendencies of the Sunday and evening press' and the redefinition of 'news' to make 'human interest' and the events of 'everyday life' more prominent.<sup>127</sup> Northcliffe's 'news values' also included the introduction of 'features of women's magazines' and the 'magazine ethos...permeating much of the content of the popular press...by the end of the 1930s'.<sup>128</sup> In business terms, the principles of the 'Northcliffe revolution' were 'based on a new market strategy: a low retail price subsidised by a high volume of advertising revenue, combined with plenty of competitions, prizes and promotional gimmicks' like free gift campaigns.<sup>129</sup> In many ways, this thesis explores the effects of the so-called 'Northcliffe revolution' on the content and format of the gossip column.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>129</sup> Manning, *News* (2001), p. 83. Bingham, *Gender* (2004), p. 19.

According to biographers George Boyce and S.J. Taylor, Northcliffe's strategies for the *Mail* were heavily influenced by his journalistic career in the late nineteenth-century, when Northcliffe, or Alfred Harmsworth as he was known before he was raised to the peerage in 1905, worked on popular periodicals for figures including the 'press baron' and 'practitioner of New Journalism' George Newnes.<sup>130</sup> Described as 'the rising figure of popular journalism' in the late nineteenth-century, and 'the ancestor of all...known as the New Journalism', Newnes had developed his periodical empire after a series of taxes on newspaper print including the Stamp Tax in 1855 were lifted, causing a rapid expansion in the popular newspaper and magazine market.<sup>131</sup> Newnes's policy was 'to reconcile "culture and profit," or to combine entrepreneurship with ideology'.<sup>132</sup> Although presented in more idealistic language than Northcliffe's populist strategy for the *Mail*, both men shared a business strategy to make a large profit out of news and cheap print. Northcliffe's entrepreneurship has been defined by press historians as his early identification of a 'gap in the market...with the growth of the literate lower middle class, the first beneficiaries of the 1870 Education Act.'<sup>133</sup> Accordingly, Northcliffe's targeted readership for the *Mail* were 'the products of the British schools: "thousands of boys and girls ... who are aching to read. They do not care for the ordinary newspaper. They have no interest in society, but will read anything which is simple and is sufficiently interesting."' <sup>134</sup> Supposedly influenced by his journalist colleague Max Pemberton, the editor of illustrated fiction magazine *Cassell's*, Northcliffe stated that

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<sup>130</sup> Hampton, 'Rethinking', *Journal of British Studies*, 43 (2004), pp. 278–290.

<sup>131</sup> H. Fyfe, *Northcliffe: an Intimate Biography* (London, 1930), p. 11.

<sup>132</sup> Hampton, 'Rethinking', pp. 278-290.

<sup>133</sup> Northcliffe, quoted in Manning, *News*(2001), p. 83.

<sup>134</sup> 'Harmsworth, Alfred Charles William, Viscount Northcliffe, (1865-1922)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online Edition*, accessed 12 January 2009, at <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/33717>.

the target audience of the *Mail* required a newspaper that was 'less British Museum more life'.<sup>135</sup>

Northcliffe's depiction of the *Mail's* content as more 'life' less 'British Museum' fits with historical interpretations of the interwar years as a period marked by dramatic change in the form and content of the national press and, in particular, the development of new features, writing styles and formats aimed at a mass market. Academic Queenie Leavis described the content of interwar newspapers like the *Express* as sensational and non-educational, little more than a marketplace or shop window. She denounced attractive new 'book-of-the-week features' as the product of business deals between publishers and proprietors.<sup>136</sup> Leavis believed a mass readership were being duped into buying and reading books recommended in articles and opinion pieces supposedly written by authors and celebrities, but in reality were shaped by the publisher-proprietor business arrangement.<sup>137</sup>

Leavis sought to undermine the respectability of the popular press by exposing the behind-the-scenes dealings that were hidden from the content of newspaper features. In so doing she publicly questioned the press's power as an institution, particularly in terms of the influence she and many other commentators felt the national newspapers had on a mass audience's behaviour and attitudes – pressing issues in the context of Britain's transformation into a genuine mass democracy after the Great War.<sup>138</sup> In 1918 the franchise was extended to men over 21 and women over 30 and in 1928 was once more extended to include women over 21. As Leavis noted, coinciding with this new mass participation in political life came novel and wide-ranging developments in popular culture.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Q. Leavis, *Fiction* (1932), pp. 14-15, 21-22.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> See P. Deane, *History in Our Hands: A Critical Anthology of Writings on Literature, Culture, and Politics from the 1930s* (London, 1998).

Many historians have studied the mass involvement in consumer and leisure culture after the First World War, analysing the development of cinemas, pubs, cafes, nightclubs, dance halls, the production of music records, wireless radio and the growth of spectator sports like Association football.<sup>139</sup> Historians including Joseph McAleer and Billie Melman have tracked the development of the publishing industry and the massive increase in production and sales of the cheaply produced popular novel, particularly romance and Society novels.<sup>140</sup> Margaret Beetham and Jill Greenfield have studied the rapid development of men's and women's lifestyle magazines in the first half of the twentieth-century.<sup>141</sup> It is clear that changes in the content of the press reflected these new consumer demands and interests, including as this thesis argues, the changes in the content and format of the gossip column. A key point with which this thesis engages is the limits and possibilities of the celebrity culture of popular print culture. For instance, whilst many historians have emphasized the escapist qualities of orientalist novels like *The Sheik* and the glamorous, upper-class lifestyles depicted in *The Green Hat* and *Women Who Seek*, I argue that these bestselling novels also included discussion of real-life issues such as romantic relationships, relations between the sexes and relationships with family. I show how the gossip column's focus on lifestyles implicitly addressed broader questions about the meanings of Britishness. In the social and cultural context of interwar Britain I argue that Northcliffe's decision to re-evaluate traditional formats of the press and reconsider established 'news values'

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<sup>139</sup> A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992). C. Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60* (Manchester, 2000). J. Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 2002). M. Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London, 2008).

<sup>140</sup> McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-50* (Oxford, 1992). McAleer, *Passion's Fortune* (1999). Melman, *Women* (1986).

<sup>141</sup> Beetham, *A Magazine of her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* (London, 1996). J. Greenfield et. al., "Fashioning Masculinity: 'Men Only', Consumption and the Development of Marketing in the 1930s", *Twentieth Century British History*, 10/4 (1999), pp. 457-476.

concerned with politics and the economy can be viewed as a radical and demotic step rather than a purely commercial venture.

Chapters two and four of the thesis consider the effect of criticism of personal journalism and the gossip column on the professionalism of journalism (including gossip writing) in more detail. Contemporary commentators like former *Mirror* editor and newspaper critic Hamilton Fyfe viewed the inclusion of the personal dramas of the human-interest story and particularly stories and features about *Society*, as an affront to the traditions of popular journalism.<sup>142</sup> Trying to add an air of respectability to his views, Fyfe quoted a judge to underline his point: 'Personal Journalism is an infamous abyss in which a sadly large section of the Press wallows.'<sup>143</sup> In the age of 'personal journalism' Fyfe wrote that a journalist required a 'thick skin...as protection against his own self-contempt. He may be asked at any moment to behave in a way that every decent instinct in his nature revolts against. The disgusting habit of prying into private affairs and pestering people related to suicides or murderers...'<sup>144</sup> Fyfe's attack on the transformation of the content and news values of the national press after the war, was most vitriolic in his discussion of *Society* features and headlines. Fyfe argued that the volume of newspapers' coverage of *Society* in gossip columns, photospreads, stories, *Society*-authored articles and high fashion features was disproportionate to the number of *Society* readers of the press.<sup>145</sup> He discussed *Society* reportage in the context of his argument that the capitalism of proprietors undermined the traditional news values of the pre-war years and the moral and professional ideals of most journalists. He wrote that newspaper coverage of *Society* was the idea of capitalist

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<sup>142</sup> Fyfe, *Press Parade*, (1936), p. 37.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

newspaper owners in response to the 'frenzied...competition for readers' after the war, the work of 'very rich men', the 'coal king (Berry Brothers), the oil king (Lord Cowdray) and the cocoa king (Lord Cadbury), proprietor-businessmen with dual interests both within and outside the press, and as chapters one and two argue in the case of Beaverbrook, members of Society themselves.<sup>146</sup> This suggests something of the changing management styles attributed to newspapers in the interwar period, a factor which this thesis considers when analysing the changing content of the column later in the introduction and in chapter one. Fyfe also suggested that Society's presence in the mass press was so great in order to trick advertisers into placing adverts in papers where they believed there was a significant audience of wealthy, fashionable and influential readers.<sup>147</sup> Fyfe attributed the British public's fascination with the gossip column and Society as due to a 'snobbish admiration' for Society or the 'germ of snobbery that lies hid in everyone.'<sup>148</sup> As I show in chapter three, for Fyfe and bestselling authors like Evelyn Waugh, this was a daft and embarrassing feature of public life that was manipulated by the popular press: features like the gossip column cultivated 'a superstitious reverence for' Society, 'an attitude almost of worship.'<sup>149</sup> In this sense the gossip column was characteristic of the content of the press, simultaneously described as designed 'to prevent thinking' 'to escape from the pressure of boredom or bad luck' but somehow so persuasive in its language and repetitive themes that it also gave a 'way of thinking' that became the 'foundation' of the way a mass audience thought about the world. It was, Fyfe argued, through new features like the gossip column and 'not leading articles that they', meaning proprietors and Society, 'influence the public mind'.<sup>150</sup> Such an

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 38, p. 102.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>148</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 23. Fyfe, *Press* (1936), p. 122.

<sup>149</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936), p. 123.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 1, p. 122.

attitude linked again to the broader critique of the damaging effects of the press on British society by commentators like Leavis.

Fyfe also wrote that instructions were given from newspaper proprietors and editors to 'Play up the peerage', and suggested the importance of Society within the content of the press in the interwar period when he stated that this managerial 'order' was 'passed on to sub-editors, to reporters, to all whom it might concern'.<sup>151</sup> Describing the editorial policies of the national press, Fyfe wrote that, 'All relations of peers are worth putting into headlines and on contents bills, whatever they do...' that it was vital for newspapers to discuss 'the doings of titled people, keeping them in the limelight...continually in the news...exaggerating their importance, though not by asserting it...'<sup>152</sup> Fyfe's description suggested the entertaining and gentle style of Society reportage at this time and the focus on their lifestyles and social lives. Fyfe described the contempt that he believed most newspaper staff felt for both Society and Society journalism, again suggesting that this was an important point of contention amongst journalists in the interwar period, writing 'men and women on the staffs of newspapers are wide enough awake to sense what is expected of them. They may feel contemptuous, but they need butter with their bread'.<sup>153</sup> In the representation of Society in the press, Fyfe suggested, 'as in many other phases of journalism, we see the faces of newspaper controllers turned desperately towards the past'.<sup>154</sup> The conservative news values of the press meant 'the test for all events, all measures is: Do they threaten capitalism?'<sup>155</sup> Here Society and the owners of the press were linked together in polar opposition to the progress and development of news culture

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

and the political values of news reporters. The continual representation of Society and the 'Old Order' and 'Old England' distorted the reality of the political and economic situation of the late 1930s: that 'the threat', against both capitalism and the traditional social structure of Britain was 'implicit in almost everything that happens or is urged as necessary' in the real world, and as a result of editorial insistence on sensational and superficial features like the Society gossip column 'we seldom see in newspapers a frank consideration of occurrences, proposals or ideas. Prejudice is always creeping in'.<sup>156</sup> In the detailed analysis of the form and content of the gossip column that follows, this thesis challenges Fyfe's appraisal of the press, teasing out the ways in which commentary upon politics, society and the economy were an integral feature of the interwar gossip column -- usually coming from the Society gentleman-journalist himself. In print at least, this figure bridged the divide between leisured Society figure and journalist by the early 1930s. Patrick Balfour showed how the gentleman gossip columnist crossed the boundaries between Society expert, journalist and social and cultural commentator in his book of 1933, *Society Racket*. The quote below shows how he shared the views of the capitalistic and simplistic culture of the mass press coined by academics like Leavis and journalists like Fyfe, but also promoted the importance of Society and suggested the complexity and variety of the content of the press:

The post-war decade has witnessed the immense development of newspapers. A newspaper used simply to be an organ for the purveyance of news, and was hence confined to some half-dozen pages. Today it has swelled to four times the size and its news is no longer its only stock-in-trade. A newspaper is a mixed bag of tricks, providing sufficient material to occupy the whole of the average man's daily leisure. It performs the advisory functions of the dressmaker, doctor, psycho-analyst, humorist, clergyman, governess, moralist, historian, salesman, beggar, philanthropist, critic, cook, gardener, chauffeur, tipster, solicitor, stock-broker, mother, father, guide, philosopher and friend....The modern daily newspaper is a kind of Universal Uncle, whose ministrations have made an incalculable difference to the daily life of the individual.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

In no direction has this development been more marked than in the view of Society which it presents to his eyes.<sup>157</sup>

Balfour described how the transformation of the press after the First World War included the rapid expansion in readership and the extension of their content to include magazine-like features on fashion, gardening and cooking.<sup>158</sup> The most significant aspect of Balfour's survey was his arguments about the increasingly personal and familiar styles of language in newspapers, the way that newspapers could not only provide 'news' through articles on national politics, economics and foreign affairs, but offer information that might impact in more personal ways on readers' wellbeing and lifestyle such as questions about the mind and morality. In other words, through changes in language, format and new kinds of content Balfour argues that after the war newspapers attempted to show that they cared about their readers and their interests. As a result of my detailed content analysis of the gossip column in chapters one, three, four and five my interpretation of the 'news value' of Society and celebrity culture in interwar Britain is very different to that of editor turned leftist critic of the press Fyfe and academic Leavis.<sup>159</sup>

#### **4) Society, Celebrity Culture and the Gossip Column.**

Fyfe defined post-war Society as a 'queer crew'.<sup>160</sup> He argued that the way in which the 'Press' had been 'doing its utmost to induce a return to pre-War conditions' through its representation of Society, did not meet the reality of those who now called themselves 'London Society', either in terms of lifestyle, their financial situation, or their social and

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<sup>157</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 82.

<sup>158</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p. 261.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

political influence in Britain.<sup>161</sup> Evoking the idea that the upper-class' status and influence had declined after the war, Fyfe wrote that Society used to be 'fairly dignified and self-assured, though unintelligent' while a group of figures were now in fact playing at being at Society by recreating old traditions.<sup>162</sup> Describing the role of the gossip column in maintaining the illusion of Society, Fyfe disparagingly wrote:

...these people, uncertain of themselves, conscious that their time is nearly up, do all they can to keep the old social fabric standing. They tread the dreary spring and summer round of Epsom, Ascot, Eton and Harrow, Goodwood, Cowes. They shoot in the autumn, hunt from October to March. Their dances, treasure hunts, surprise parties are chronicled in fashionable gossip columns or pages, with well-simulated snobbish admiration.<sup>163</sup>

If Fyfe tried to suggest that Society did not exist after the war, that they were just charlatan parvenus imitating the pre-war aristocracy, then historians like Ross McKibbin have described Society's continuing influence in public life through new developments in print culture and the press.<sup>164</sup> According to McKibbin, Society valued their names in the gossip column because it gave them a sense of power and influence in public life, particularly when their traditional patronage of MPs was becoming less vital and valued in government.<sup>165</sup> He writes that Society changed its public representation to fit with the modern image of a 'cosmopolitan café society' and transatlantic film stars.<sup>166</sup> Through analysis of the content of the gossip column over the period, I argue that the gossip column did look outwards to Europe and the United States but not always to bolster the celebrity profile of the Society figures it discussed. Foreign politics and economic affairs in Europe were a feature of the column; so were sports stars, dancers and cultural and intellectual figures from Europe, the

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> McKibbin, *Classes* (1998), p. 31.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

Empire and to a lesser extent the United States. Challenging the assumptions of historians, I argue that the world of the gossip column extended much further than British Society.

Society figures have been defined by both contemporary gossip columnists and historians as 'celebrities' between the wars. For example, in the *Express* of 15 August 1930 the 'Dragoman' referred to 'various celebrities' including, 'Lady Dorothea Ashley-Cooper, Lord Berners, Mr Lytton Strachey and Lord Ivor Spencer-Churchill.'<sup>167</sup> In a counter-argument against the Americanisation of European popular print culture, Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi argue that celebrity culture had its origins in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>168</sup> They argue that:

...established leaders...had to operate within the new culture of celebrity, which forced them to compete for the recognition they had long taken for granted...With the advent of mass newspapers, the "celebrity" became a common cultural type, constituting a new and powerful social force. Thanks to ever more complex technologies- steam powered rotary presses, automatic paper folders, linotype machines, railroads, telegraphs, and soon telephones, and innovative photographic techniques- ordinary people could identify with the famous; feel that they knew the hero, leader or "star"; and imagine that public figures belonged to their private lives.<sup>169</sup>

In British popular history, celebrity has long been associated with a spectacular visual culture of photography, film, advertising and newspaper headlines, and this is also often regarded as an imported part of the 'Americanisation' of popular print culture.<sup>170</sup> The origins of this process have often been interpreted through the visual iconography of the

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<sup>167</sup> *Express*, 15 August 1930.

<sup>168</sup> E. Berenson and E. Giloi (eds.), *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York, Oxford, 2010), pp. 1-13.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936), p. 122.

Society flapper and 'Bright Young Things'.<sup>171</sup> The flapper's short skirts, make-up and cigarettes, and the Bright Young People's fast cars and penchant for nightclubs and jazz created a modern, fast-paced world in which newspaper audiences, and the readers of celebrity gossip columns in particular, were supposedly enthralled.<sup>172</sup> Such a representation of modern celebrity culture is seen in the film *Bright Young Things* (2003) where we see the 1920s equivalent of a paparazzo scaling gates and walls, desperately trying to get a candid picture of guests at a private house party.<sup>173</sup> In the film, the click of the camera and flash of the camera bulb seems to follow the 'Bright Young People' wherever they go as the photographers desperately try to provide pictures to an impatient press.<sup>174</sup> By analysing the written content of the gossip column, this thesis questions the pervasive assumption that gossip columnists were chiefly interested in writing about the leisured lifestyles of a small group of youthful Society celebrities. The content analysis of the gossip column in chapters one and five show that whilst Society remained a constant subject, or at least an underlying theme in the gossip column, the subjects of the gossip column were more varied in age, occupation and social status, particularly after 1930. Chapter four also argues that such candid photographs of Society figures caught unawares at Society events were not at all common in the national newspaper gossip columns of the interwar period: staged studio shots were much more likely to be used. As I have suggested above, the significant differences *between* the content of national newspaper gossip columns have also been overlooked in the historiography. The comparative analysis of the written content and visual culture of the gossip columns in chapters one, four and five will work to examine the historical reasons behind the different 'identity' of national newspapers in this period. This

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<sup>171</sup> A. Jenkins, *The Twenties* (London, 1974).

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0325123/> [last accessed 7 July 2013].

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

thesis also uses content analysis of the gossip column to expose the shifting nature of celebrity culture in the newspaper gossip column. For example, I argue that representations of Society changed significantly over the period as editorial policy responded to political and economic change including the rise of the Labour Party and the economic depression, and a number of cultural influences including Evelyn Waugh's bestselling novel *Vile Bodies*.

D.J. Taylor's recent popular history of 1920s Britain, in which he attempts to find the real-life figures behind Waugh's BYP in *Vile Bodies*, reflects the pervasive tendency to present the gossip column as a modern vehicle developed mainly to enhance the BYP's celebrity and public influence.<sup>175</sup> This ongoing interest in the celebrity and lifestyles of the BYP in popular culture links with modern trends in the sociological and historical study of celebrity.<sup>176</sup> Sociologist Richard Dyer focuses on themes of glamour, wealth, sexuality and gender in the representation of the 'star' in media discourses, without considering that the public persona of the journalist or artist who presents the celebrity's public image might also compete for space and public recognition in the printed discourse.<sup>177</sup> Dyer's continuing influence is seen in Mayhall's recent comparative analysis of the public personas of Hollywood stars and British royalty, and most noticeably in Charles Ponce de Leon's study of the popular press in the United States.<sup>178</sup> Whilst ground-breaking in its argument that newspapers had a unique role within interwar celebrity culture through the development of new 'human-interest' styles of journalism, Ponce de Leon still focuses on the public profile of the represented celebrity rather than that of the journalist, arguing for the dominance of self-penned or

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<sup>175</sup> Taylor, *Bright* (2007), pp. xiii-51.

<sup>176</sup> *Glamour's Golden Age: 'Beautiful and Damned'*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nk9m5>. Last aired BBC 4, 6 July 2011.

<sup>177</sup> Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London, 2004), pp. viii-17.

<sup>178</sup> Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales Versus Clark Gable', *Cultural and Social History* (2007), pp. 529-543, and, Charles L Ponce De Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill; London, 2002).

ghost-written profiles and printed interviews in the American popular press.<sup>179</sup> In what follows I argue that this impression of a direct two-way communication between reader and celebrity conceals much more than it reveals about the history of journalism in the early twentieth century.

## 5) Sources, Research Methodology and Chapter Outline

A major aspect of this thesis is the analysis of the production of the gossip column in interwar Britain, using the newspaper office and business archives of the *Mail* and Beaverbrook press and the letters and diaries of individual columnists, to assess both columnists' and proprietors' understanding of the purpose of the gossip column and how columnists regarded their work and status, and also to uncover the new professional and social networks in which gossip columnists worked. This is accompanied by a systematic study of the content of the gossip column in the six main newspapers studied (*Express*, *Mail*, *Mirror*, *Sketch*, *News of the World* and *Standard*) and I have sampled the gossip columns in the months of January, June, August and November every year between 1918 and 1939. The detailed content analysis of the gossip column in chapters one and five are based on sample columns from January, June, August and November in 1922, 1930 and 1938, in order to track key changes in content and authorship throughout the period. I have chosen these months to reflect the traditional Society social calendar, chiefly as a way to explore how upper-class lifestyles and social lives were changing in this period and uncover more about how Society were represented in the national press. It also analyses specific columns and columnists within *Reynolds's News* ('The Talk of the Town Outside Mayfair' 1930-1934), the *Sunday Chronicle* (Page Two by Beverley Nichols 1931-1933), *Sunday Dispatch* ('From My

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<sup>179</sup> Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales Versus Clark Gable', *Cultural and Social History*, 4/4 (2007), pp. 530-540, C.L. Ponce De Leon, *Self-Exposure* (London, 2002), pp. 1-13.

Window in Vanity Fair' by Lady Eleanor Smith 1927-1930), *Sunday Express* ('Londoner's Log', Viscount Castlerosse, 1226-1939), *Sunday News* (Marquess of Donegall, 'Almost in Confidence', 1927-1930), *World's Pictorial News* ('Greenroom and Smokerroom', 'On the Boulevards' and 'Gossip of the Week', all anonymous, 1920-1924) and Society periodical *Bystander* ('In England Now!', Helen McKie and Olivia Maitland-Davidson, 1918-1921). This expands the study of the interwar press to include newspapers published, at least at some points during the period, in Manchester, including *Reynolds's News* and the *World's Pictorial News*.<sup>180</sup> Until now, there has been a dominant historical focus on the national Fleet Street dailies like the *Express* and the *Mail*, which McKibbin explains were popular with a middle-class audience.<sup>181</sup> I extend my study to include newspapers that are no longer published, and also those popular with mainly working-class readers like *World's Pictorial News* or wealthy, upper-middle class and upper-class readers like the *Daily Sketch* and *Bystander*. In so doing I challenge the historical sense of the stagnant and monotonous basis of the popular press in the interwar period, but also seek to offer new sources through which to engage with historical debates about Britishness and national identity in this period which have mainly focused middlebrow and elitist sources such as novels and social commentaries and investigations.<sup>182</sup>

This methodology responds to Frank Mort's recent work which suggests ways forward 'to establish recurrent and typical patterns for events, in terms not simply of their content, but

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<sup>180</sup> Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press* (1938), pp. 246-252.

<sup>181</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* (1998), p. 33.

<sup>182</sup> J. H. Wiener, *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850's to 1914: Conference on History and Politics: Papers* (New York; London, 1988), pp. xi- xii.  
Collins, 'The Fall', *Historical Research*, 75/187 (2002), pp. 90-111. Light, *Forever England* (1991).

of form, genre and iconography as well'.<sup>183</sup> He explains that the history of popular print culture 'needs more, not less, attention to the generic forms and languages through which modern culture is communicated' and argues that 'a similarly complex grasp of the genres through which the press codified cultural and political change for popular consumption, within the confines of their operation as marketable commodities' is now required; 'whether factual news reportage or front-page feature, human-interest story or expose, column inches of print or text-photo montage.'<sup>184</sup> This thesis takes a dual approach focusing on the content and production of the newspaper gossip column of interwar Britain, popular with readers, scrutinized by critics, and written by a new set of journalists from Society backgrounds. Mort writes that the analysis of specific generic conventions of the press matters because they tell us not only about the cultural history of popular print but the social history of its audiences as well:

an understanding of the dynamic role played by varied generic treatments of this kind can provide historians with more precise tools for reading the meanings that journalists and editors disseminated into the field of popular culture and beyond. They also return us to Pedersen's demand for the big integrative questions, but by a different route, because generic conventions point to the concrete grounding of texts, allowing us to read their formal properties and their audience responses as products of historically determined narratives that are refracted through genre. A genre like popular press melodrama is a socially constructed fiction precisely because the contexts of its production and reception invariably lead back to events that exist well beyond the newspaper page.<sup>185</sup>

Building on Mort's analysis, this thesis challenges the intellectual distancing from the genres of popular print, and particularly the national press, by historians of interwar Britain. Chapter one offers a comparative analysis of six national newspapers and defines the types of subjects found in the written content of the column over the interwar years analysing the

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<sup>183</sup> F. Mort, 'Intellectual Pluralism and the Future of British History', *History Workshop Journal*, 72/1 (2011), pp. 212-221, p. 215.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

shifting nature of celebrity culture in the gossip column. It also examines a number of fan letters to uncover reader responses to the gossip column and columnist, arguing that it was the columnists' personable writing style that formed a key part of their celebrity appeal. Chapter two provides the biographical detail on the gossip columnists discussing how they entered the role and the professional and personal responses from journalists and proprietors to their work. It continues to explore the cultural and social circumstances surrounding the employment of the gentleman gossip columnist in the late 1920s by focusing on the published persona of the gossip columnist, charting the evolution of what I argue was a gentleman-journalist persona from the late 1920s. It then explores the gap between the public and private representations of the gentleman-journalist by comparing the content of the columns with evidence about columnists working lives from newspaper office archives and columnists' private correspondence and diaries. Chapter three considers the impact of Evelyn Waugh's bestselling novel about gossip writing, the mass press and Society, *Vile Bodies* (1930) on shaping the public persona of the gossip columnist.<sup>186</sup> It places the novel and the content of the gossip columns in the context of academic criticism of the press in the early 1930s and examines why and how some columnists' distanced themselves publicly from their gossip work in the 1930s and beyond. Chapter four analyses the increasingly 'spectacular' visual form of the newspaper gossip column in the context of the technological advancement of printing mechanisms and photography, but also uses newspaper archives, professional manuals and training literature to explore the collaborative nature of journalistic work on the gossip column. Chapter five analyses the content, form and style of the gossip column to explore questions of British national identity in the interwar period in relation to themes of leisure, culture, consumerism and the

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<sup>186</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London, 1930, 1986 edition).

metropolis. It analyses the cosmopolitan nature of the gossip column and considers the inclusion of celebrities from Empire, the United States but also Europe. Usually treated as a particularly abhorrent symbol of the stagnant consumerism-conservatism and immoral sensationalism of the interwar press, I examine the gossip column's fluidity and creativity in response to social, political and economic change, and its responsiveness to the development of other genres of print culture including novels, magazines and film. In short, by studying the gossip column I wish to emphasize the creativity and dynamism of the national press in the interwar period and the connection between popular cultural forms and social and political change.

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This introduction has set out the key reasons why the newspaper gossip column is an important study in interwar Britain. It allows us to learn more about the history of journalism, the changing content of the press, and the impact of the press in interwar society and culture.

## Chapter One:

### The Content and Context of the Newspaper Gossip Column in Interwar Britain.

This chapter analyses the content of the newspaper gossip column between the wars asking what its celebrity culture can tell us about the popular press and society in interwar Britain. It provides a detailed comparative survey of the content of the columns in six popular newspapers: the *Express*, *Mirror*, *Mail*, *Sketch*, *Standard* and *News of the World*. Examining the development of the gossip column in this period, I trace the extent to which there was change or continuity in the types of subject presented in print. This systematic content analysis is an original historical approach as historians have often analysed single news stories without placing them in a longer-term context of the development of the press.<sup>187</sup> It also helps to establish the particular differences in style, form and content between newspapers during this period. The interwar national press has been mythologized as sensational and reactionary in tone and content: in comparison to popular magazines and novels, historical studies of the content of the interwar popular press are relatively rare.<sup>188</sup> Despite studies of the women's pages and newspaper cartoons, there have been no systematic studies of the gossip column.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> L. Bland, 'The Trials and Tribulations of Edith Thompson: the Capital Crime of Sexual Incitement in 1920s Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 47/ 3 (2008), pp. 624-648. Bland, "'Hunnish Scenes' and a 'Virgin Birth': a 1920s Case of Sexual and Bodily Ignorance", *History Workshop Journal*, 73/1 (2012), pp. 118-143. S.D'Cruze, "Intimacy, Professionalism and Domestic Homicide in Interwar Britain: the case of Buck Ruxton", *Women's History Review*, 16/5 (2007), pp. 701-722.

<sup>188</sup> McAleer, *Passion's Fortune* (1999). Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination* (1986).

<sup>189</sup> A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004). M. Hampton, 'Inventing David Low: Self-Presentation, Caricature and the Culture of Journalism in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20/4 (2009).

As well as quoting extensively from the columns, I place this material in a series of pie charts: detailing the results of my content analysis in the months of January, June, August and November in the years 1922, 1930 and 1938. In so doing I identify and present both the categories or types of subjects discussed in the gossip column and provide information on the celebrity subject's status, whereabouts and nationality. This detailed analysis will pinpoint moments of change in the content of the press and differences in the approach and tone of gossip columns and columnists in different newspapers. In short, through this comparative approach I trace the evolution and transformation of the content of the 'popular', 'middle-class', 'middle-market' press.<sup>190</sup> Historical accounts of interwar culture and society present a vision of the celebrity gossip column as obsessed with the activities of London Society, particularly the activities of metropolitan upper-class youth, or discuss an Anglo-American network of 'cosmopolitan' film stars and Society.<sup>191</sup> Drawing on my content analysis, this chapter questions the idea that London Society were continually present in the celebrity culture of the national press, and traces their changing reputation during the period. As the analysis that follows suggest, Europe, Empire and the US were important features in the gossip columns' content between the wars – something that I explore in greater detail in chapter five. Building on the content analysis of the columns, the second section of the chapter uses readership surveys and journalist records to explore who the gossip columns' readers were. It also analyses a series of fan letters to *Evening News* gossip columnist Oswald Barron and *Express* columnist Tom Driberg aka 'William Hickey' to reveal what it was about their columns that appealed to readers. In so doing, it will argue that the gossip columnist became a celebrity figure in interwar Britain.

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<sup>190</sup> McKibbin, *Classes* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 23-37.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29. Taylor, *Bright* (2007).

## 1) The Celebrity Subject of the Newspaper Gossip Column

British Society including the Duchess of Rutland and Lady Alexander was the predominant feature of the gossip columns in the *Express* and *Mail* of 1922 (Fig 8 and Fig 9).<sup>192</sup> Mention of the names of Society figures amounted to 58% of the sample of *Express* columns and 40% of the *Mail's* columns in 1922. These figures were usually presented in the context of the social events that they attended, such as the wedding of 'Miss Margaret Napier...married at St James, Piccadilly' on 9 November 1922. The anonymous columnist also followed the traditional Society social calendar in his paragraphs, most of his paragraphs in November for example, focused on Society events in the countryside. This included the exclusive gathering on the 'Duke of Buccleuch's' estate for his annual hunt.<sup>193</sup> The anonymous *Express* columnist also followed the Society social calendar in his descriptions of Society lifestyle. For example, in June the columnist described Society's attendance at a number of public and private events in London. The dress of a number of Society ladies seen watching the tennis at Wimbledon was described in detail, in another paragraph some of the upper-class guests present at a dance in a private home in Mayfair were listed and the evening dress of some of the women again described in detail. A similar narrative was followed when the column listed the Society women in attendance at a charity ball held at the Royal Albert Hall and again their costume was described in detail.<sup>194</sup> By the end of August, when the London Society 'Season' had finished, the column's focus moved to the English countryside. For example, the *Express* columnist announced that Lord and Lady March had

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<sup>192</sup> *Mail*, 30 June 1922.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 November 1922.

<sup>194</sup> *Daily Express*, 28 June 1922.

left 'London...for their country lodge in the north', and described the new home of 'Sir and Lady Ward's' new residence in 'the country'.<sup>195</sup>

To summarise, in the content of the *Express* and *Mail's* Society gossip columns in 1922, two themes prevailed: the dress of Society women and the announcement of Society activities. Another continual theme in the *Mail* and *Express* was the discussion of the royal family's public engagements such as the paragraph in the *Mail* on 30 June 1922 which announced the King's return to London from Newmarket races.<sup>196</sup> In both papers, the editorial decision had clearly been taken that the discussion of royalty would open the gossip column each day. Giving the royal family 'top billing' as it were showed the papers respect and support for British royalty, and also presented a social hierarchy; this was a visual reminder that royalty were above Society in their social status.

The lavish, sensational and detailed descriptions of Society women's dress could be attributed to what Bingham describes as the 'feminization' of the national press in the post-war years. In this context, the Society gossip column could be viewed as part of proprietors like Northcliffe's effort to attract more female readers by the inclusion of more 'women's interest' features.<sup>197</sup> On 1 June 1922, paragraph five of the *Mail's* 'Court and Society' column conjured up a spectacularly colourful and extravagant description of Society women's dress at the Epsom Derby:

The Duchess of Newcastle...was in the paddock, wearing silver-grey georgette and a silver lace hat with white feathers; Lady Hamilton of Dalzell was in yellow, and Countess Fitzwilliam wore black and a black hat with a long grey feather. The Hon. Mrs. Roland Cubitt looked extremely pretty in brick-red silk stockinette with a black hat; and Mrs Aleen Adiar was also very pretty, wearing yellow organdi muslin and a yellow hat. The Countess of Ilchester wore a lovely shade of orchid mauve with a

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 15 August 1922.

<sup>196</sup> *Mail*, 30 June 1922.

<sup>197</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004), p. 38.

silver hat edged with ospreys, and her daughter, Lady Mary Fox-Strangeways, had a pink hat with a white lace gown.<sup>198</sup>

The discussion of 'feathers' and 'orchids' added an exotic, sensual element to the gossip feature which contrasted sharply with the formally-toned announcements of birth, deaths and marriages or the announcements of the royal family's public engagements.<sup>199</sup> An earlier paragraph from the *Mail* of 6 July 1920 described the organisation and details of a Society party in London as well as the dress of its wealthy guests:

Mrs Davis...received the visitors in the drawing-rooms...wearing a gown of cream silk lace over pink satin, with a brown tulle sash tied in a huge bow. With them were Miss Davis and Miss Watson. The former wore pink crepon and cream-coloured lace over pink satin, with a blue sash, and Miss Watson's dress was of pink taffetas, embroidered in white. A band at the foot of the stairs played a number of American airs, and tea was served downstairs at buffets decorated with huge vases of red, white and blue flowers.<sup>200</sup>

Purchased mainly by a middle-class audience, the *Mail's* 'Court and Society' gossip column could be viewed as an additional part of a middle-class print culture of magazines in the interwar period, within which Catherine Horwood states middle-class readers formulated their own sense of dress style against descriptions of upper-class dress.<sup>201</sup> The quote above also hinted at the influence of American popular culture on British Society life in London, adding a cosmopolitan, transatlantic element to depictions of British Society. Yet it should be stated that in the sampled columns the nationality of the subjects of the *Mail* and *Express's* gossip columns was overwhelmingly British. From the sixty-two paragraphs analysed there were only five paragraphs that named figures that were not British: three

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<sup>198</sup> *Mail*, 1 June 1922.

<sup>199</sup> *Mail*, 3 January 1922, 30 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 9 November 1922. *Express*, 2 January 1922, 28 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 20 November 1922.

<sup>200</sup> *Mail*, 6 July 1920.

<sup>201</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up* (2005).

discussed French figures, one a figure from the United States, and the other a member of the Spanish royal family.<sup>202</sup>

The *Sketch* was similar to the *Mail* and the *Express* in that almost half of its contents in 1922 referred to British Society. The *Sketch* pie chart shows that 29% of the sample referred to people within Society and a further 17% of the content discussed exclusive Society social events. The *Sketch* was also similar to the *Mail* and *Express* in that it mainly focused on British subjects. Out of the 106 paragraphs sampled there were five paragraphs that did not discuss British nationals. There was a mention of Sarah Bernhardt the French actress, and a short biography and picture of a young imperial figure the 'Marchioness Della Taffia', referred to as the 'Maltese Marchioness'.<sup>203</sup> This cosmopolitan and metropolitan celebrity culture was dependent on a more personable, friendly and colloquial writing style of the gossip columnist.<sup>204</sup> Whereas there was no clear account of the columnist in the *Mail* or *Express* taking part in the Society activities he described, the narrative of the *Sketch's* gossip column was focused upon presenting 'Mr Gossip's' social life amongst Society, as well as his taking part in a more diverse and open leisure culture of theatres, restaurants and cabarets in the West End of London. For example, on 13 November 1922 he described his enjoyment of Australian Dame Nellie Melba's concert at the Royal Albert Hall.<sup>205</sup>

In 1922, the equally sociable 'Mrs Gossip' also described her participation in Society social life in the metropolis, even if her comments were more focused on the description of elite women's clothing, private dinners and dances and balls organised for charity. Her paragraph on 5 June 1922 also showed that she had some interaction with a cosmopolitan

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<sup>202</sup> *Express*, 3 January 1922.

<sup>203</sup> *Sketch*, 11 August 1922, 25 June 1922.

<sup>204</sup> See Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

<sup>205</sup> *Sketch*, 13 November 1922.

social elite in the metropolis, when she listed the names of the guests at a charitable ball at Claridge's hotel, which included the Princess of Monaco.<sup>206</sup> The different parameters of the male and female gossip columnists' social lives hinted at contemporary ideas of what were deemed respectable social activities for men and women to take part in the post-war period. Both 'Mr' and 'Mrs Gossip' seemed to attend the activities they described on their own, never describing that they were accompanied. This was perhaps deemed appropriate for 'Mrs Gossip' because of her married, and the reader presumes by this older, status. She would not need to be chaperoned like a respectable younger woman of Society might. It is also notable that 'Mrs Gossip's' columns were always the last in the feature and significantly outnumbered by 'Mr Gossip's' columns, for example 'Mrs Gossip' had seven paragraphs on 25 January 1922 in comparison to 'Mr Gossip's' twenty. This suggested that 'Mr Gossip's' social life was more varied, more central in his lifestyle compared to that of the female gossip columnist. Such a divergence between the male and female gossip columnists social lives, particularly between the amount of time men and women spent away from the home socialising, presented an interesting point of tension with the *Mail and Express's* gossip columns of the same year, when it was normally the appearance of mainly married women at Society events that was described. This could have had something to do with the clues about 'Mrs Gossip's' triple-status: it seemed she would have had to split her time between running the home, attending Society events and writing the column, her time was more divided than the wealthy Society woman and the male gossip columnist. Judging by these differences between the amount of space devoted to 'Mr' and 'Mrs Gossip's' social life it did not seem that a common status as journalists, usually associated with a more modest middle-class lifestyle and a full-time working week, shaped any similarities between their

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 5 June 1922.

depictions of their social lives. Instead it seemed that notions of appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour in the public sphere were more influential on their public personas, and this can be taken with the evidence that neither 'Mr' or 'Mrs Gossip' referred directly to their employment as gossip columnists or their dealings with office life, both instead emphasised their social connections to Society.<sup>207</sup> However, in another sense, the fact that the majority of space was given to the male gossip columnist could be viewed as a direct representation of journalistic culture within the gossip column; that there were very few female journalists in comparison to men throughout the interwar period, even if women journalists on Fleet Street did increase after the war.<sup>208</sup>

'Mr Gossip's' focus on a more cosmopolitan and demotic set of leisure pursuits within the metropolis, expanded the celebrity culture of the column. This not only included the discussion of the participation of social elites from Empire and Europe in the leisure culture of the metropolis, but also allowed paragraph space to be devoted to British 'stars' of the West End stage alongside Society figures. For example, on 25 January 1922, 'Mr Gossip' promoted the actors 'Winifred Lawson, Derek Oldham and H.A. Bytton' for their performance in 'Princess Ida...at the Prince's Theatre'.<sup>209</sup> On 5 June 1922 'Mr Gossip' praised the West End stage actresses 'Mrs Pat Campbell and Gladys Cooper' after watching their performances in the West End.<sup>210</sup> 'Mr Gossip's' celebrity gossip column arguably marked the beginning of a closer association between Society and stage entertainers in the national, middle-market press, and crucially this connection was not one marked by scandal or condemnation (as it had been in the reporting of the death of stage actress Billie Carleton

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<sup>207</sup> *Sketch*, 25 January 1922, 5 June 1922, 11 August 1922, 13 November 1922.

<sup>208</sup> L. Regan (ed.), *Winifred Holtby, 'A Woman in her Time'* (Newcastle, 2010).

<sup>209</sup> *Sketch*, 25 January 1922.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 June 1922.

in 1918, and the reports on the raids of Society night-club the '43' in the West End in the 1920s).<sup>211</sup> As the Society figure 'Mr Gossip' showed in his column, this relationship was based on an appreciation of individual talent and skills of stage actors and Society's increased appreciation of a cultural life outside the private ball or dinner. This was unusual in comparison to other papers like the *World's Pictorial News* (see chapter four), and as shown in the content analysis of the gossip columns of the *Mail* and *Express*. All of these papers kept Society, actors, entertainers and dancers in distinctly separate parts of the paper in 1922.<sup>212</sup>

Differences were seen in the type of celebrity figures presented in the more 'lowbrow' papers of the *Mirror* and *News of the World*. A major difference, which chapter five goes on to discuss in detail, was the much more international scope of figures and topics discussed. For example, in the *News of the World* the anonymous columnist discussed the lifestyle of American millionaires and 'Australian wool growers', as well as unemployment levels in France.<sup>213</sup> Although both columns discussed the royal family such as 'Princess Mary's first dance...at Chesterfield House', Society, 'The Earl of Carnarvon...has won the Coronation Cup' and stars of the West End stage and cabarets like the wedding of British actress 'Miss Chrissie White', a much broader and diverse range of figures including religious leaders, politicians and professionals were included in these celebrity features. For example, in the *News of the World* of 22 January 1922, the marriage of bestselling romance author E.M. Dell was discussed and the work of mediator 'Mr Cope' in securing a peace settlement between the Irish and the British. On 4 June 1922, the columnist described the work of the judge Lord Justice Banks, the humble origins of the 'highly successful' businessman Lord

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<sup>211</sup> M. Kohn, *Dope Girls* (1992, 2003 edition), pp. 105-149.

<sup>212</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>213</sup> *News of the World*, 22 January 1922, 4 June 1922.

Woolavington and his recent illness, and judged that advocate Mr Travers Humphreys had 'distinguished himself' recently in his work at the 'Old Bailey'.<sup>214</sup> The national and social diversity of the subjects discussed in the *Mirror* and *News of the World* meant that there was less space for discussion of the royal family and Society. For example, in the *Daily Mirror* of 1922 approximately 25% of the sample discussed the royal family, people of Society and exclusive Society events which was less than the *Mail*, *Express* and *Sketch* of the same year. Likewise, although the *News of the World* always began its column with on average two paragraphs about the public engagements of the royal family throughout the interwar period, discussion of Society amounted to 20% of the column. In the 'lowbrow' *News of the World*, Society did not dominate the gossip column like it did in the middle-market *Mail*, *Express* and *Sketch*. It was also less excitable in its tone towards Society figures and their lifestyles than 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* was. For instance, the columnist's tone was more like an announcement; he did not describe the appearance of Society figures that he had seen first-hand at Royal Ascot or the opera like 'Mr Gossip' did. This suggested the different methods of the gossip columnists in the *News of the World* and the *Sketch*. For instance, the types of gossip presented meant that the *News of the World's* columnist/s was more likely to be office-bound and using newspapers, magazines, and news sent in from freelance gossip writers or stories wired from abroad. It seemed from the content of the *Sketch*, which as section two shows, the biography of 'Mr Gossip' founder Hannen Swaffer supports, the columnist was moving from one Society gathering to another each evening, mainly in London. This demonstrated the difference in styles, tone and journalistic approaches of newspaper gossip columns in 1922.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 22 January 1922, 4 June 1922.

Although the *Mirror's* column focused less on Society than most other national newspapers, it still very much praised and publicised those Society figures it did discuss, like on 14 November 1922, when the 'Rambler' described 'Colonel Francis Mildmay' as 'one of the most well-loved figures in Society...especially as he was able to endure being poor following the collapse of Barings'.<sup>215</sup> The newspaper columnist's sympathy for Society figures also stretched to 'Mrs Herbert Cox', who 'was a favourite in Society until her death last week' and to 'Mrs Graham Smith who broke her arm in Bond Street'.<sup>216</sup> His sympathy and knowledge of the personal details of upper-class lives might suggest that he was of a similar social background, similar to 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch*. It was clear that personal details about Society figures were an important feature of the *Mirror's* column of the early 1920s as they were in the *Mail*, *Express* and *Sketch*, yet as the quotes from the *Mirror* suggest, there was also more of a sense of personal drama and misfortune attached to Society figures in this column. If in the *Mail* the resplendence, order and wealth of Society was continuously celebrated mainly through descriptions of their attendance and dress at social events, then in the *Mirror*, Society were also presented in very down-to-earth terms, experiencing worry, pain and financial strain like any person might. This representation of Society can be interpreted through what LeMahieu has described as the increase in the 'human-interest story' in the national press after the First World War, evidence that news reports which 'underscored...commonplace events...and the significance of everyday life' were also entering the content of the celebrity gossip column in the early 1920s.<sup>217</sup> Society's suitability as a subject for the 'sensational' human-interest story was also enhanced by their association with 'romantic-fiction' and 'mystery' plots like the bestselling novel *The Green*

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<sup>215</sup> *Mirror*, 14 November 1922.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 November 1922.

<sup>217</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p. 23.

*Hat* by Michael Arlen.<sup>218</sup> The association of Society with romance and exotic glamour in the *Mirror's* column was seen in the depiction of masculine hero 'Lord Farquhar...one of the most prominent people in society and politics', who 'shot one of the finest stags of this season'.<sup>219</sup> The exotic allure of Society women was seen in the description on the 'latest fashion' for wealthy females to wear 'white diamonds set in jet and edged with platinum'.<sup>220</sup>

The seemingly contradictory extremes of death and bankruptcy with high fashion and leisurely lifestyle intermingled in the Society paragraphs of the *Mirror's* gossip column. There was also another jarring element with the fashion focus of the column, that of political unrest and social disadvantage in Britain. Sandwiched between a paragraph discussing the 'successful stables' of Mr Lambton the horse trainer and a paragraph on the king was a passage discussing the working-class. The columnist reported that 'Candidates for election to Parliament have been going into working class constituencies wearing expensive fur coats and, in one instance, a £400 pearl tie pin'.<sup>221</sup> The juxtaposition of wealth and poverty was striking here, as was the insinuation of the insensitiveness and social distance of wealthy parliamentary candidates from their potential constituents' lives. In highlighting the difference in lifestyles of voters in Britain, and drawing in the working-class subject to a column that in most national newspapers was dominated by Society and the wealthy, the gossip columnist showed that he had a greater social awareness and concern than the parliamentary candidates that he discussed. Although the gossip column and the gossip columnist has not often been discussed in relation to the changes in editorial policy of the *Mirror* in the late 1920s and mid-1930s, the columnist's concerned persona and

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<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>219</sup> *Mirror*, 2 January 1922.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 January 1922.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 November 1922.

determination to discuss society in broad terms, can be viewed within the context of the *Mirror* of the 1930s with its campaigning journalism and decisions of editors like Hugh Cudlipp to engage the 'ordinary' reader with lively styles of reporting and bolder headlines.<sup>222</sup>

Other major features of the 'Rambler's' column was the humorous discussion of consumer culture and to include jokes, anecdote and miscellany: as well as being a social and political commentator and expert on Society lifestyle and fashion 'it is the latest fashion amongst men to wear tie and spats of the same colour', the 'Rambler' was also an entertainer.<sup>223</sup> For example, on 30 August 1922 the columnist utilised common stereotypes about the wealth of Americans and suggested the difference in lifestyle between Americans and Britons when he told a joke about an 'American in Berlin' who needed to cut his tour short due to the fact that 'his chauffeur had bought a castle on the Rhine'.<sup>224</sup> Presenting the Americans as the subject of a joke meant that both the joke-teller and the audience had a shared superiority over the American subjects. With the humour and gossiping tone of the columnist's language the reader and author were drawn closer together through a language of informality. Like the *News of the World* and the *Mirror*, the *Standard's* 'Londoner's Diary' contained a diverse set of subjects. If the Sketch presented London as a mecca for entertainment and social life, then the 'Londoner' of the 'Diary' presented London as the place of government power and decision-making. The largest part of the sample was taken up with the columnist's discussion of British political affairs (33%) including gossip such as 'Mr Pringle, who built a reputation as adviser to the Asquithian Liberals in the last Parliament, is building his power base within the party, possibly teaming up with

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<sup>222</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004), p. 44.

<sup>223</sup> *Mirror*, 30 August 1922.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 August 1922.

Commander Kenworthy'.<sup>225</sup> Other examples of the Londoner's knowledge of British political affairs and gossip were shown on 2 August 1922 when he stated that the 'right-wing Tories are very concerned as to the future of the Indian Civil Service since fewer and fewer boys in the top schools are being prepared for it'. The sense of political disquiet and disagreement was much stronger in the 'Londoner's' column than any other, and the columnist presented himself as very much part of this culture of disagreement and debate through his knowledgeable and authoritative persona. For example on 2 August 1922, the columnist argued that Britain should reaffirm its commitment to repaying its 'American war debts' and stated that there was anger about the fact that 'civil servants work far less hours' and have 'longer holidays' than people in the private sector.<sup>226</sup> The difference between the calm and serene representation of Society life, particularly Society women's lifestyles in London in the *Mail*, and the more aggressive, fast-paced tone of political commentary in the *Standard* suggested a strong divide between Society life and political life in London. As well as saying something about the gendered representations of Society life as feminine and government life as masculine, to an extent the divergence between Society lifestyles and MPs lifestyles as represented in the national newspaper gossip column supports McKibbin's argument about the changing public role of Society in the post-war years and the 1930s; from political power-brokers to 'cosmopolitan' celebrities of the 'press'.<sup>227</sup> McKibbin discussed this change in Society's public representation as due to the decline of the political Society hostess, less Society patronage of MPs, and fewer MPs feeling it necessary to attend Society social events to progress their careers.<sup>228</sup> Analysing the content of the *Standard's* gossip column which as the analysis of content in 1930 and 1938 will show, maintained a

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<sup>225</sup> *Standard*, 28 November 1922.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 August 1922.

<sup>227</sup> McKibbin, *Classes* (1999), pp. 29-31.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

predominantly political commentary over the interwar period means that the gossip column can also be used as evidence to suggest the changing influence of Society within national government in the interwar period.

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This section has shown that in the early 1920s discussion of Society dominated the celebrity gossip columns of the *Mail* and *Express*. This was also the case in the *Sketch* but whereas the *Mail* and *Express* observed the dress and behaviour of their upper-class subjects in deferential, reverential terms, 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* described his active participation in the mainly metropolitan nightlife of Society in cabarets and theatres. This was two very different representations of Society, and as the next section will show, the man-about-town persona of 'Mr Gossip' would go on to heavily influence the print personas of new gossip columnists in the *Mail* and *Express* by 1930, transforming and modernising these columns representations of Society lifestyle in the process. I will also go on to show that the entertaining writing style of the *Mirror's* columnist the 'Rambler' would become an important aspect of the print personas of the columnists in the *Mail* and *Mirror* of 1930. The *Evening Standard* (fig. 11), *News of the World* (fig. 12) and *Mirror* (fig. 9) had the most variation in the types of subjects they discussed from political figures to actors, politicians and businessmen. I will go on to show that figures from outside of Society and the royal family became an important feature of all gossip columns in the national press by 1930.

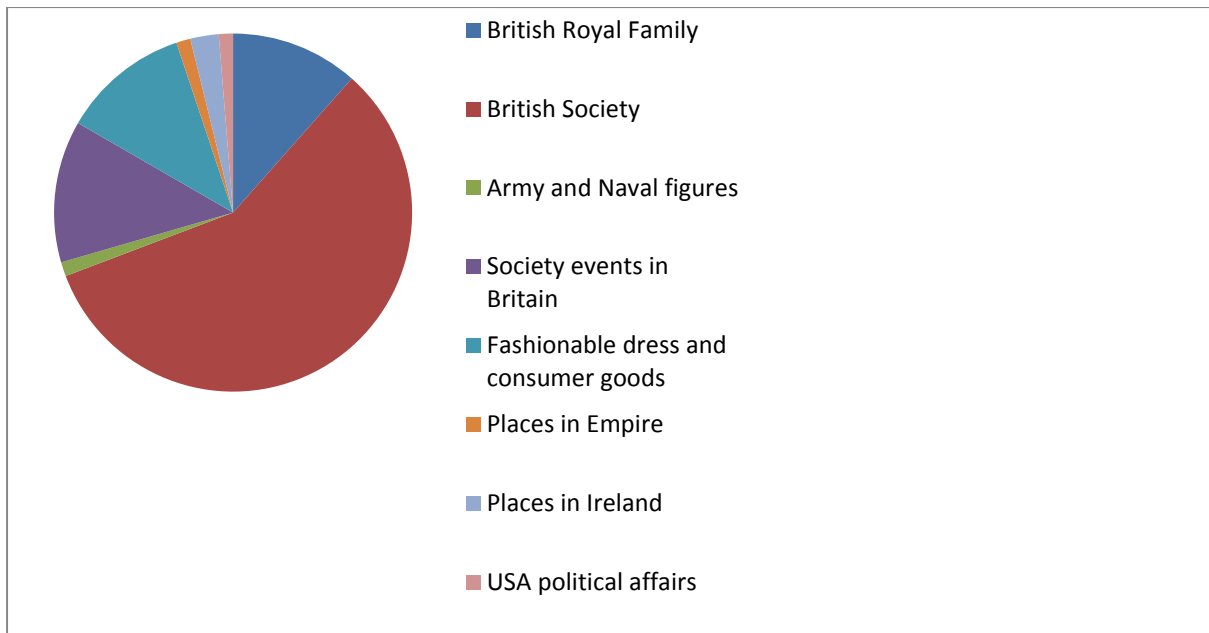


Fig 9.Types of subject of the gossip column, *Daily Express* (1922).<sup>229</sup>

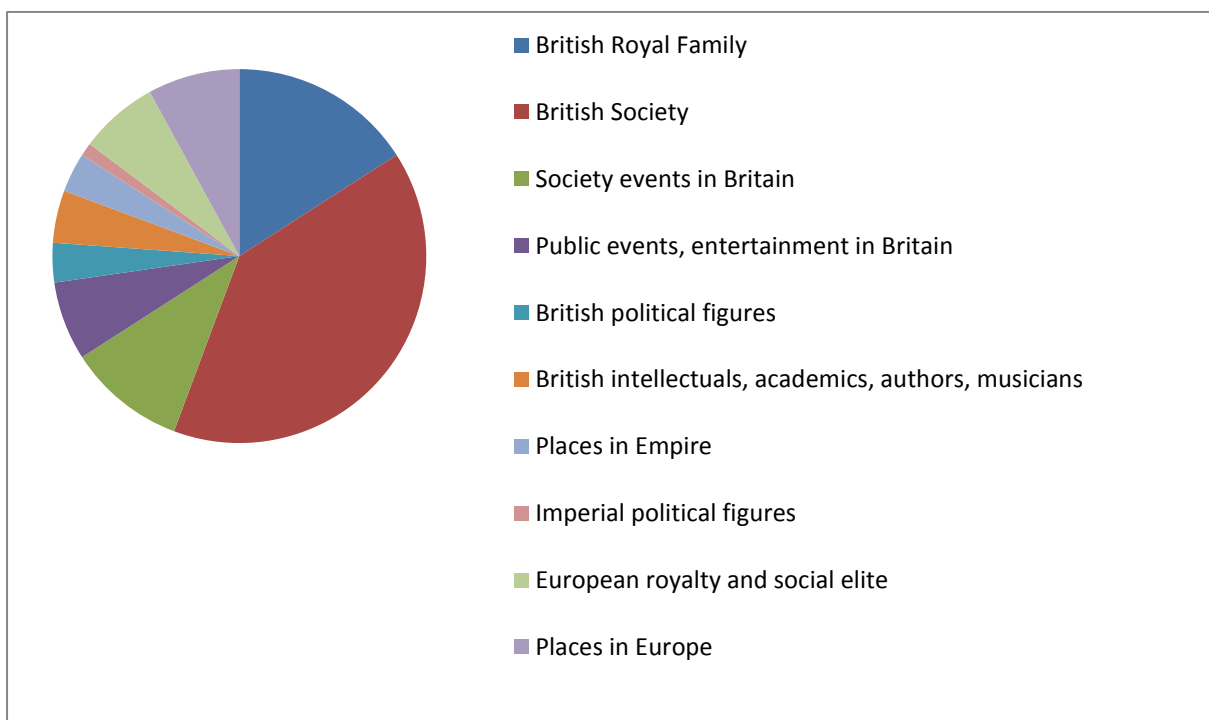


Fig 10. Types of subjects, *Daily Mail* (1922).<sup>230</sup>

<sup>229</sup> *Daily Express*, 2 January 1922, 28 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 20 November 1922.

<sup>230</sup> *Daily Mail*, 3 January 1922, 30 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 9 November 1922.

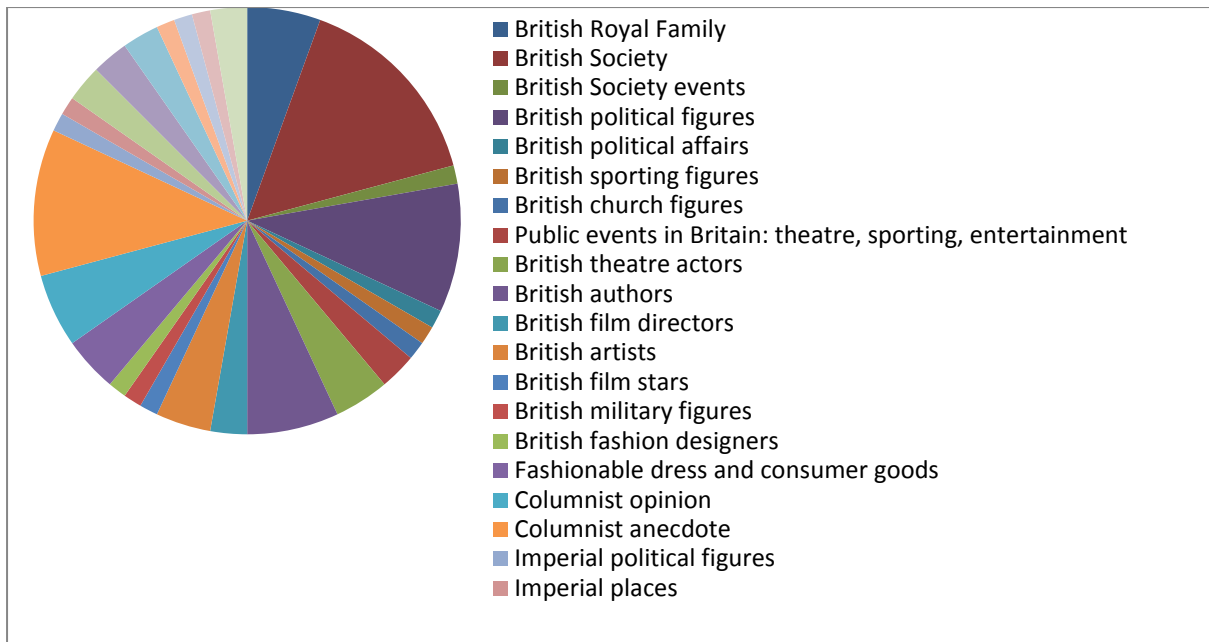


Fig 11. Types of subjects, *Daily Mirror* (1922).<sup>231</sup>

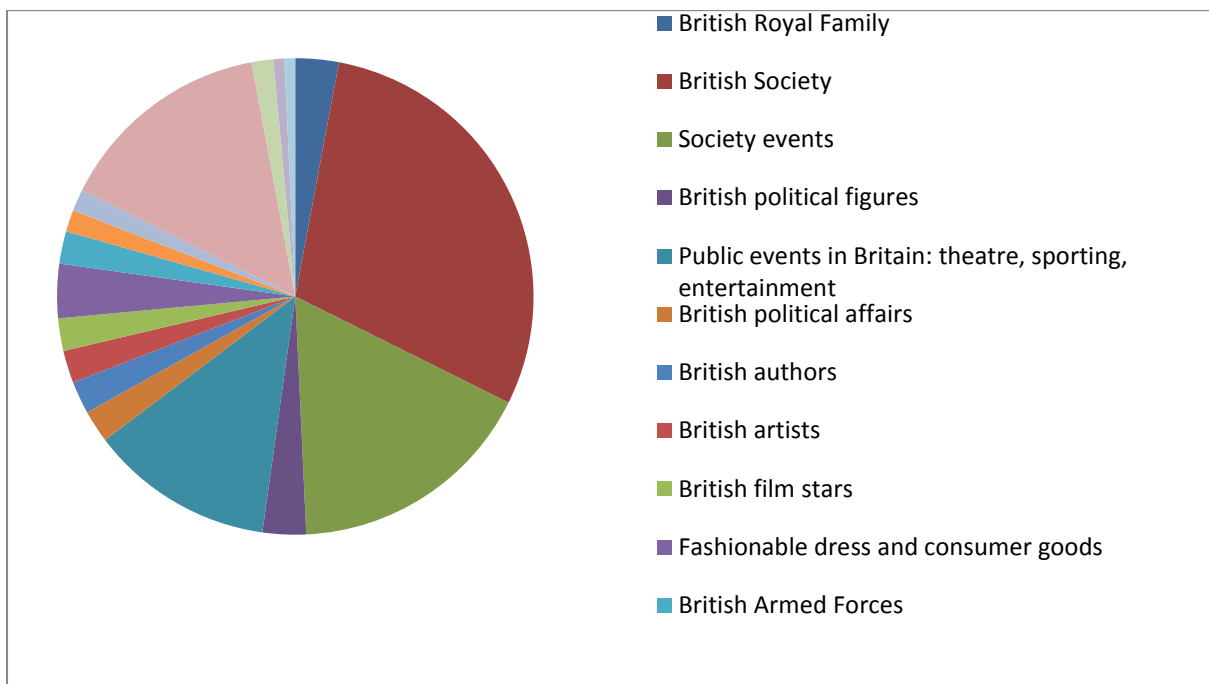


Fig 12. *Daily Sketch* (1922).<sup>232</sup>

<sup>231</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 2 January 1922, 9 June 1922, 30 August 1922, 14 November 1922.

<sup>232</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 25 January 1922, 5 June 1922, 11 August 1922, 13 November 1922.

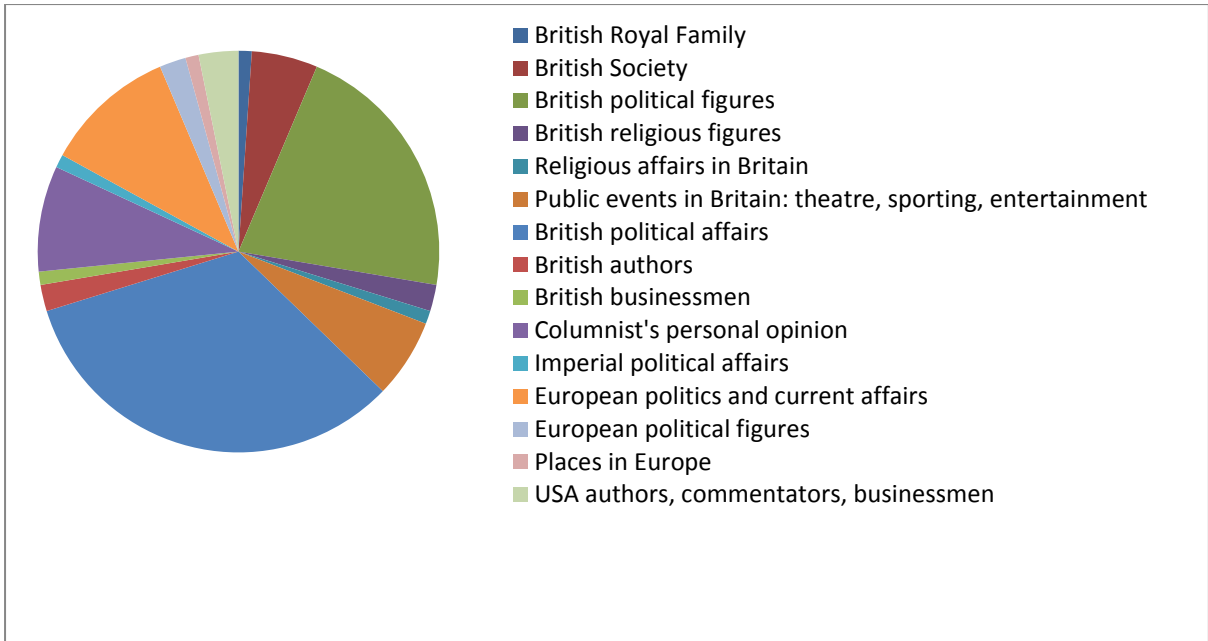


Fig 13. *Evening Standard* (1922).<sup>233</sup>

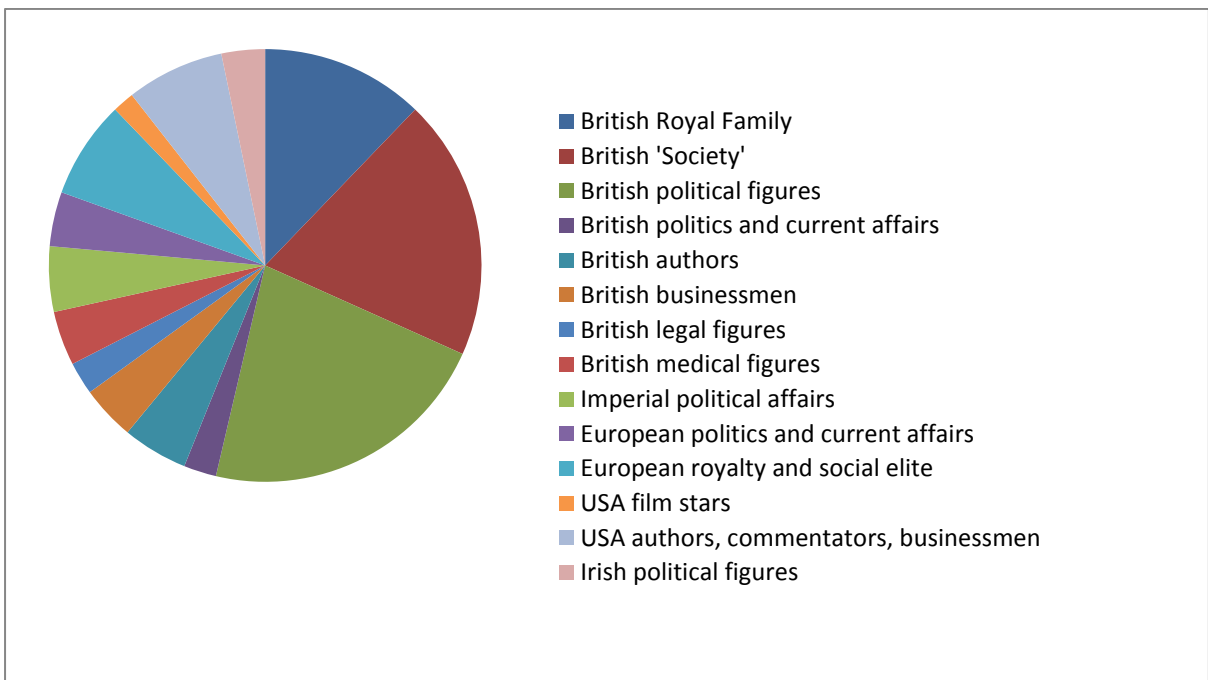


Fig 14. *News of the World* (1922).<sup>234</sup>

<sup>233</sup> *Evening Standard*, 2 January 1922, 13 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 28 November 1922.

<sup>234</sup> *News of the World*, 22 January 1922, 4 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 5 November 1922.

## 1930

In the *Daily Express* gossip column of 1930, discussion of Society figures and their lifestyles was still the most prominent topic at 24% of the sample (Fig. 15). For example, paragraph four of fifteen on 28 January 1930 announced the 'surprise engagement' of 'Lady Millicent Taylour and Mr Henry Tiarks' and paragraph five discussed the couple's shared love of hunting.<sup>235</sup> However, the varied backgrounds of individuals that were now publicised in the feature meant that its celebrity content now more closely resembled the diverse and international scope of the *Mirror* and *News of the World* of 1922: this included British diplomats like Sir John Tilley and Sir Francis Lindley who was celebrated by the columnist as a 'great traveller' and 'hunter' and publicity for the latest novel *St Vitus' Day* by Stephen Graham.<sup>236</sup> In 1922 there were eight different types of subject within the sample, however by 1930 this had more than doubled to twenty categories. Whereas there had been no discussion of British political affairs in the sample of 1922, 7% of 1930's sample discussed British political figures in the context of their current work on behalf of the British government. For example, on 28 January 1930 the first three paragraphs assessed the progress of British delegates at the international naval conference and questioned whether 'British interests' were being met in the context of the 'strong' personality of French Premier 'Tardieu...who knows what he wants'.<sup>237</sup> In this example, the personal opinion and political knowledge of the gossip columnist was present and this was a major change within the print persona of the *Express* columnist by 1930: in 1922 the *Express* columnist described the dress and activities of Society figures but never directly offered his opinion. Other new categories of celebrity found in the *Express* in 1930 were as socially diverse as the former

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<sup>235</sup> *Express*, 28 January 1930.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 January 1930, 30 June 1930.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 January 1930.

'Gaiety Girl' the West End theatre star Rosie Boote, the Maharajah of Alwar, Luigi 'the richest waiter in London', guidebook author and social commentator, Paul Cohen-Portheim, and the column also included praise for the work of bohemian, intellectual and controversial author Ronald Firbank.<sup>238</sup> A key change in the content of the columns of both the *Mail* and the *Express* of 1930 was a reduction of paragraph space devoted to Society women. For example, on 28 June 1922 the *Express's* gossip column had used 75% of its space naming Society women and discussing their dress at events like Wimbledon and a private dance in London.<sup>239</sup> In 1930 however the *Express's* gossip column of 28 January 1930 was more evenly divided with 54% of figures discussed being men like politician 'Mr Neville Chamberlain' and 46% focusing on women like young Society lady 'Lady Millicent Taylour'.<sup>240</sup> This new gender diversity of the gossip feature was met by a new, broader geography of the gossip column and celebrity culture. Whereas the column of the early 1920s had followed Society from London to the country according to the social calendar and royalty from palace to public engagement, the content of the column was now mainly focused on leisure and entertainment venues of the metropolis and not those only open to Society. For example, on 30 June 1930 the columnist enthused about the 'wonderful carnival of sport' in London at 'Wimbledon, Lord's...swimmers in the Serpentine, the Greyhound Derby in White City'.<sup>241</sup> With a more demotic and metropolitan content, the gossip feature's tone was now injected with a pace and variability, a sense of vitality, which had not been present in the stately language of the column in 1922. Also, the columnist's outlook had become much more international in comparison to 1922, as chapter seven

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 28 January 1930, 30 June 1930, 15 August 1930, 8 November 1930.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 28 June 1922.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 28 January 1930.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 30 June 1930.

discusses in detail: 34% of the column discussed foreign figures from Europe, Empire and the US and international political and current affairs in 1930, compared with 5% in 1922.<sup>242</sup>

No longer just a clothes and Society expert as the columnist had been in 1922, he now offered information on the latest developments within consumer culture like in paragraph four on 15 August 1930 when he discussed the increased popularity of photography with the advent of the 'cheap camera'.<sup>243</sup> Another example of the columnist's new interest in a consumer culture outside fashionable dress was seen in paragraph fifteen of fifteen on 28 January 1930, when he provided a detailed description of the new type of tennis racket used by British 'lawn tennis champion...Mr Tilden': 'a racket strung with fine, but not too fine, blue gut'.<sup>244</sup> The columnist's discussion of Tilden also heralded the entrance of another type of celebrity figure in the gossip column by 1930, the sport's champion. The commentary on Tilden provided a sense of the tennis star's personality and the essence of his champion status, which in turn helped to promote a consumer culture around sports equipment: for example, the columnist wrote that Tilden found it 'impudent...to arrive on a tennis court with less than four rackets'.<sup>245</sup> The increasingly vibrant tone of the gossip column and the more varied set of topics discussed in the column of 1930, was largely due, I argue, to the new print persona of the columnist. Now a gossip feature with three columns of eleven to sixteen paragraphs, as opposed to the single gossip column of five to ten paragraphs in the sample of 1922, the feature was now signed by an author who worked under the pseudonym 'Dragoman'.<sup>246</sup> With the addition of the pseudonym came suggestions of the lively and sometimes acerbic personality of the gossip columnist,

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<sup>242</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>243</sup> *Express.*, 15 August 1930.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 January 1930.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 January 1930, 30 June 1930, 15 August 1930, 8 November 1930.

particularly when he talked about the latest fashion trends: in January 1930 he mocked the 'frowsily-dressed' women who waited at stage doors to see theatre 'stars' like 'Miss Tallulah Bankhead and Mr Novello', mocking not only their fashion choices but their 'stage-door habit' and the celebrity culture that fuelled this. He also presented his amusement and surprise that 'dinner jackets' were the suggested attire for men skating in London in the evenings which presented a more sensible and practical side to his personality.<sup>247</sup>

Like 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* in 1922, some of the narrative of the *Express* column was framed around the 'Dragoman's' participation in the consumer and leisure culture of the metropolis. For example, in paragraphs four and five on 30 June 1930, the 'Dragoman' provided a critical review of the Royal Air Force Pageant. Although he stated that there had been some impressive 'acrobatic flying' he was not convinced that he had 'his money's worth' from the event.<sup>248</sup> Here the gossip columnist's personal transformation into a cultural critic as well as a sensible and active consumer by 1930 was again evidenced. Evidence from the gossip feature also suggested that he was a commentator on religious affairs, as he described who and what he saw at the 'High Mass of the Anglo-Catholic Congress' at Stamford Bridge Football Ground.<sup>249</sup> In three paragraphs he combined social and cultural commentary on this event, describing the newspaper that was on sale each day, with its 'ecclesiastical gossip column' and 'crossword', and listed the attendance of Society guests including 'Lord Lloyd and Lady Cynthia Colville'.<sup>250</sup> Unusually where Society was involved, the columnist described some of the tensions and potential dangers at this

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 28 January 1930.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 30 June 1930.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

event, writing that 'abusive leaflets' had been placed on some of the 'guests motor cars'.<sup>251</sup>

Whereas in the early 1920s, Society attendance at events had always been described by the columnist in an opulent, calm and serene manner, here Society figures were presented in a social context which clearly contained some conflict and controversy.

The *Express's* gossip column of 1930 with its direct discussion of religion and politics as well as fashion and consumer innovations meant that gossip had become a feature of current affairs in a broader sense; it had widened its focus from royalty and Society through the development of the personalised style and personality of the gossip columnist. His interest in fashionable clothing was tempered with a confident knowledge of national and imperial political affairs and international relations. He was up-to-date with the latest productions in the West End and the latest novels that were released which suggested his expertise on a range of cultural developments, but was wary of the obsessive behaviour of female fans towards actors and suggested that there was a limit to how far fads in clothing fashions could be taken seriously. Whilst in some senses the 'Dragoman' displayed a modest and sensible attitude towards consumer and celebrity culture, which implied that he had a fairly simple and respectable lifestyle, he also combined this with a fascination in expensive and exclusive leisure pursuits. For example, on 13 August 1930 the final three paragraphs of the gossip feature excitedly described a wealthy and cosmopolitan social elite's gambling habits at the lavish Monte Carlo casino.<sup>252</sup> In June 1930, he revealed news from 'a friend' in Paris about the scenes and fashions at the Paris Grand Prix.<sup>253</sup> In this sense, the columnist had a split, complex print persona: conservative in his attitudes towards certain aspects of consumer and leisure culture but still intrigued by a wealthy social elite's social life both at

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 13 August 1930.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 30 June 1930.

home and abroad. His disclosure that a 'friend' rather than a correspondent had sent him information about the Paris Grand Prix also added a personal element to the column, suggesting that personal rather than journalistic networks fuelled the column's content. It also hinted that the gossip columnist might be of a wealthy background with Society connections.<sup>254</sup>

The personality of the columnist was also a central aspect of the gossip features in the *Standard* and *Sketch* in 1930 (Fig. 19 and Fig. 18). Both seemed bold and assertive characters but in different ways: 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* appeared to be highly sociable and gregarious describing the Society figures with which he had 'supped and dined', 'The Londoner' of the *Standard* seemed intelligent, knowledgeable and confident in his views, on 8 January 1930 he wrote that the 'circumlocution inherent in large employment schemes' needs to be stopped and in June that 'Mr Edward Marsh...a dutiful civil servant' would have made a good MP if he had spent 'less time' on his hobbies and social life.<sup>255</sup> This hinted at a key difference within these two gossip features: as in 1922, the *Sketch* celebrated Society lifestyle mainly in the metropolis and discussed the Society figures the columnist encountered in restaurants and theatres, and the *Standard* primarily focused on the work and personalities of political figures mainly in Britain. For example, 29% of the *Standard's* column focused on political figures and national political affairs and 6% of the sample discussed Society figures. 47% of the column's coverage in the *Sketch* was of Society figures like 'Mrs Claude Beddington' and 'Captain Robert Bridgeman' and Society events such as the

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> *Sketch*, 15 January 1930. *Standard*, 8 January 1930, 13 June 1930.

columnist's report on the 'preparations for Ascot', and there was no discussion of British politicians or national political affairs.<sup>256</sup>

As the pie chart shows, the *Daily Mirror* of 1930 still discussed a broad range of British figures outside of the traditional upper-class confines of Society, as it had done in 1922 (Fig. 17). These included British political figures (2%) like 'Lord Fitzmaurice' who the columnist had announced had spent 'sixty-two' years in 'Parliament', British sporting figures (2%), British authors and academics (7%) like 'Mr Osbert Sitwell', British artists (2%), 'Augustus John is to create the scenery for the opera *The Damnation of Faust*' and British church figures (5%), 'Dr John Mozley is one of the youngest canons of St Paul's'.<sup>257</sup> Also, the work of British legal figures were discussed (2% of the sample) such as the announcement on 25 August 1930 that 'Lord Tomlin' was 'leading a trip' of around 'fifty English lawyers' to the US, as were British military figures: 'Rambler' informed his readers of military developments when he stated in November 1930 that 'The new General Officer Commanding in Chief' will be an individual who is interested in the mechanisation of the army.<sup>258</sup> Such statements presented the reader with a sense of certain professional and military figures' important roles and celebrity within Britain but also kept readers updated on current affairs. A noticeable change between the *Mirror* columns of 1922 and 1930 was the nearly four times rise in the percentage of column space devoted to what I have labelled 'columnist anecdote'. For example, in 1922 'anecdote' occupied 11% of column space and British Society figures occupied 15% of column space. In 1930 however, Society figures seemed to have been edged out by the personality of the columnist with 40% of the column space

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 10 June 1930.

<sup>257</sup> *Mirror*, 24 January 1930, 20 June 1930, 25 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 25 August 1930, 30 November 1930.

devoted to 'anecdote' and 5% British Society figures.<sup>259</sup> The columnist as entertainer was seen in a story of a 'friend' who was seated at a dinner party 'between his dentist and collector of taxes', and a 'woman from the country' who did not know what 'the kitchen tap did'.<sup>260</sup> Also, on 25 June 1930 he wrote of a 'parrot' in the exclusive 'Hans Square' in London who 'confuses taxi drivers' by imitating those who hail a taxi cab.<sup>261</sup> However, even if the coverage of Society was declining in the *Mirror* of 1930 there were still undertones of their leisure and consumer culture and lifestyle within these stories like the reference to the exclusive 'Hans Square' and attendance at dinner parties. These themes can be read as suggestive of the Society status of the columnist, the enjoyment that readers received from stories about London life and consumer and leisure culture, and a new determination of the columnist to entertain and engage readers in a lively and personable way. As in 1922, the *News of the World* remained anonymously authored and normally continued with its traditional opening paragraphs of the discussion of the royal family's public engagements, like on 1 June 1930 with its discussion of the 'Queen's dining arrangements for Derby night'.<sup>262</sup> Without the injection of the personality of the gossip columnist, the representation of celebrity culture retained the structure it had followed since the war (Fig. 20).

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A key change from the gossip columns of 1922, was that five of the six gossip columns in the national press (rather than three of six in 1922: *Mirror*, *Standard*, *Sketch*) were written in a

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<sup>259</sup> *Mirror*, 24 January 1930, 20 June 1930, 25 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 January 1930.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 June 1930.

<sup>262</sup> *News of the World*, 1 June 1930.

personal style by 1930. This ‘personal style’ meant that the lively, young male columnists of the *Express*, *Mail* and *Sketch* columns all told the reader about his own social life amongst Society, informing the public of the latest consumer fashions and the latest forms of entertainment, usually in the metropolis. Although ‘the Londoner’ of the *Standard* did not talk about his own experiences enjoying Society nightlife I have shown that he confidently offered his opinion on political figures and developments. The *Mirror* columnist ‘Rambler’ also showed a personalised approach as he consistently tried to entertain and engage his audience with jokes and amusing stories. It was only the *News of the World* that retained its formal, anonymously authored stance, however it still contained the diverse range of subjects that it had in 1922 from Society figures to businessmen.

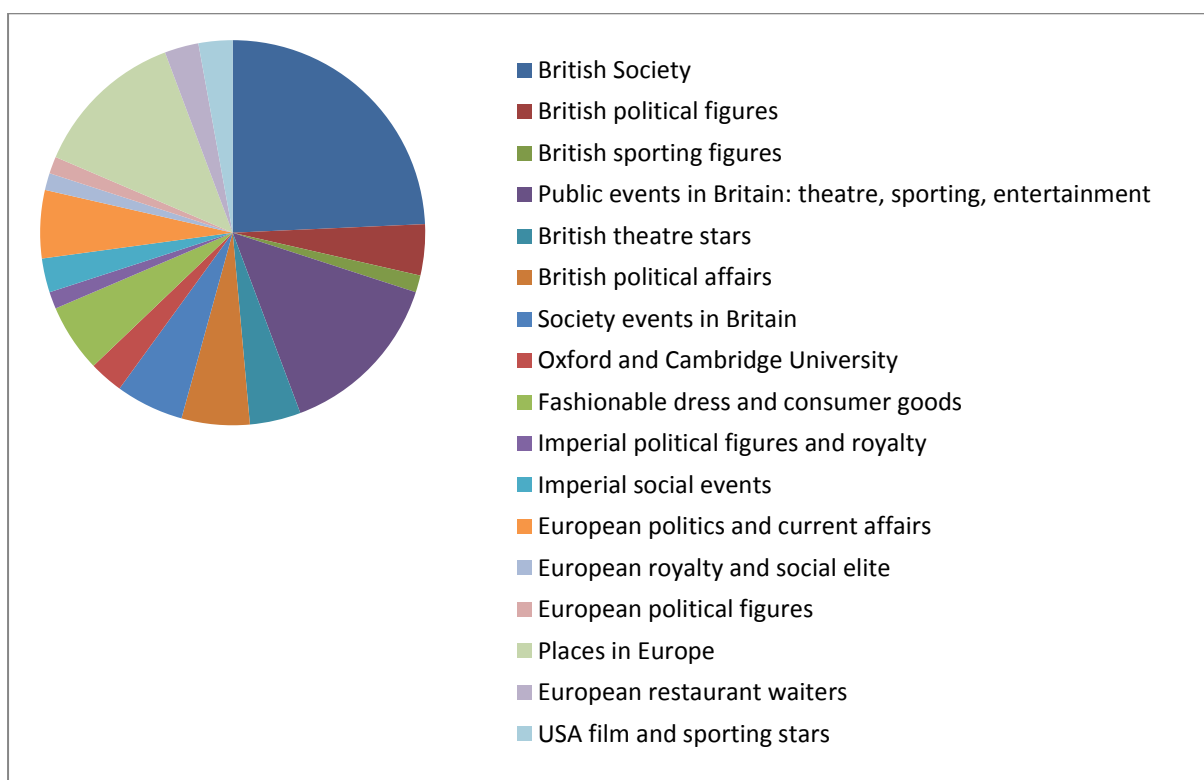


Fig 15. Types of subjects, *Express*, 1930.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>263</sup> *Daily Express*, 28 January 1930, 30 June 1930, 15 August 1930, 8 November 1930.

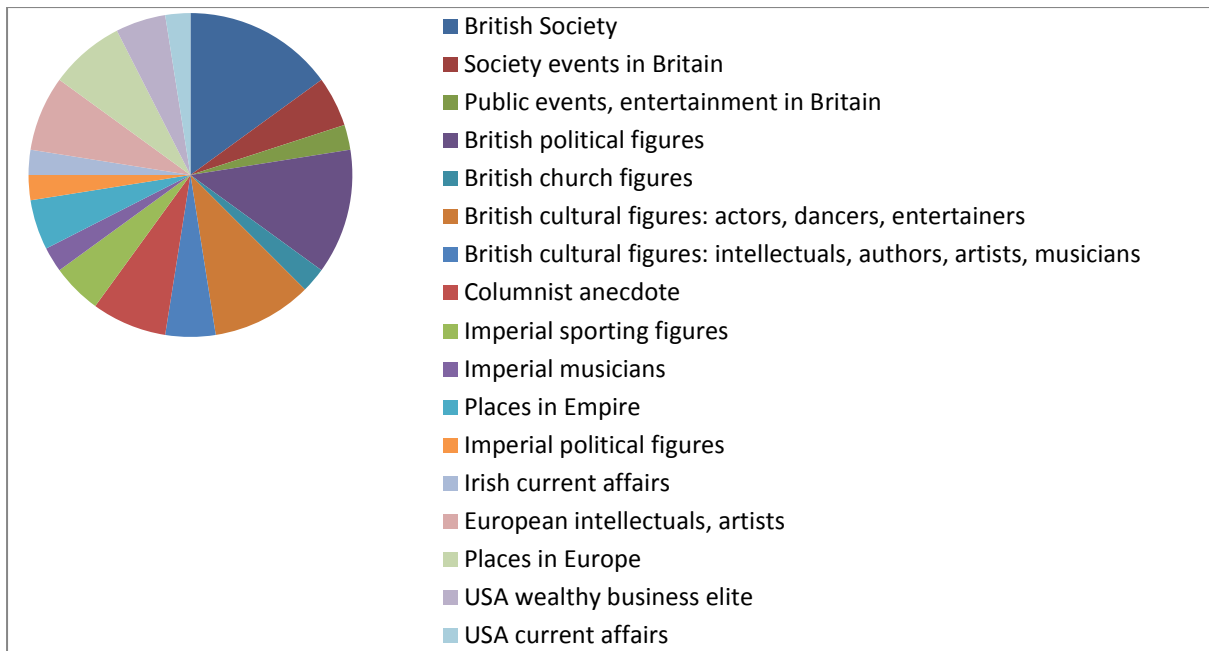
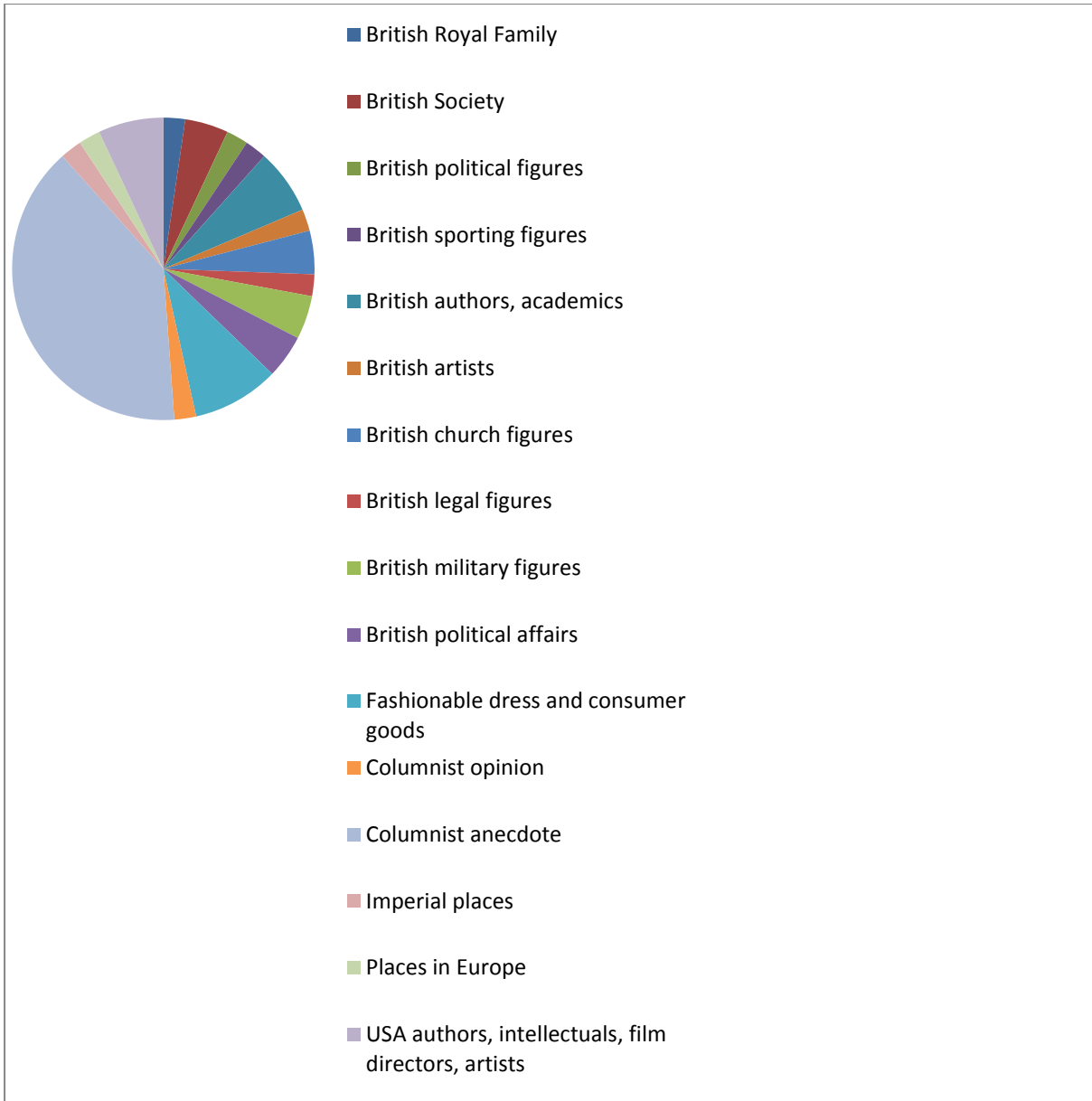


Fig 16. Types of subjects, *Mail* (1930).<sup>264</sup>

<sup>264</sup> *Daily Mail*, 9 January 1930, 5 June 1930, 4 August 1930, 28 November 1930.



**Fig 17. Types of subjects, *Mirror* (1930).**<sup>265</sup>

<sup>265</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 24 January 1930, 20 June 1930, 25 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

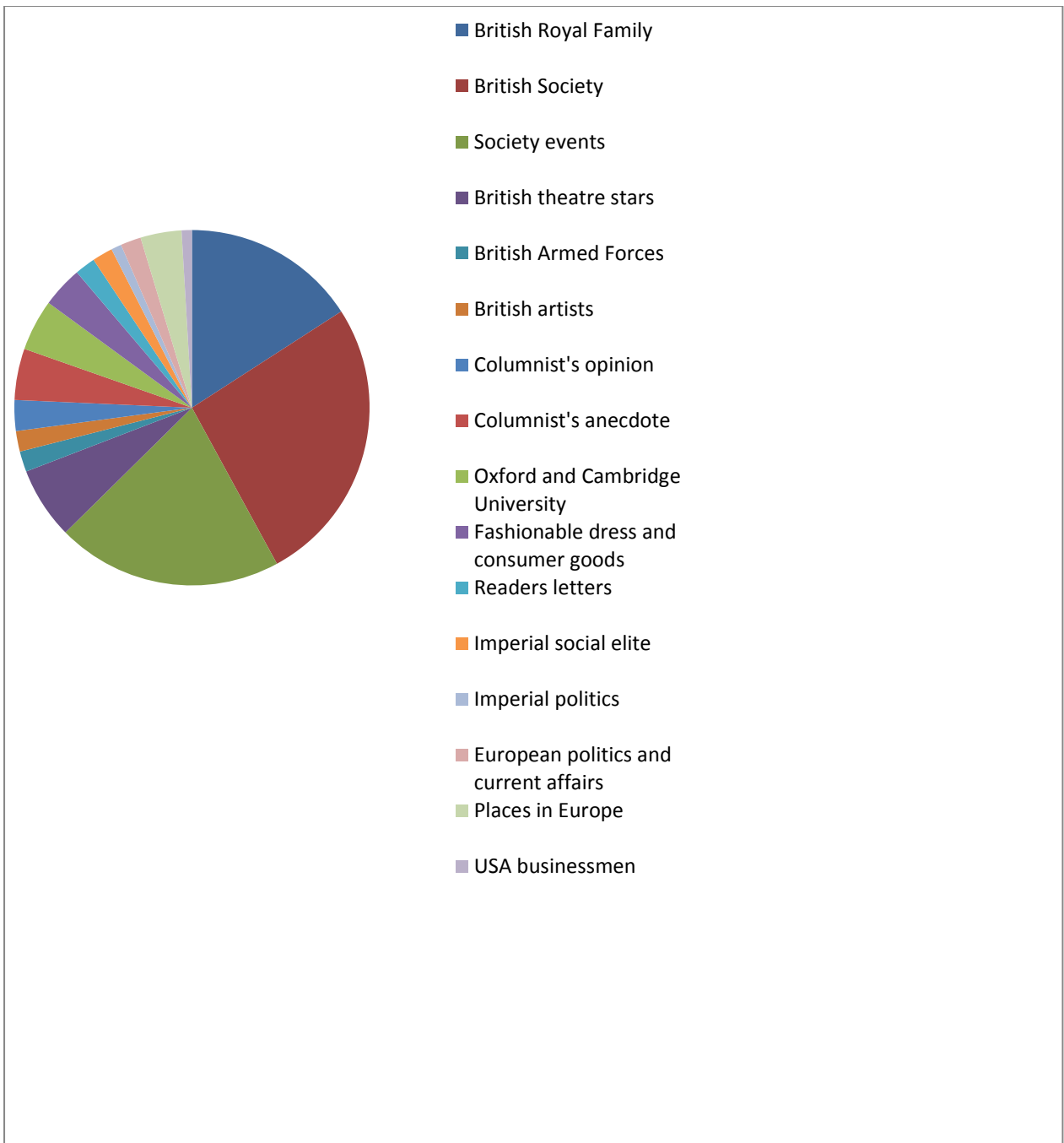


Fig 18. Types of subjects, *Sketch* (1930).<sup>266</sup>

<sup>266</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 15 January 1930, 10 June 1930, 2 August 1930, 17 November 1930.

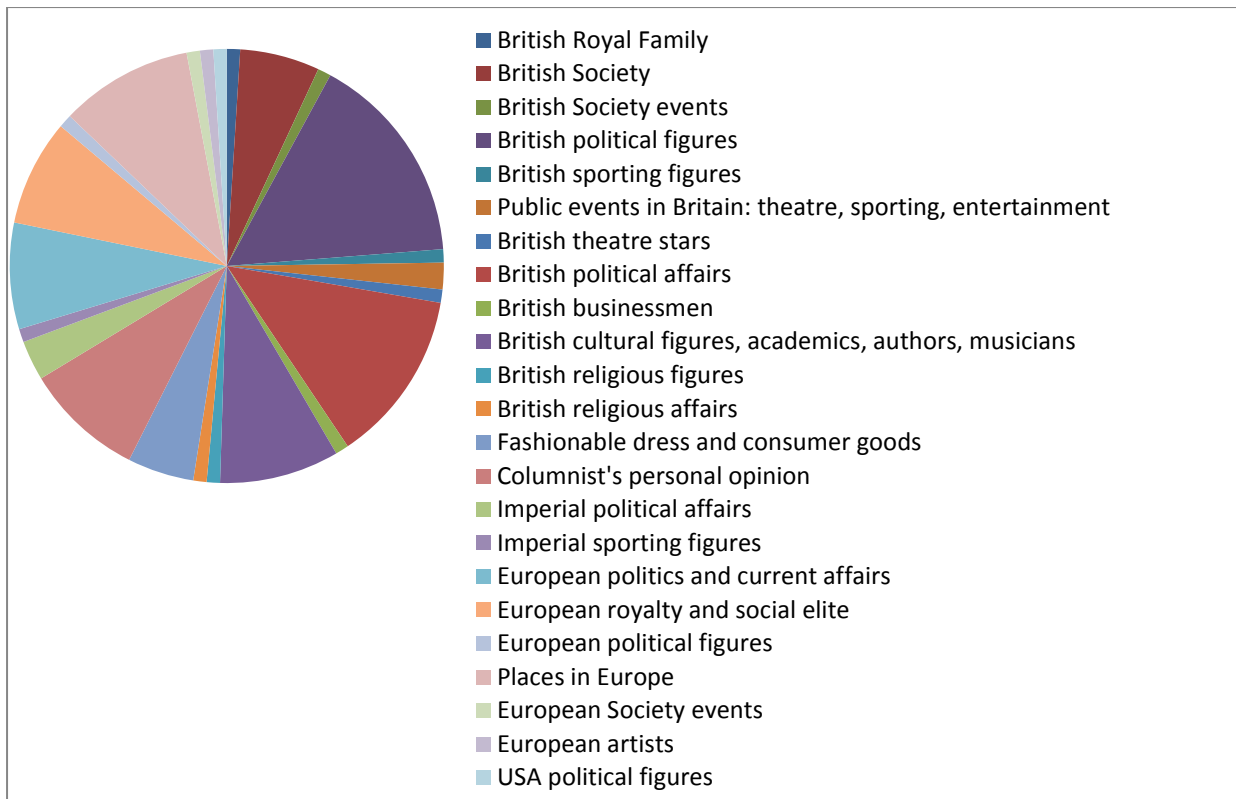


Fig 19. Types of subjects, *Standard* (1930).<sup>267</sup>

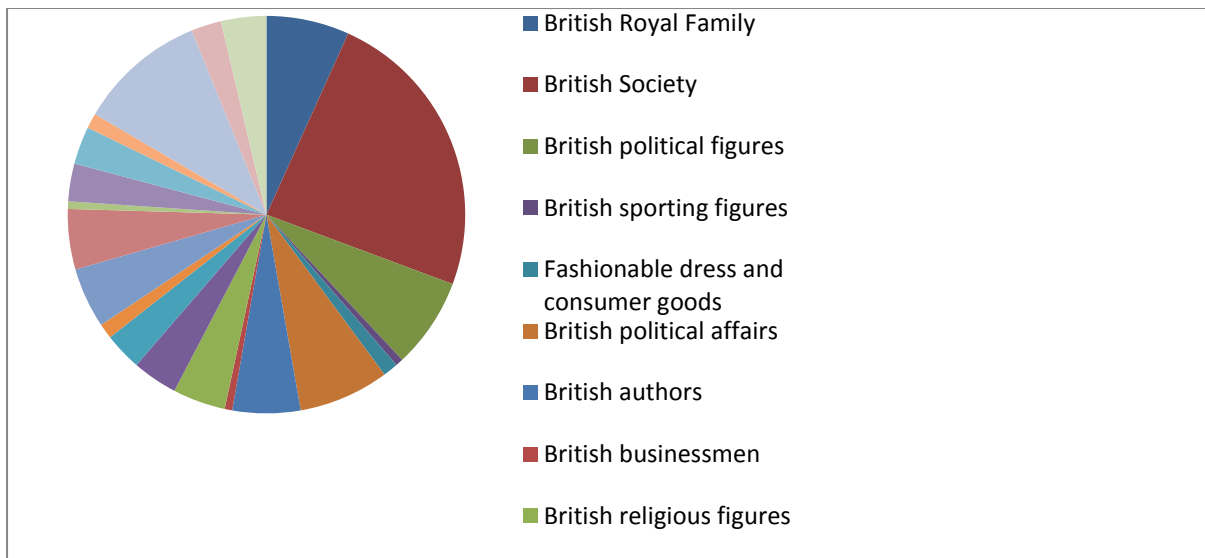


Fig 20. Types of subjects, *News of the World*, 1930.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>267</sup> *Evening Standard*, 8 January 1930, 13 June 1930, 18 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

<sup>268</sup> *News of the World*, 5 January 1930, 1 June 1930, 10 August 1930, 2 November 1930.

## 1938

In 1938, both the *Mail* and *Express's* gossip columnists continued with the personalised approach of the columnist begun by 1930. This involved a discussion of their daily activities and personal interests. For instance, the *Mail's* new columnist Charles Graves described his enjoyment of cricket and tennis. On 3 August 1938, he excitedly discussed England's prospects against the 'Australians' in the 'final test' at the 'Oval' and on 11 January 1938 enthusiastically announced that the tennis tournaments were about to begin on the French Riviera.<sup>269</sup> Like the *Mirror's* 'Rambler' of 1930, Graves also entertained and engaged the reader with amusing stories, making light of the threat of war in November 1938 by referring to the pleasurable activity of visiting London Zoo. For instance, he took macabre delight in describing the zoo's evacuation plans and the chaotic scenes that would ensue: he wrote that the plans involved 'chopping off the heads of poisonous snakes', and 'as for the lions and tigers, there are snipers available to shoot these should there be an escape following the explosion of a bomb'.<sup>270</sup> As in 1930, the personalised approach of the columnist meant another reduction in both the *Express's* and the *Mail's* coverage of Society figures in the gossip column: in comparison to the sample of 1930, the *Mail's* discussion of Society figures had reduced by over half, and in the *Express* Society coverage had again halved from 24% in 1930 to 12% in 1938 (fig. 20). This was due to the columnist's varied personal interests from politics to philosophy and Society. For example, in the *Express* of 21 January 1938 new columnist 'William Hickey' gave a brief biographical outline of the new 'Socialist candidate for Henley-on-Thames...Wogan Philipps' (who was also a Society figure), and the columnist also gave a synopsis of a new philosophy book he had read that he would

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<sup>269</sup> *Mail*, 11 January 1938.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 November 1938.

recommend.<sup>271</sup> He was interested in theatre and design, writing on 24 June 1938 that 'Robert Medley' had just won the 'curtain design' competition at the 'Old Vic' and also remained interested in Society lifestyle announcing the death of Lady Strathmore and describing a recent party at 'Lady Moore's house in Grosvenor Square'.<sup>272</sup> 'Hickey' also tried to involve the views and personalities of readers directly in his column which was another example of the personalisation of the gossip column, for instance, three paragraphs of eight on 21 January 1938 were quotations from readers letters.<sup>273</sup> In contrast the 'lowbrow' *News of the World* still retained its anonymous, serious tone in its profiling of celebrity figures, yet it did resemble the *Mail* and the *Express* in the diverse range of figures it discussed such as British military figures (12% of the sample, fig. 24) like 'Major-General APD Smolett', and five paragraphs on the legal career and family background of Lord Amulree.<sup>274</sup> There was also discussion of the British royal family (12% of the sample) like the 'Duke of Kent' and Society (11%) with several paragraphs profiling the role of Viscount Halifax in the royal household and a discussion of his 'fine figure' due to his 'active outdoor lifestyle'.<sup>275</sup>

As had always been the case in the *Standard*, the largest category of discussion was British political figures (20%) and in 1938 the 'Londoner's' commentaries often insinuated the looming threat of war in Europe and the political tensions over appeasement in Britain, for instance on 22 June 1938 paragraphs 2-3 described how 'Air Minister', 'Sir Kingsley Wood' planned 'to do more flying' and also to 'increase the size of the R.A.F.'<sup>276</sup> This curious blend of personal commentary on Wood's hobbies, followed by the secondary casual and understated remark about the national plans for rearmament, could be regarded as

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<sup>271</sup> *Express*, 21 January 1938.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 June 1938.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 January 1938.

<sup>274</sup> *News of the World*, 9 January 1938.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 June 1938.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 June 1938.

evidence of the paper's policy to play down the threat of war and its support for appeasement. For instance, a similar theme was present in a paragraph on Winston Churchill on 3 January 1938, where his personal interests and hobbies were emphasised over his political views and activities: 'Mr Churchill is in France, making the last improvements to his Life of Marlborough'.<sup>277</sup> In fact, in a column that had always prioritised discussion of national politics over figures such as royalty and Society, the national political issue of possible war in Europe was understated. For example, on 3 January 1938 the columnist provided a detailed history of the Order of the Garter and the Order of the Bath, and the history of peerages in the 'Lindsay' and 'Lindsey' family, discussed the persistent confusion surrounding the other titles of the 'two Lord Hastings' and made an engagement announcement for Society couple 'Mr Oliver Bagot and Miss Annette Stephens'.<sup>278</sup> 'The Londoner', which as the examples from earlier in the period show, had often offered forthright opinions on the work of government and politicians, now appeared much less committed to offering his opinion on political figures or the national political situation. For example, on 18 November 1938, the Londoner explained that 'Six businessmen' were 'to advise Mr Chamberlain on rearmament'. Rather than offer any comment on the implications of this meeting in the context of a possible war, the columnist went on to profile one of the committee member's lifestyle: 'Mr Peter Bennett, a supplier of accessories to leading car manufacturers...takes only one holiday a year, at Christmas, and he keeps fit by hiking'.<sup>279</sup> Such an approach, more likely to be found in 'Mr Gossip's' profiles of Society figures, was surprising in the context of the column's history as a forum for discussion of parliamentary debates and criticism of powerful figures work in the public

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 3 January 1938.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 18 November 1938.

sphere, and a space where the columnist had developed a persona as an intelligent, educated critic. This evidence again suggested the influence of editorial policy on shaping the columnist's print persona. As the threat of war increased the *Standard* columnist's print persona had changed to become less politically engaged.

If the *Standard's* column reflected a distancing from the political issue of war in 1938, then the *Mirror's* gossip column had undergone a distancing from celebrity. By 1938 a major change had taken place in the *Mirror's* gossip feature. 'Godfrey Winn's Personality Parade' which had begun in 1936 ended at the beginning of 1938. Winn's column was unlike that in the other 'pictorial paper' the *Sketch*. He had rarely publicly celebrated Society figures, authors, artists or film stars, preferring to discuss the views and personalities of 'ordinary' people he met in everyday life like the 'out of work engineer from a depressed area' on 15 January 1937.<sup>280</sup> His avoidance of the celebrity culture found in most other newspaper gossip columns however was somewhat ironic, as he had mainly used his 'personality page' to discuss his own personality, daily activities and lifestyle. For example, on 18 August 1936 he gave an entertaining account of how he had survived 'London in a heat wave'.<sup>281</sup> There is no pie chart categorising the celebrities within the *Mirror's* gossip column of 1938 as there were no celebrities- no Society figures, actors, artists or politicians- either named or discussed. Instead the 'Personality Parade', which was authored by a range of different authors after Winn left in 1937, focused on the stories of 'ordinary' people.<sup>282</sup> For example, on 11 June 1938 'Clive Daly', 'an ordinary young man, a waiter' was introduced as that day's author of the 'Personality Parade'.<sup>283</sup> A large picture of the young, attractive London waiter

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<sup>280</sup> *Mirror*, 18 August 1936, 27 November 1936, 15 January 1937, 7 June 1937.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.* 18 August 1936.

<sup>282</sup> *Mirror*, 11 June 1938.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

in his work uniform featured at the top- right of the page and the guest columnist went on to describe his favourite places. Presenting himself as a thoughtful, sensitive and contemplative figure who enjoyed a quiet social life, he described a place where he liked to go and think by himself, 'a secluded part of the cliffs at Bournemouth, I call Poet's Corner'.<sup>284</sup> Although a waiter living and working in London, Daly's distancing from metropolitan nightlife made him seem a more complex, less straight-forward character than 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch*. Mr Gossip also lived and worked in the metropolis but proudly celebrated his participation in the theatre and entertainments culture of London and his personality expressed through an enthusiastic, lively, excitable style seemed suited to the busy and hectic nightlife of London he described.

Other authors of the 'Personality Parade' distanced themselves from the metropolis and Society. Female journalists became authors of the feature who used their names as bylines like Eileen Ascroft and Pamela Frankau, and this was notable as men had dominated the authorship of newspaper gossip throughout the period.<sup>285</sup> Eileen Ascroft, did not reference Society lifestyles at all in her features and instead provided her opinion on those 'ordinary' people i.e. outside the upper-class, involved in extraordinary and sensational 'Human News Stories' from around the country that she said she had read about in the national press.<sup>286</sup> For example, her paragraphs included the sensational titles: 'His Wife Tortured by Love', 'Doctor's Wife Leaves Prison', 'Mother's Inhuman Neglect'.<sup>287</sup> Here Ascroft utilised descriptions of personal and private dramas that had not been used in gossip columns

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>286</sup> *Mirror*, 7 September 1938.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

before, and themes that certainly had never been attached to the descriptions of Society figures. Such an approach suggested her change in working-style and office-based approach in contrast to Winn, 'The Dragoman', 'Onlooker' and 'Mr Gossip' who gathered their gossip as they travelled around the metropolis and talked to people. Frankau utilised themes of Society and the metropolis to show her personal aversion towards the 'snobs' at first night performances in the West End. Presumably referring to the kind of Society figures that 'Mr Gossip' regularly described he had seen in the theatre, Frankau stated that 'snobs' just wanted publicity and to be regarded as both intelligent and fashionable when really they had no interest in the play that they were supposed to be engaging with.<sup>288</sup> This approach undermined both the integrity of the West End theatre as a place of the arts and exposed the fake behaviour and ulterior motives of the Society figures that attended. Frankau had been introduced by Winn in his column as 'honest, clear-cut and sincere' with 'a sense of humour as well as that sense of understanding' which Winn described rather mysteriously as a result of her 'having seen all sides of life'.<sup>289</sup> This complex combination of mystery, morality and respectability surrounding Frankau's print persona as a journalist- the limited information the reader received about her lifestyle- reflected but also contradicted the celebrity persona of the Society female of the *Mail's* 'Court and Society' in 1922. For example, the reader presumed the Society woman's respectability as a result of the columnist's writing style with his description of her dress, her presence at Society events and reference to her title, but the stylistic limits of the column meant that they could only guess about her personality. If the Society woman was deemed respectable as a result of the way the columnist described her public life, then in 1938 Winn asked the readers to confirm Frankau's authority as a columnist because she had a certain amount of unspecified

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<sup>288</sup> *Mirror*, 5 February 1937.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1937.

life experience. There were differences between definitions of authority and respectability here: the Society women were deemed respectable because of their outward appearance, titles and attendance at public functions, and because of their social class. However, Frankau's authority as a columnist came from a complex combination of her femininity and her intellectual skills as a writer, her 'economy of expression, elegance, wit' rather than her appearance (although she was referred to as a 'modern young girl'), and her mental ability or emotional intelligence to 'understand' 'ordinary' people's life experiences.<sup>290</sup> Although there were significant differences between the *Mail* and *Mirror's* representation of the Society woman's and Frankau's public status, it was the gaps in their representation which seemed to fuel their celebrity personas throughout the period. For example, the reader knew how the Society figure dressed and about her social life but little about her views. However, Frankau seemed very bold in her views, demonstrated in the paragraph headings of one of her features 'Shut Up!', 'Don't be so Amazed!', yet the reader knew little about her private life, social life and lifestyle apart from that she was a journalist.<sup>291</sup>

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This section has shown that by 1938 there was a decrease in focus on Society figures in the gossip columns of the *Mail* and *Express* compared to 1930. In the *Express*, as chapter five analyses, discussion of Europe dominated the gossip column (41% of column space) in comparison to discussion of British Society figures (12% of column space). The commentary on Europe in this popular national daily in fact exceeded that found in the column of the *Evening Standard* (34% space), a column which had always prided itself on its focus on questions of politics throughout the period. The reasons for the *Mail's* decrease in its

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid. 5 February 1937.

coverage of Society figures from 40% of column space in 1930 to 15% in 1938, was due, I argue, to columnist, novelist and critic Graves's print persona as a 'man of the world' rather than the 'man-about-town'. I have shown however that this man-of-the-world persona was not particularly presented in an intellectual sense, which was perhaps surprising in his other guise as a well-known novelist and critic, but was associated with his fascination for international cricketers and tennis stars and his interest in American culture and film stars like Fred Astaire and Gary Cooper.<sup>292</sup> The only column which had retained a similar amount of coverage publicising Society figures over the 1930s was the *Sketch*: the 26% Society coverage in 1930 increased to 29% by 1938. In contrast, the *Express* had reached the top sales position of national dailies by the end of the period with sales nearing 2.5 million copies, whereas the *Sketch's* sales figures had reduced by 1937.<sup>293</sup> This suggests that columns with less of a Society focus were more attractive to readers by 1938.

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<sup>292</sup> *Mail*, 9 November 1938.

<sup>293</sup> See Introduction and PEP, *Report* (1938), pp. 116-121.

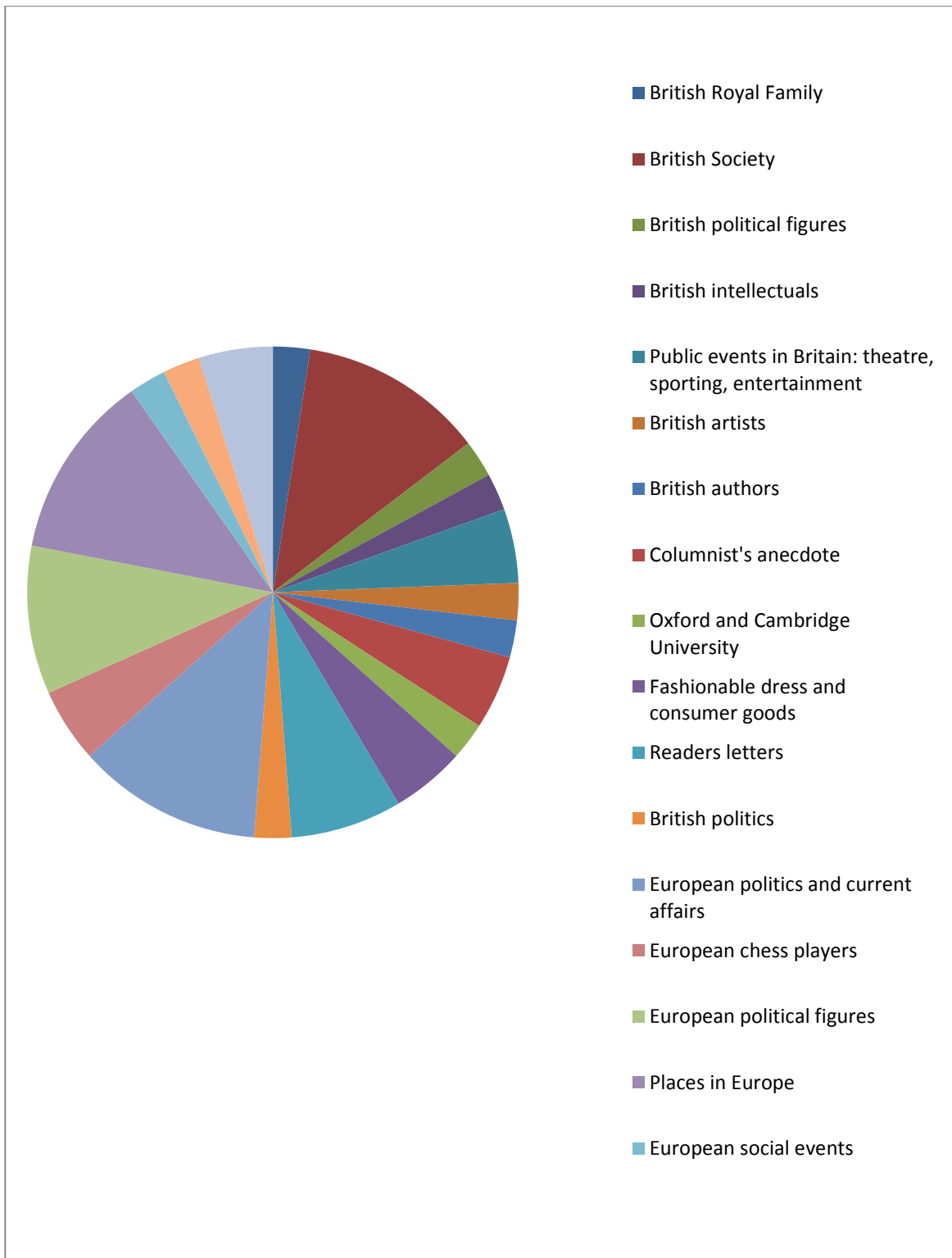
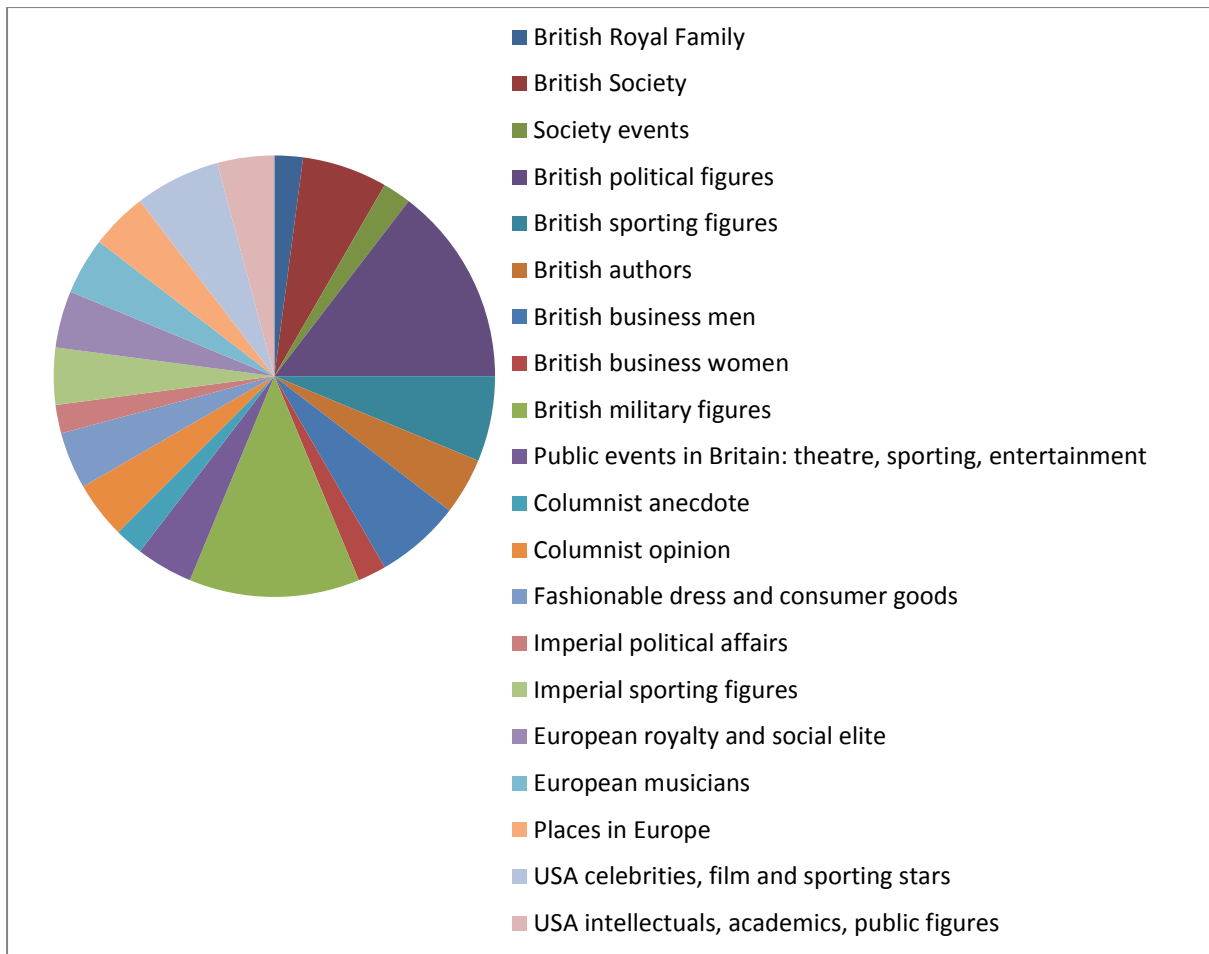


Fig 20. Types of subjects, *Express* (1938).<sup>294</sup>

<sup>294</sup> *Express*, 21 January 1938, 24 June 1938, 26 August 1938, 9 November 1938.



**Fig 21. Types of subjects, *Mail* (1938).**<sup>295</sup>

<sup>295</sup> *Mail*, 11 January 1938, 21 June 1938, 3 August 1938, 9 November 1938.

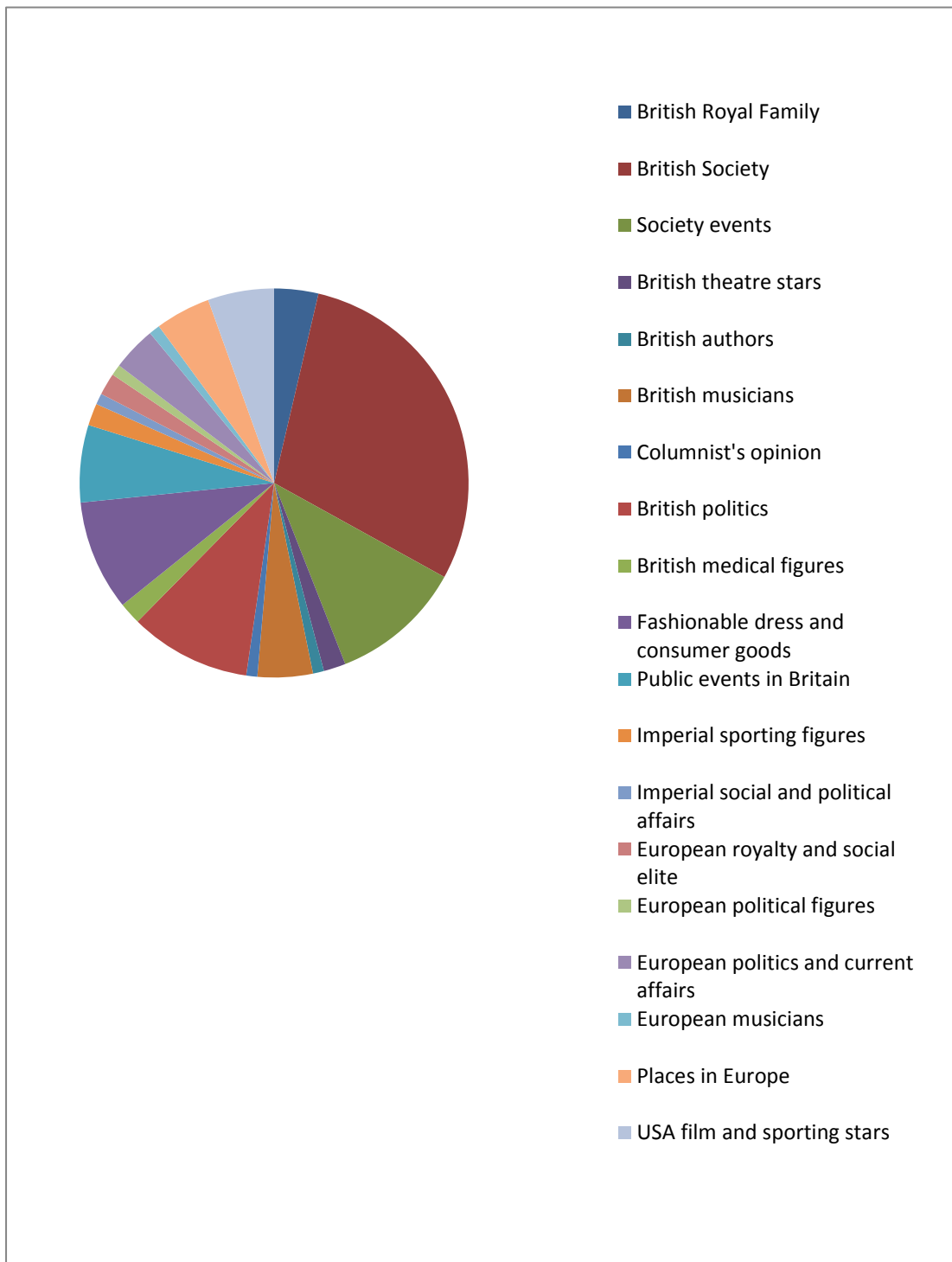


Fig 22. Types of subjects, *Sketch (1938)*.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>296</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 4 January 1938, 13 June 1938, 6 August 1938, 5 November 1938.

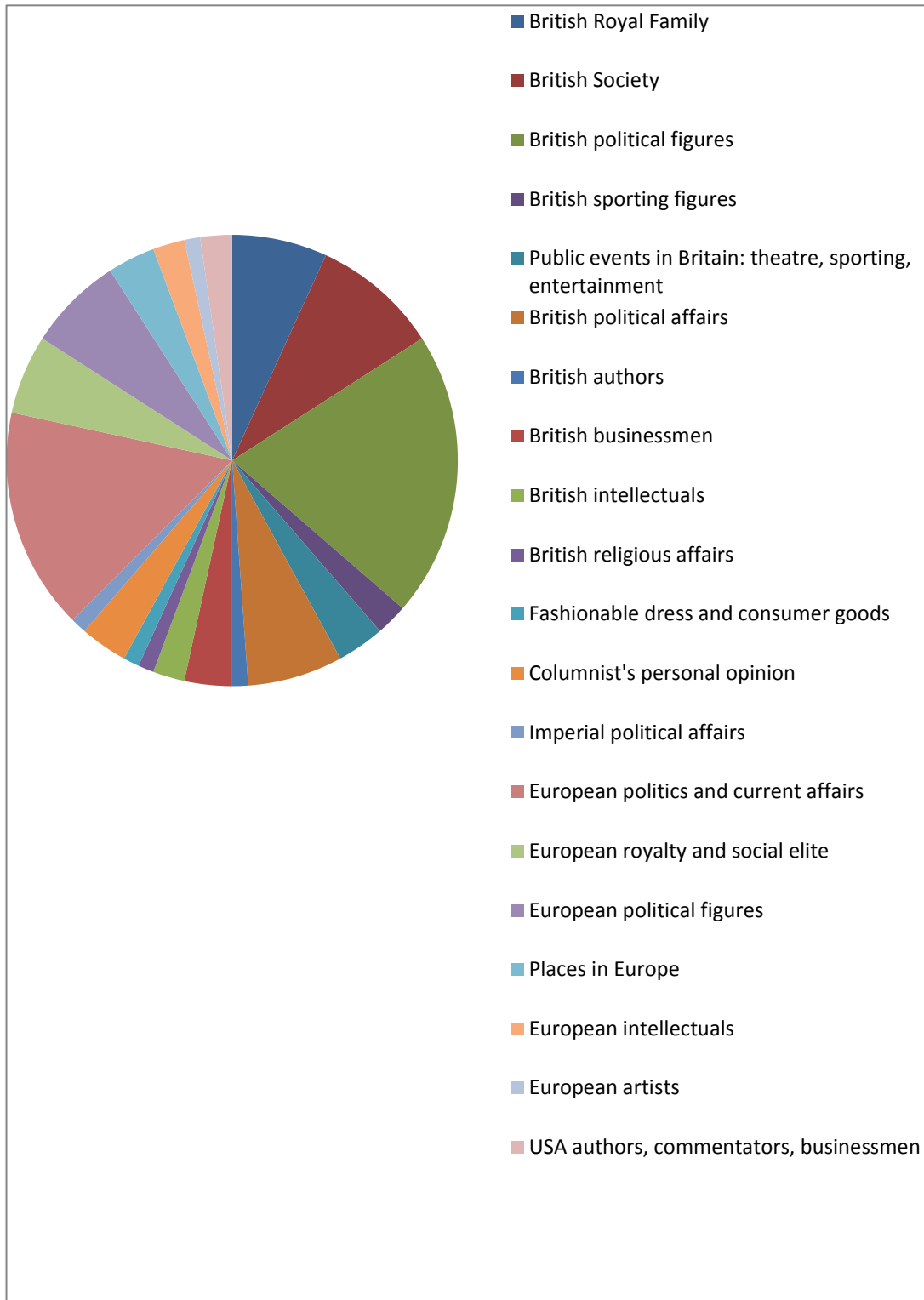
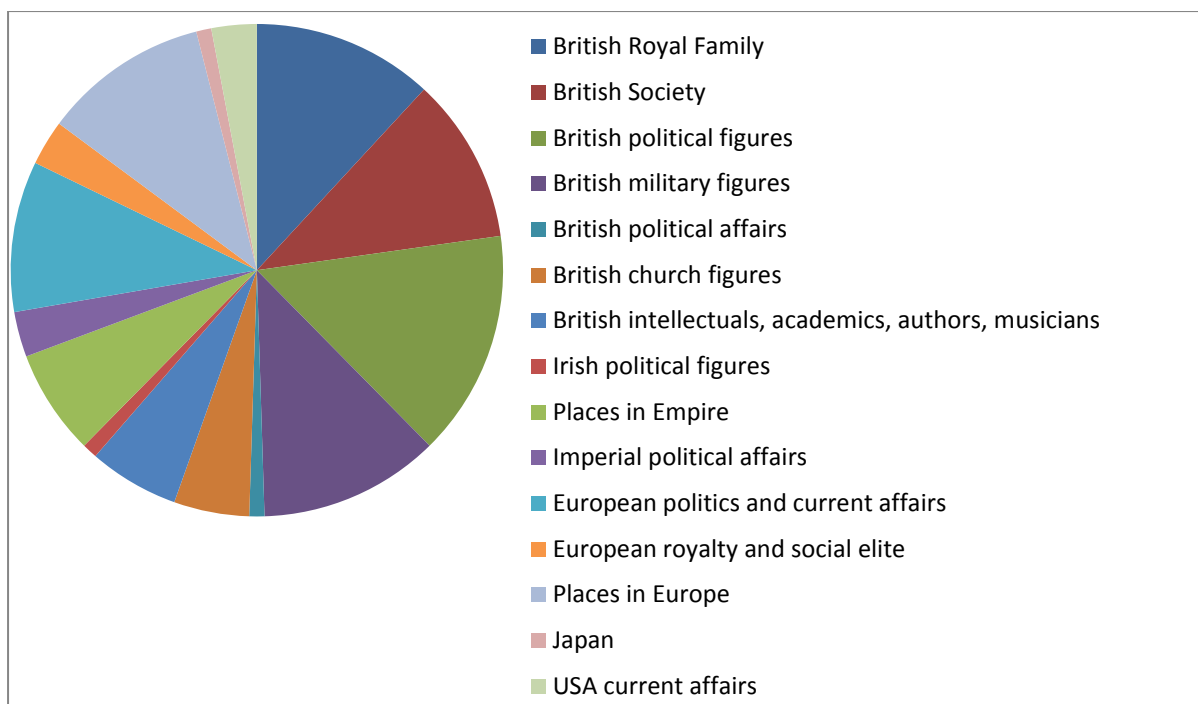


Fig 23. Types of subjects of the gossip column, *Standard* (1938).<sup>297</sup>

<sup>297</sup> *Evening Standard*, 3 January 1938, 22 June 1938, 15 August 1938, 18 November 1938.



**Fig 24. Types of subjects of the gossip column, *News of the World* (1938).**<sup>298</sup>

## 2) The Readership of the National Press and the Newspaper Gossip Column.

A number of readership surveys from the interwar years reveal more detail about the social backgrounds of the national press's audience. In *Press Circulations Analysed*, produced by the London Research and Information Bureau in 1928, 20,140 housewives living in England were interviewed about their family's reading habits. Amongst those surveyed the *Daily Mail* was the most popular newspaper, followed by the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Sketch*.<sup>299</sup> Amongst the 'working-class, lower middle-class and middle class' readers interviewed, all of these papers were purchased mainly by the middle class.<sup>300</sup> According to the survey, the *Express* was mainly read in London and the South-East and towns like Reading and Croydon.<sup>301</sup> The *Mail* was most popular in Oxford and Exeter and the *Mirror*

<sup>298</sup> *News of the World*, 9 January 1938, 19 June 1938, 7 August 1938, 20 November 1938.

<sup>299</sup> L.R.I.B, *Press Circulations* (1928), pp. 71-84.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi, pp. 71-84.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

had its biggest percentage of readers in Croydon.<sup>302</sup> The most purchased Sunday newspaper according to *Press Circulations Analysed* was the *News of the World* followed by the *Weekly Dispatch*, *Sunday Express*, *Sunday Chronicle*, *Sunday News* and *World's Pictorial News*.<sup>303</sup> Section one has shown that the content of the gossip column in the *News of the World* differed considerably from that of most daily newspapers, it was anonymously written with brief usually seriously toned profiles about the activities of figures from the royal family, Society, politics, church and the military. In contrast the columns of the 'Dragoman' in 1930 focused on the columnist's social life amongst Society in the West End of London.

There was more class and geographical variation amongst the readership of the Sunday press compared to the daily papers. The *Sunday Express* and *Weekly/Sunday Dispatch*, partner papers to the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* respectively, were most purchased by a middle-class audience.<sup>304</sup> However, the *News of the World*, *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, *Sunday News* and *World's Pictorial News* were all mainly purchased by a working-class audience.<sup>305</sup> The *Sunday Chronicle* was purchased mainly amongst a 'lower middle-class' audience.<sup>306</sup> Whereas the readership of the daily national press was dominated by readers in London and the South-East in the late 1920s, there was a slightly wider geographical spread for the Sunday newspapers. The *Weekly Dispatch* was most popular amongst readers in Blackburn and Yorkshire.<sup>307</sup> The *World's Pictorial News* was most purchased in Chester and the *Sunday Chronicle* in Bradford and Middlesbrough.<sup>308</sup> Identified in a

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-84.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p. 80, p. 83.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 80, p. 84.

readership survey in 1936 as the industrial areas where a 'vivid civic sense' prevailed, it appeared that towns like Blackburn and Bradford also liked to look outwards and read the gossip columns about London Society on a Sunday, like those of the youthful Lady Eleanor Smith in the *Sunday Dispatch* in the late 1920s.<sup>309</sup> The *News of the World's* readers were mainly focused in the south-eastern towns and cities of Eastbourne, Hastings, Exeter, Bournemouth, Norwich and London. The *Sunday Express* was particularly popular in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells and the *Sunday News*, Southend.<sup>310</sup> Judging from this survey it would seem that the increasingly leisure and consumer- focused content of the national press in the late 1920s was more appealing to the Southern reader and the middle-class reader. It is possible to interpret these findings within this thesis's main argument about the personalisation of newspaper journalism between the wars, for instance, the results suggest that there were closer links and parallels between the lifestyle and interests of Society and the middle-class of the South of England at this time rather than those in the working-class or in other regions of Britain.

The results of the survey might also suggest how newspapers fitted into different ways of life across England and suggest some customs of leisure and reading activities in different regions and communities. For instance, the purchase of a daily national newspaper might depend on working hours, the length of the working week, wages and different types of work: Stevenson has discussed the strengthening north-south divide between heavy industry in the north and the growth of service industries in the south after the First World

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<sup>309</sup> *Sunday/Weekly Dispatch*, 23 December 1928, 30 December 1928, 27 January 1929, 1 September 1929. Harrison, *The Home Market* (1936), p. 102.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

War.<sup>311</sup> For example, newspaper experts Harrison and Mitchell wrote in the 1930s that, ‘the regions where Sunday papers are “thickest” are some, though not all, of the dense industrial areas’.<sup>312</sup> If middle-class audiences engaged with *Society* and the content and format of newspaper gossip column on a daily basis, then it seemed that working-class audiences in industrial towns and cities engaged with the national press and details of *Society* less regularly, perhaps only on a Sunday.

Another survey of the ‘home market’ in 1936 discussed the disparities between the north and south in terms of the sales of national newspaper titles.<sup>313</sup> Now discussing ‘Great Britain’ rather than England, the guide, produced to promote ‘newspapers as an advertising medium’ for companies and businesses, did however suggest an expansion in the audience of national dailies, stating that ‘it is a safe generalization that a morning paper is taken by the vast majority of families’.<sup>314</sup> This study also highlighted that as in the 1920s the national ‘morning papers’ ‘coverage’ continued to be ‘very much higher in London and the South East (120 per 100 families) than in the rest of Great Britain, all the other regions varying relatively slightly around’ a still considerably high national ‘average’ figure ‘of 84 copies per 100 families.’<sup>315</sup> The demand for morning papers in London was explained as due ‘to the large administrative class- governmental, commercial, and industrial- to keep in touch with affairs...’<sup>316</sup> This gives a more detailed sense of the office-based, working week, lifestyles of

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<sup>311</sup> J. Stevenson and C. Cook, *The Slump: Britain in the Great Depression* (London, 1994), ‘Introduction’.

<sup>312</sup> Harrison, *The Home* (1936), p. 102.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

many middle-class readers that purchased papers with gossip columns, perhaps reading them on their commute to work in London.

Readers of the *Express* gossip column in 1938 were certainly more in touch with national and international political 'affairs' than they had been in 1922 or 1930. If the national morning papers were the main purveyors of national current 'affairs' then some of these papers were being purchased by a broader, cross-class and cross-region 'national' audience by 1938. For instance, the results of the think-tank Political and Economic Planning's survey of the British press stated that the *Daily Express*, the left-wing *Daily Herald* and the *News of the World* 'were the most truly national newspapers by the end of the 1930s, 'in the sense that they covered the whole of Great Britain most thoroughly.'<sup>317</sup> If we take the gossip columns found in the *Express* and *News of the World* in 1938 as representative of 'national' forms of celebrity culture, section one has shown that there was some convergence between the content of the columns in the 'middle-class' daily and 'working-class' weekly at this time. For example, as chapter five analyses in detail, both columns looked outwards to Europe at a time when political tensions across the continent were rapidly increasing (*Express*, 41% of column content, *News of the World*, 25%). They also looked further afield, both discussing the circumstances of the conflict between China and Japan (*Express*, 5%, *News of the World* 1%). Although a key difference between these papers was the personable style of the columnist of the *Express* with his jokes and discussion of consumer goods and fashions, alongside the more formal tones of the *News of the World's* columnist, both columns discussed the same categories of British celebrities including the royal family, Society, politicians, British artists, musicians and authors.

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<sup>317</sup> PEP, *Report* (1938), p. 247.

As well as this national audience of the gossip column, there were also some very local networks of readers, in the sense of their closeness to proprietors and the gossip columnists. For example, there is also evidence that Society figures read the column in order to utilise the column space for their personal benefit. In 1930 Lady Diana Cooper implored her friend Beaverbrook to 'give...a prominent place' to a ball she was organising in July.<sup>318</sup> She suggested some personal knowledge of the workings of the *Express* office, its professional structure and the contemporary news values of the paper, writing that, 'I have given a lot of information to the D.E. news editor...it's not bad "news" anyway'. This was combined with a very personal appeal to Beaverbrook: 'Would you be very good & kind & give that instruction? & today? I'd be exceedingly grateful- please please [double underscored] look to it....I love you as always & for always, Diana.'<sup>319</sup> Cooper's imploring language suggested her strong belief in the value publicity in the gossip column might have for ticket sales of the event and her own profile, and it also suggested that a Society audience did read the national newspaper's gossip column in order to learn about forthcoming events, the activities of others in Society and to plan their own social lives. Cooper's highly personal tone also suggested that there were blurred boundaries between the workings of the newspaper and the interests of Society and the upper-class.<sup>320</sup>

Newspaper proprietors were also avid readers and critics of the gossip column, which suggested both their personal interests in the content of the gossip column and the influence of their professional views on the 'news values' of the gossip column. For instance, evidence from the *Express's* and *Standard's* archives points to how private rows

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<sup>318</sup> Parliamentary Archives, (Beaverbrook Papers), Correspondence between Beaverbrook and Lady Diana Cooper, BBK/C/259. 'May 1930'.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> See Chapter Two.

between Beaverbrook and celebrities would play out in the content of the gossip column.<sup>321</sup> On 4 March 1927, as a result of some personal criticism of Beaverbrook by 'G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc', Beaverbrook wrote that he had ordered the 'space allotted to advertising' them in the 'Londoner's Diary' to be cut; where there was once a 'perfect passion' for mentioning these two men's names 'now their names seldom appear.'<sup>322</sup> As well as emphasising how the personalities of proprietors had direct influence on the content of the column, these comments also hinted at the level of control Beaverbrook had over the work of his columnists.<sup>323</sup>

If Society figures and proprietors showed an emotive and opinionated response to the content of the gossip column then so did 'ordinary' readers as well. For instance, whilst it remains unclear why readers read newspapers and why they enjoyed reading them, some historians have suggested that readers particularly valued national newspapers at times of national and international political crisis after the First World War. Stevenson's and Cook's work gives an example of how some unemployed attached a great deal of importance to the routine of reading the daily newspaper, citing the example of the *Daily Express* during the Great Depression of the early 1930s.<sup>324</sup> Also, Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Heat of the Day* set during the Second World War also suggests the vital nature of the national newspaper in two of the main characters' lives.<sup>325</sup> Connie, one of two middle-class housemates, has an 'addiction' to newspapers and 'has almost always been reading one quite recently', 're-

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<sup>321</sup> Wilkes, *Scandal* (London, 2002), p. 160.

<sup>322</sup> Beaverbrook letter to Rothermere, quoted in, D. Griffiths, *Plant Here the Standard* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 233.

<sup>323</sup> See Chapter two.

<sup>324</sup> Stevenson, *The Slump* (London, 1994), 'Introduction'.

<sup>325</sup> E. Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London, 1948).

reading' and 'reading between the lines', 'nothing was to get by unobserved.'<sup>326</sup> Louise 'came to love newspapers physically' saddened by their 'increasing thinness' during the war due to print restrictions.<sup>327</sup> Alongside such fictional representations, the emotive tones of fan letters and careful scrutiny of the written content of gossip columns provides a new insight into the gossip column's appeal and popularity between the wars, allowing us to challenge the dismissive comments of cultural pessimists and social elites about the 'values' of the newspaper gossip column.<sup>328</sup> For instance, hundreds of 'fan' letters were sent to Oswald Barron of the Northcliffe/Rothermere press's *Evening News* throughout the period which came from the 'ordinary' reader expressing their 'admiration' for both Barron aka the 'Londoner' of 'To-Day's Gossip' and the content of his column.<sup>329</sup> Bowen's comments had suggested that women readers found pleasure in their scrutiny of the whole paper during the Second World War; however women's letters to Barron during and immediately after the First World War suggest that it was the gossip column, and the gossip columnist himself, that they found particularly appealing. This might suggest a number of things about the changing content of the press during the interwar period: firstly, that the reading habits of women had changed, that by the end of the period they had become more interested in the 'news' political and economic, as well as the features of the press. Or, conversely, it might suggest that the style and persona of the gossip columnists, which appealed to women, had influenced the wider content of the paper and the writing styles of reporters that were utilised by the end of the period. Certainly Bingham's work would confirm the view that papers like the *Mail* were making a concerted effort, with their new features on home life,

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>328</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>329</sup> Hammersmith and Fulham Archives, DD 12/17-40 (Barron Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings).

fashions and personal advice columns, to appeal to women after the First World War.<sup>330</sup>

'Ethel Belshaw' of '8 Albert Road, Gloucester Gate, N.W. 22' suggested the 'pleasure' she received from both the content of Barron's column and his style of writing in a handwritten letter dated 22 September 1915:

...What real pleasure we look forward to your evening 'Gossip'. It is the one... spot in the paper to which one turns as one does a breath of fresh wholesome air. I have no idea who you are, but I am quite sure you must be very...understanding...I wish I had a...portion of your power of expression, and I could then give you a better idea of how very much pleasure you have given us....You have not one to whom you could give greater pleasure.<sup>331</sup>

Firstly the personal, emotive tone and informality of Belshaw's letter is striking, she signed her letter using her first name rather than her more formal title of 'Mrs'. In some senses the effusive style of her language suggested that she regarded herself as on very familiar terms with the columnist but also stated that she had 'no idea who you are'.<sup>332</sup> Yet, complexly, it was Barron's print persona, particularly the sense that he was 'understanding' which appealed to Belshaw. Even though Belshaw stated that she did not know anything about the real Barron she still trusted that he was a good, honourable, 'wholesome', patient and gentle character, and this was deduced by Belshaw through Barron's skills of writing, his 'power of expression'.<sup>333</sup> From examples of Barron's gossip columns in the *Evening News*, it appeared that Barron was a mature, experienced man, interested not only in his job as a newspaper columnist but with his amateur pursuits in antiquarianism and the history of London, particularly the historically important Thames district and suburban, leafy, middle-

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<sup>330</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004).

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, DD 12/39.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

class community where he lived, 'Hammersmith'.<sup>334</sup> His writing style was humorous with much play on words, and it was Barron's use of language which seemed to form a key part of the columnist's appeal to his many male fans. For example, in a handwritten, undated letter an 'Alfred G. Trumble' mimicked 'The Londoner's' style of writing:

Dear "Londoner"

It may interest and please you to learn that there was a goodly gathering of obviously interested folk at the Healds' Hall Queen Victoria Street E.C. yesterday (Monday) when I made a brief and hurried visit in the early afternoon- many doubtless being drawn there, as in my own humble case as the result of your article in the "Evening News" of Thursday last (28<sup>th</sup>.)<sup>335</sup>

Although the admiration for Barron was more reserved and less straightforwardly expressed than in the female Belshaw's letter, Trumble hopes that the 'Londoner' will be pleased to know that so many had followed his advice about attending a social event in the city. He also stated that he had 'humbly' acted on Barron's advice suggesting that he believed Barron the gossip columnist was an important and respectable man of influence in comparison to himself. Although Trumble's description of his lowly status may have just been a carefully constructed form of flattery that fans used, as Belshaw had used the same tactic when she described her own modest skills of writing in comparison to Barron. Also like Belshaw, Trumble seemed aware of the deceptive qualities behind the columnist's use of a pseudonym, and placed "the Londoner" in speech marks, which suggests that he believed there were some differences between the columnist's persona in print and in private. This letter is also evidence that the gossip columnist directly influenced the activities and lifestyles of their readers, Barron had advertised an event and on his recommendation, 'many' had attended. There was also more mimicry of Barron's writing

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<sup>334</sup> *Evening News*, 23 September 1915, 2 April 1919, 15 August 1919.

<sup>335</sup> Hammersmith and Fulham Archives, Barron letters, DD 12/39, Undated.

style in the letters below, typed by the middle-class 'George Wells' writing from his house "April" on The Crescent, Totteridge, High Wycombe, Bucks' on 11 August 1934, and the second typed letter from 'Professor A.M. Low', who used company-headed paper from 'Laboratories, Woodstock Road, London, W4' in his letter to the Londoner of 26 March 1936:

The Londoner,

My nursery Robinson Crusoe, like yours, has a picture of Friday on that swaying bough, with the bear which must have been a Pyrenean bear.

But alas according to my book, Robinson's friends in the Brazils did not remit fifty thousand pounds, but a mere five. I have no doubt they were scurvy knaves, and retained forty-five thousand for their own selfish ends. A great temptation, mayhap, but methinks, an unworthy act....<sup>336</sup>

Professor A.M. Low letter to Barron:

Sir...your article each night relieves some of the agony of strap-hanging on many tube trains. I look forward to it when hill-climbing the horrible stairs on many stations.<sup>337</sup>

Both Wells and Low's letters professed their enjoyment and fondness for Barron's gossip columns. Wells enjoyed 'The Londoner's' reflections on his childhood and scrutiny of popular novels and Low appeared to enjoy the humour of Barron's writing and the relief his language brought in the 'horrible' surrounds of the underground system on his work commute.<sup>338</sup> All of these fan letters to 'the Londoner' admired his print persona, and particularly the sophisticated and intelligent writing skills the columnist used in order to express himself and entertain others.

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid. 11 August 1934.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 26 March 1936.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

The gossip columnist and the content of the column were also very popular amongst Express readers by the end of the period. A Miss Jane Schnobel wrote to 'William Hickey' of the *Express* in 1945, reflecting on his popularity before 1939, 'I know for a fact that many people bought the "Express" specially [sic] to read this column.'<sup>339</sup> 'Hickey', the columnist for 'These Names Make News', was written, as chapters two and three discuss, by Tom Driberg from 1933 until the Second World War.<sup>340</sup> In a letter from a 'Sylvia Littell' to 'Hickey' on 27 September 1939, Littell emotively and expressively described how she believed Hickey could make her a better person: 'to make me less ignorant, less stupid, to teach me to be independent minded.'<sup>341</sup> Such a statement revealed her belief in the educational qualities of the gossip column, and particularly how the gossip columnist could help in her quest for self-improvement. She also wrote of her fantasy to befriend Hickey, she wrote that she dreamed of a meeting with Hickey where she 'wanted to ask' him 'about books, poetry, people, philosophy and a hundred other things. I wanted to gain your friendship, it...seems a very perfect thing to possess...'<sup>342</sup> Like Belshaw's letter to 'The Londoner' in 1915, Littell believed in the honesty, integrity and respectability of the gossip columnist even if he was writing under a pseudonym. Also like Belshaw she wrote in a very personal tone, seemingly baring her inner-most thoughts and emotions to the national newspaper gossip columnist. Littell's letter was evidence that the gossip columnist's carefully constructed persona actually worked in the interwar period, readers recognised and responded to the different topics, 'books...philosophy', he informed them about. What is more, the columnist was viewed by readers as an authority on complex topics of art and

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<sup>339</sup> Christ Church Library, Oxford, H2 (Driberg Papers), letters to 'Hickey', 12 July 1945.

<sup>340</sup> See Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 September 1939.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

culture, but was somebody who could express these ideas in a clear and friendly way. For ‘Hugh Craig’ a ‘22 year-old’ working-class man from a ‘family of ten’ in Glasgow, the national newspaper gossip columnist Hickey was somebody he could write to frankly and confidently about his views on class, British politics and national identity.<sup>343</sup> He wrote: ‘Please don’t say I’m unpatriotic, I’m more British than most Britishers, for all I want to see in every family is a son fit to march alongside the men of the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division, and a daughter to compare with Lady Louis Mountbatten. Yes, and I’ll be satisfied with this our Britain.’<sup>344</sup> With their interests in questions of politics, literature and education and their personal regard for the columnist as an educator, some readers of the gossip column clearly regarded the gossip column quite differently to the sensational descriptions of its mind-numbing qualities described by academics like Leavis.<sup>345</sup> Perhaps it was the *closeness* that readers professed to the gossip columnist which academic commentators feared most.

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Author Evelyn Waugh, gossip columnist Patrick Balfour and editor-journalist and left-wing newspaper critic Hamilton Fyfe attributed the British public’s fascination with the gossip column and *Society* as due to a ‘snobbish admiration’ for *Society* or the ‘germ of snobbery that lies hid in everyone.’<sup>346</sup> It is impossible to know why Barron and Driberg kept these letters in particular, and we cannot, of course, take this cross-section of fan letters as a full representation of the feelings of a mass readership towards the gossip column. However, from the analysis of these letters I argue that some readers’ interest in the gossip column was based on far more than an unthinking, snobbish interest in *Society*. From these examples it is clear that the readers’ interest in the column was complex and multifaceted,

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., Undated.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Leavis, *Fiction* (1932).

<sup>346</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1930), Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 23. Fyfe, *Press* (1936), p. 122.

and a major, if not the major, part of the column's appeal was the persona of the columnist, not the Society subjects. After all, the main character in Waugh's *Vile Bodies* was a gossip columnist.

### **3) Conclusion:**

The celebrity culture of the gossip column in the national press was not fixed or stagnant over the interwar period, particularly in its coverage of Society figures. On average, Society figures occupied the largest proportion of column space in 1922 across the six newspapers analysed, this was almost a third (32.83%). However, by 1930 the amount of column space devoted to Society figures had halved to 16.66%. This meant that Society was still the biggest single category of celebrity figures in the national newspaper gossip column but that the column devoted more space to other topics and figures outside the context of a leisured social elite of royalty and aristocracy, including politicians, church figures, army and navy leaders, authors and also playwrights, actors, artists, sportsmen and businessmen. By 1930, the social boundaries, and celebrity culture, of the column, once so closely associated with the British royal family and the titled upper-class had widened considerably to include a cultural, business, sporting, political and church elite. By 1938, Society coverage in the six national newspapers had reduced again to 11.16% of column space. One of the major changes in column content was the increased presence of the columnist himself in the gossip feature, and it was the introduction of the discussion of his personality, his opinions on political affairs, the books he had read or plays he had seen-basically descriptions of the gossip columnist's 'own' social life and leisure time- which, I argue, caused this major shift in focus. By 1930 the gossip columnist had become a major celebrity within his own column. I

have shown that readers were attracted to the columnist because of his skills as a writer and the print persona he projected in his columns. For example, fans regarded Barron as a celebrity, as a special, superior individual because of his skills as a writer. They also felt that he was something of a friend and confidante, somebody which to whom they could reveal their own interests and who would be interested in them as individuals. In the 1930s readers wrote to 'William Hickey' as if he was a romantic hero, a political comrade or a leisured gentleman. I argue that both men cultivated a gentleman-journalist print persona but in different ways: Barron was caring and sophisticated and Driberg was a man-of-the-world with interests in Society lifestyle, politics and the arts. However, both engaged their readers in very personal ways, and an aspect of the men's celebrity appeal was that readers wanted to know more information, and personally receive information, about the real columnist, the real person behind the complex dual print persona of gentleman-journalist.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Gentleman, Journalist, Gentleman-Journalist: Diaries and Letters as Alternative Celebrity Gossip Columns.**

The chapter originally presented here cannot currently be made freely available via ORA.

## Chapter Three:

### **Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, the Society Gossip Columnists and Criticism of Celebrity Culture in Interwar Britain.**

This chapter analyses the links between the content, production and reception of the gossip column between the wars. It does this by examining how the content of the best-selling satire of *Society* and the gossip column *Vile Bodies* (1930) influenced the public persona of the gossip columnist in the national press of the 1930s. In so doing, it explores the connections and influences between different genres of popular print culture including newspapers, novels, periodicals and social commentaries that have usually been treated separately by historians of interwar Britain.<sup>347</sup> As well as exploring the fluidity between the content of different popular print forms, this chapter explores the personal contexts—the social networks—which influenced the shared themes of *Society* lifestyle that were present in both the newspaper gossip column and *Vile Bodies*. Evelyn Waugh was friends with columnists including Tom Driberg and Patrick Balfour, and moved in the same *Society* circles as Eleanor Smith, the Marquess of Donegall and Beverley Nichols.<sup>348</sup> This chapter not only explores this personal context for changes in the tone and style of the columnist in the 1930s but also the impact of professional, literary and academic criticism on the column's content. It analyses criticisms of the gossip columnist from journalists like Rebecca West and Gerald Gould who worked for more highbrow papers like the *Manchester Guardian* and considers critiques of the content and authorship of the press by academics like Queenie

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<sup>347</sup> Melman, *Women* (1986). McAleer, *Passion's Fortune* (1999). McAleer, *Popular Reading* (1992).

<sup>348</sup> Taylor, *Bright* (2008), Introduction.

Leavis. In so doing, I argue that both the best-selling novel and the national newspaper columnist became important features within a diverse and dynamic critical culture of popular print forms that increasingly became focused on questions of national culture in the 1930s, and included questions of how the celebrity culture of the newspaper gossip column impacted on British society.

### 1) **Context: Evelyn Waugh and *Vile Bodies*.**

Published in 1930, *Vile Bodies* has been judged as both a scandalous bestselling novel and a classic of modern English literature.<sup>349</sup> Its author Evelyn Waugh has long been associated with a British literary elite, whilst the novel's contents, particularly its focus on a decadent, immoral youth culture of flappers and nightlife in 1920s London, has been connected with a popular or brainless culture of celebrity and glamour.<sup>350</sup> Patrick Deane connects Waugh's work with a range of literary critics and commentators on the nation in the 1930s, including W.H. Auden, F.R. Leavis, Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf, by discussing similarities in their writing styles: he argues that all wrote in 'reaction' to 'sudden explosions on the cultural scene', discussing the 'cause and effect' of new developments like 'proletarian literature' and 'new verse' poetry.<sup>351</sup> He also connects these authors through their upper middle-class and Oxbridge background and the types of publications they produced; according to Deane it was the age of the 'pamphlet...manifestos and tracts'.<sup>352</sup> Yet Waugh's connection with this literary elite ignores his work in a range of print genres that we would tend to associate with a lowbrow or popular culture today. For instance, Waugh worked as a 'cub reporter' on the *Daily Express* and according to one biographer was laughing 'all the way to the bank'

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<sup>349</sup> D. Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Life* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 67-71.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.67-71.

<sup>351</sup> Deane, *History* (1998), p. 7, p. 13, p. 43, pp. 161-173.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, p. 7, p. 13, p. 43, pp. 161-173.

with his 'fashionable', 'comedy' *Vile Bodies* which supposedly fed a mass public's demand to read about Society and their private lives.<sup>353</sup> Yet in the same period Waugh wrote a critical biography, *Rossetti: his Life and Works* (1928) and later became a war correspondent in Abyssinia, employed by several newspapers to report on the conflict.<sup>354</sup> Evidence from his diaries and biographies suggest that he was not part of any artistic coteries or intellectual sets in the late 1920s and early 1930s whilst he was writing *Vile Bodies*, but instead had a passion for the nightclubs and hotels frequented by the young Society figures he parodied.<sup>355</sup> Moving between such diverse roles, and across cultural brows and genres, in such a short time-frame seems surprising today when career paths, and training and qualifications for specific roles, have become more fixed, and it was not only Waugh who did this. As the biographies of the gossip columnists in chapter two have shown, for a time Tom Driberg combined both his work as a gossip columnist and a politician. Harold Nicolson and Robert Bruce Lockhart went from working for the Foreign Office to working on Fleet Street as gossip columnists; Beverley Nichols, like Waugh, took on a diverse set of roles within print culture.<sup>356</sup> He wrote celebrity biographies, novels, newspaper articles offering political and religious commentary at home and abroad, gossip columns, books on cats and gardening guides.<sup>357</sup> Gossip columnists Valentine Williams of the *Mail*, Howard Spring of the *Standard* and Lady Eleanor Smith all moved from the national press to successful careers as

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<sup>353</sup> Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh* (1999), pp. 68-71.

<sup>354</sup> E. Waugh, *Rossetti: his Life and Works* (London, 1928) and, Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (London, 1936). D. Gallagher (ed.) and E. Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (London, 1983).

<sup>355</sup> Waugh, M. Davie (ed.), *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh* (London, 1995), pp. 306-309.

<sup>356</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>357</sup> B. Nichols, *Crazy Pavements* (London, 1927). Nichols, *All I Could Never Be: some Recollections* (London, 1949). Nichols, *Down the Garden Path* (Cambridge, 2005 edition). Nichols, *Beverley Nichols Cats A.B.C.* (Portland, Cambridge, 2003 edition). Nichols, *Oxford: London: Hollywood: an Omnibus* (London, 1931). Nichols, *25: being a Young Man's Candid Recollections of his Elders and Betters* (London, 1930). Nichols, *Dogs of War!* (London, 1934).

novelists in this period.<sup>358</sup> The employment of these mainly upper-middle class and upper-class Society figures as gossip columnists in the 1920s suggests the changes in the content of the national press and the professional structures of journalism at this time. In one sense it suggests the limited professionalization of the national press in the 1920s, because of its openness to figures from Society who had not gone through apprenticeships or work in the provincial press.<sup>359</sup> It also suggests the fluidity between different forms of print culture, and how Society figures in particular navigated a diverse publishing culture in this period.

Already in its fourth edition one month after its publication in January 1930, Waugh's *Vile Bodies* was an 'instant' cultural phenomenon.<sup>360</sup> The *Saturday Review* declared the novel to be 'the most talked about book of the Season' and placed the novel within the modern category of the 'bestseller'.<sup>361</sup> According to literary historian Billie Melman, a central facet of the novel's mass appeal was its depictions of a scandalous and decadent elite Society; also presented in *Vile Bodies'* bestselling predecessors, E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* (1919) and Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* (1924).<sup>362</sup> This suggested that Society's private lives *as well as* the bestselling novel had become a cultural phenomenon in the 1920s. *Vile Bodies* focused on the outrageous lifestyle and social life of Mayfair Society and their pursuit of pleasure in the stately houses, hotels and cabarets of Britain and Europe, for example, it referred to 'midnight orgies', a 'drunk Major' and holidays with a 'Maharajah in Monte Carlo'.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> V. Williams, *The Return of Clubfoot* (London, 1923). E. Smith, *Satan's Circus and Other Stories* (London, 1932). H. Spring, *The Houses In-Between: a Novel* (London, 1951 edition).

<sup>359</sup> S. Moseley, *Short Story Writing* (London, 1926).

<sup>360</sup> Anon. 'Vile Bodies', *Saturday Review*, 8 February 1930, p. 175.

<sup>361</sup> Anon. 'Vile Bodies', *Saturday Review*, p. 175.

<sup>362</sup> Arlen, *The Green Hat* (1924). Hull, *The Sheik* (1919).

Melman, *Women* (1988), pp. 65-67, 76-77.

<sup>363</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (Middlesex, 1986 edition), p. 59, p. 179, p. 187.

Waugh's depiction of the varied, fast-paced and debauched nature of Society lifestyle is encapsulated in the following famous quote from the novel below:

...Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties...almost naked parties in St John's Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs...parties at Oxford...dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris - all that succession and repetition of massed humanity...Those vile bodies...<sup>364</sup>

On the basis of such scandalous and entertaining depictions of British Society, Waugh's biographer Wykes interprets the popularity of *Vile Bodies* as a result of public interest in the scandalous lifestyles of the celebrity BYP.<sup>365</sup> Yet this assumption can be strongly challenged through a closer reading of *Vile Bodies*, and I argue that the public's interest in the novel should be interpreted in the context of the novel's focus on the production, content and reception of the gossip column.<sup>366</sup> Chapter two argued that the gossip columnist became a celebrity in interwar Britain because of his Society status, his personalised writing style and his focus on his own social life: in this context it could be argued that *Vile Bodies* perpetuated the columnist's celebrity status. The novel's main character is a gossip columnist: 'Mr Chatterbox' aka the Society figure Adam Fenwick-Symes. Chapters four to ten of a total of thirteen chapters focus on the character of the gossip columnist, chart his working life in the newspaper office of the 'Daily Excess' and detail the methods he used to glean gossip at Society parties.<sup>367</sup> For example, one gossip columnist attended an exclusive Society party in disguise to try and gain news for his column.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986 edition), p. 123.

<sup>365</sup> Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh* (1999), p. 69.

<sup>366</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986), pp. 84-89.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-152.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-107.

How did this mass interest in the gossip columnist come about? How did the gossip columnist become such a prominent cultural figure as to prompt a bestselling novel? These questions can partly be answered by analysing the columns of Waugh's fellow Society figures in the late 1920s. The production and popularity of the novel can be understood in terms of the popularity of the gossip column at the end of the 1920s as evidenced in my analysis of readership surveys and fan letters in chapter one, and also the new, personable, lively style of gossip writing that dominated the national press from the mid-1920s onwards.<sup>369</sup> As I have argued, this was a period when the gossip column became increasingly personalised in a number of ways. For example, in the most-purchased daily national papers like the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*, the column was now signed by an author who focused the content of his paragraphs around his own social life. The 'Dragoman' of the *Express* thus described his participation in an elite, cosmopolitan culture of leisure when on 6 August 1928 he wrote that he had arrived in 'Le Touquet for the weekend...after a late night meal I was in the Casino'.<sup>370</sup> The gossip columnists of the *Mail*, *Mirror* and *Express* also presented a more demotic culture of theatre, popular music, cinema and developments in the latest consumer goods. 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* discussed an interview 'at home' with actress 'Heather Thatcher' on 23 January 1926 and the novels of 'Elizabeth Fagan' on 1 January 1927.<sup>371</sup> Biographers have also discussed the personal motivation for Waugh's work, his attack on Society a result of his failed marriage with a Society figure.<sup>372</sup> Waugh was also writing about a social world of which he was part. Evidence from the letters of Patrick Balfour 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch*, suggests that he and Waugh moved in the same social circles, and like Balfour, Waugh and Driberg of the *Express*

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<sup>369</sup> Chapter One.

<sup>370</sup> *Express*, 6 August 1928.

<sup>371</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 23 January 1926, 1 January 1927.

<sup>372</sup> Wykes, p. 67.

and Nichols of the *Sunday Chronicle*, all had attended Oxford University in the 1920s.<sup>373</sup> Waugh also demonstrated some knowledge of how the gossip column was constructed and saw its publicity value for his work as a novelist when he wrote to his school and Oxford University friend Tom Driberg, the 'Dragoman' and later 'William Hickey' of the *Express*, to ask for him and his work to be publicised in a paragraph of Driberg's column.<sup>374</sup> There were, however, important changes in the content, style and authorship of several gossip columns written by Society figures within Waugh's social milieu in the late 1920s, when, I argue, the columnist became just as important a celebrity as their Society subjects.

In the *Sunday Express* of 17 April 1926, Viscount Valentine Castlerosse became the first gossip columnist to attach his name to his column. In an introductory publicity feature in the *Sunday Express*, proprietor Lord Beaverbrook animatedly profiled the multi-faceted personality that made Castlerosse the 'most brilliant diarist in London journalism'.<sup>375</sup> He referred excitedly to his Viscount status which exalted Castlerosse to celebrity in the more traditional terms of other Society figures; but it was also his one of a kind, new journalistic skills, the unavoidable 'personality' and 'wit' that Castlerosse 'stamped' on the column that was celebrated. Castlerosse was being presented as a new kind of modern public figure: a gentleman-journalist.<sup>376</sup>

Beaverbrook's characterization of Castlerosse invited the reader 'behind-the-scenes' into the world of the newspaper, to read about the editorial decision making process of the press as it discussed its decision to employ the aristocratic Castlerosse. In appealing to the

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<sup>373</sup> Wilkes, *Scandal* (2002), pp. 143-160. Taylor, *Bright* (2007).

<sup>374</sup> Christ Church Library, Oxford, E1 (Driberg Papers), Waugh correspondence with Driberg.

<sup>375</sup> The article is quoted in Mosley, *Castlerosse* (1956), pp. 64-65.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

readership to assess Beaverbrook's 'pitch' of Castlerosse's characteristics and professional skills, the readers were represented as valued stakeholders in the newspaper. Insinuating the readers' value in his business success, Beaverbrook not only valued the column for the capital it could provide, but also promoted it as a new site for ethical journalism. By opening up Castlerosse's personality to the readers they could assess whether the information that this translator of social class and metropolitan lifestyles could be trusted, if he acted with professional integrity, and, unlike those writing behind a mysterious pseudonym, the readers would be able to get a clearer understanding of exactly in whose service he acted. It seemed that with these shifts the gossip columnist was being fashioned as a figure with greater public responsibility and who should therefore be viewed as a more respectable figure in British society.

This sense of personal respectability was also seen in another aspect of Castlerosse's increasingly multifaceted public appeal, through demonstrations of his moral code and thoughtfulness. Although Irish and very much part of the modern and glamorous elite social group who dined at the Ritz and danced at the Savoy during the London 'season', holidayed on the French Riviera, went to the 'Derby' and attended shooting parties on country estates, Castlerosse continually attempted to bridge the social divide with his predominantly English middle-class readers by asserting what Alison Light has defined as a 'middlebrow' morality and sense of Englishness.<sup>377</sup> For example, on 2 January 1927 Castlerosse excitedly exclaimed that he was 'off to Cannes!' but that he had made a 'good resolution' that he

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<sup>377</sup> Light, *Forever England*, pp. 211-214. *Sunday Express*, 1 August 1926. For more examples of Castlerosse's cosmopolitan social life see *Sunday Express*, 7 November 1926, 14 November 1926, 16 January 1927, 3 June 1928, 24 June 1928.

'was not going to gamble'.<sup>378</sup> He also suggested his sense of belonging in English society and his knowledge of its people when he said, 'In England we would rightly never tolerate casinos'.<sup>379</sup> By promoting his self-control, Castlerosse successfully avoided potential accusations that he led a decadent and immoral lifestyle. By writing that he observed but did not fully partake in aspects of elite leisure culture, Castlerosse's authorial stance aligned him with British journalists like Sydney Moseley who had created a 'guilty pleasure' middlebrow culture of books and investigations that vividly described but also condemned the elite 'night haunts' of London.<sup>380</sup> By guilty pleasure culture, I mean that middle-class readers wanted to read about night-clubs, jazz music and dance crazes but that they wanted to maintain a sense of their respectability and traditionalism. In other words, they did not want to be regarded as publicly condoning what they also regarded as scandalous forms of nightlife because of their associations with promiscuity, miscegenation and Americanised, foreign forms of music and dance. In this sense, Waugh's satire of Society *Vile Bodies* can also be categorised within this post-war literary canon that combined themes of Society with sobriety. The journalist Moseley, the author Waugh and the gossip columnist Castlerosse all critiqued the debauched behaviour and decadent lifestyles of figures within the social elite in the late 1920s, which suggested common themes of authorship and content across print genres of popular culture in the interwar period. These cross-genre themes were the middle-class's relationship with the upper-class and Society lifestyle.

To return to the fashioning of Castlerosse's celebrity persona in the late 1920s, his strength of character, his sense of public duty, national loyalty and reliability was represented

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<sup>378</sup> *Sunday Express*, 2 January 1927.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 January 1927.

<sup>380</sup> Moseley, *The Night Haunts of London* (London, 1920). H.V. Morton, *The Nights of London* (London, 1926).

through reminders of his honourable service as a Captain of the Irish Guards during the First World War.<sup>381</sup> Castlerosse's charitable and philanthropic qualities were also established when he looked outwards, beyond his elite social circle, to other individuals of a lower social status and different communities within London. For example, on 7 November 1926, Castlerosse described his interview with social campaigner, Irish author and playwright George Bernard Shaw at a dinner party. This featured alongside the dialogue of London taxi-drivers and commentary on their pay, quotes from his Jewish neighbour on discrimination and 'the Jewish Question', and finally his observations of the homeless in the crypt of St Martin-in-the-Fields church right next to a national emblem, Trafalgar Square.<sup>382</sup> By demonstrating his empathy and ability to communicate and socialise with a varied group of individuals he showed the reader that he was not a superficial character like other Society figures: he asserted that there was far more depth to his personality than 'those who spend their lives flitting from drawing-room to drawing-room and from night club to night club.'<sup>383</sup> In November 1926 he further distanced himself from the rest of Society when he publicly redefined the role and responsibilities of the gossip columnist, writing that he would spend time 'among people who are doing things in the world and are up against the realities of life'.<sup>384</sup> So, by the end of the 1920s Castlerosse's new kind of print persona made a distinct link between moral character and public actions and behaviour; it also relied on projections of his opinionated and lively persona through his engaging, personable writing style. Theorist and cultural historian Warren Susman argues that forms of popular print in the USA shifted from explorations of 'character' to studies of 'personality' as a result of the

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<sup>381</sup> *Sunday Express*, 7 November 1926, 16 January 1927.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 November 1926.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

development of celebrity culture in the 1920s.<sup>385</sup> I argue however, that in mid-1920s Britain, the celebrity persona of the newspaper gossip columnists evolved through an engagement with a long-established English form of moral character, symbolised by Castlerosse's wartime role and his reflective and thoughtful comments on the state of the nation. Personality was also a vital aspect of Castlerosse's public persona as a gossip columnist. His writing made him seem friendly, funny and charming, for example, he made an effort to engage and entertain his readers through a variety of jokes, anecdotes, snippets of poetry, direct questioning like 'would you like to hear about the Duchess of Westminster?', and amusing turns of phrase like 'tremendous jollification'.<sup>386</sup> Yet the sociable style of his writing was also a reflection of his moral character. Castlerosse's inclusive linguistic approaches and identification with the imagined English middle-class reader's concerns about respectability, was an expression of an emotional intelligence that could not be accused of superficiality or self-absorption.

However, as Castlerosse's writing began to assert a public image as a serious social commentator and concerned citizen, not unlike many of his news reporter and editorial colleagues, the striking visual culture of the column threatened to damage this new print persona:

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<sup>385</sup> Susman, *Culture as History* (1985), pp. 191-205.

<sup>386</sup> *Sunday Express*, 2 January 1927, 16 January 1927.

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**Fig 25. *Sunday Express*, 16 January 1927.**

The visual vibrancy, decadence and unusualness of the feature in comparison to the normal columns of text in which news stories appeared in the preceding pages, immediately highlighted the difference between Castlerosse and the average newspaper journalist's lifestyles and professional roles. For example, there was a suggestion of the feature's preoccupation with the elite of Mayfair in the bold paragraph titles like 'Princess Hohenlohe', Castlerosse's aristocratic title emboldened in the text, and the large photographs of often young, attractive and lavishly dressed Society figures that filled the opening third of the feature's printed space. Examples of the centrality of young Society women in the visual culture of the column can be seen in the glamorous picture of Lady Weymouth on 8 January 1933, and Society figure Miss Judy Kelly on 23 June 1933, both of which take up an eighth of the feature.<sup>387</sup> The danger then that Castlerosse could be interpreted as a dandified, womanising cad resulted from the *Sunday Express's* sub-editing

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<sup>387</sup> *Sunday Express*, 3 January 1927, 18 June 1933, 8 January 1933, 23 June 1933.

decisions which visually compromised Castlerosse's down-to-earth prose. This was a culturally formed barrier which, like the written content of *Mail's* post-war 'Court and Society', highlighted the cultural links between high fashion, the upper-class author and celebrity subject, and the social difference of the majority of the mass readership.<sup>388</sup>

I have so far shown how the personality and character of the gossip columnists were becoming central themes of the gossip column in the late 1920s. Although intensely lively and entertaining, the new, spectacular columns of Lady Eleanor Smith in the *Weekly Dispatch* and the Marquess of Donegall's column in the *Sunday News*, displayed little of the middlebrow moral sensibility initiated in the written content of Castlerosse's column. Unlike Castlerosse's references to his age and war experiences, a vital aspect of the two new gossip columnists' personas was their youth and vitality and their full involvement with the social world, in London and abroad, of British Society. For example, on 30 January 1927, Smith packed in 23 paragraphs which described her modern Society lifestyle. Boisterous in tone, and willing to make fun of Society figures which the columns of the *Mail* and *Express* would never have done at the end of the 1920s, she excitedly presented her observations of the Prince of Wales's dance steps and the ridiculousness of tall and short dance partners.<sup>389</sup> Smith was keen to emphasise her adherence to 'modern' ways of living, for example, on 23 December 1928 she wrote in a sensational style about her plans for Christmas in Madeira, 'amid orange-trees, olives and hibiscus...and the central-heating and loud speakers of restaurants' rather than 'pander to Pickwick...fogs...slush and over-eating' of the traditional English Christmas.<sup>390</sup> Such statements suggested the forceful tone of her writing and made

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<sup>388</sup> See Chapter One and Chapter Two.

<sup>389</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 30 January 1927. For analysis of the *Mail* and *Express*, see Chapter One and Chapter Five.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1928.

her seem that she had contrary, independent views and ways of living to most English people; she enjoyed a life that was exotic and not traditional, she seemed determined to shock and break traditional social and cultural boundaries through her choice of social life. Also, her discussion of Christmas in Madeira revealed her personal wealth and the freedom and independence this gave her to travel outside Britain. If Castlerosse's celebrity status relied in part on creating the impression that he and his middle-class readers shared similar views on social life and consumer culture in England, then Smith's celebrity relied on emphasising her difference and uniqueness to her readers which in part depended on descriptions of her wealthy, upper-class status as a 'Lady'; and this upper-class status was immediately portrayed in the full title she signed the column with at the start of the feature.<sup>391</sup>

Although Smith's outspoken tone emphasised her independent spirit, she also showed the reader a sociable side to her personality amongst the 'cosmopolitan' of 'Society', 'friends' who like her enjoyed the autumn and winter months abroad in 'Biarritz...Deauville...the South of France'.<sup>392</sup> Smith showed that she was part of an exotic and varied social world, that stretched across national borders: for example as the example below shows, the visual culture of her gossip column on 27 January 1929 showed her elite, international social networks which included a montage of photographs of the smiling 'ex-Kaiser' and his wife at their home in Switzerland, Mr Neville Ford 'enjoying himself at Madeira' and the glamorously dressed, reclining 'Senorita Lili De Alvarez' who 'has been ill at Switzerland'.<sup>393</sup> The photographs within Smith's column demonstrated an elite enthusiasm for the collective

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<sup>391</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 30 January 1927, 3 July 1927, 10 July 1927, 21 August 1927, 23 December 1928, 30 December 1928, 27 January 1929, 1 September 1929.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1928, 30 December 1928, 3 July 1927.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 January 1929.

pursuit of holidays and leisure which seemed to disregard national histories or international political tensions.

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**Fig 26. *Sunday Dispatch*, 27 January 1929.**

Smith's social web was not only transnational in its scope-she complained that the number of 'foreign visitors' to London would decline because of the continual police raids on night clubs- but was even more complex as it seemed to cross classes and different social groups in London.<sup>394</sup> For example, on 21 August she described her enjoyment of greyhound racing at White City and gave quotes from her interviews with actors at a rehearsal of *Peter Pan* in a West End theatre on 23 December 1928.<sup>395</sup> Such examples meant that Smith's sociability seemed limitless and sometimes risqué: there was a subversive aspect to her celebrity. For

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<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1928.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1928, 30 December 1928.

example, her support for night clubs, since they were ‘innocuous’ and ‘do little harm really’ aligned her with a demi-monde that was being heavily targeted by the police and powerful establishment figures like Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks, and was also the subject of many newspaper campaigns at this time.<sup>396</sup> Smith also demonstrated her acquaintance with the American sex symbol Tallulah Bankhead, describing an interview in her dressing room in a West End theatre.<sup>397</sup> Smith associated herself and her Society friends even more with an American culture of glamorous film stars when on 30 January 1927 she discussed the reports from the aristocrat turned film star Lady Diana Cooper and Society figure Iris Tree on their ‘fabulous salaries’ on touring America as actresses.<sup>398</sup>

The Marquess of Donegall had an equally cosmopolitan and energetic persona as Lady Smith. On 26 June 1927 he threw himself into the Society calendar, demonstrated his involvement with both a European and American celebrity culture and established his excitable personality: ‘Well really. What with Wimbledon, the King of Spain arriving, Josephine Baker getting married and unmarried again with such bewildering frequency...it’s a case of cold towels and yet more cold towels’.<sup>399</sup> Like Smith and Castlerosse, Donegall’s style was direct, comedic and colloquial, yet he was introduced by the editor of the *Sunday News* before his first column in 1927 as if he was writing an important and urgent political commentary. For example, the editor referred to his feature ‘on notable men, women and movements of the day...Society and bohemian activities’ as a ‘brilliant new weekly

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<sup>396</sup> Kohn, *Dope*(1992), Introduction, Chapter One.

<sup>397</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 23 December 1928.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 January 1927. D. Cooper, *Autobiography* (Salisbury, 1979). Cooper, D. Cooper and A. Cooper (ed.), *A Durable Fire: the Letters of Duff and Diana Cooper* (London, 1985). A. Cooper, *The Diana Cooper Scrapbook* (London, 1987). D. Fielding, *The Rainbow Picnic: a Portrait of Iris Tree* (London, 1987).

<sup>399</sup> *Sunday News*, 26 June 1927.

causerie'.<sup>400</sup> Such serious tones emphasised the centrality of Society news within the paper, and the importance attached to Society celebrity. Like Smith, Donegall stressed his friendships with Society figures and his full participation in their leisure culture. For example, on 13 January 1929 Donegall sent his column from the ski resort of St. Moritz and quoted his conversation with his 'friend' Mr Gordon Selfridge as they had climbed the ski slope together. In a paragraph with the subtitle 'An Energetic Life' Donegall wrote 'Nobody who has not been to St Moritz knows the meaning of that expression, "to burn the candle at both ends"'. This we presume was most of his audience. Like Smith, Donegall presented details of an exotic and international social world that emphasised his and his Society subjects' social distance from his audience. To a certain extent, Donegall's column opened up a private world of Society because of his insider connections. For instance, he presented part of his conversation from a private lunch with Lady Newborough at her house on 'Bruton-Street' as a subject for public scrutiny in his column of 5 June 1927.<sup>401</sup> On 12 June 1927 he described his attendance at a private dance, 'the brightest event of the week...Lady Dunn's dance...there were 500 guests... [it] reminded one of an Italian fiesta'.<sup>402</sup> Donegall's depictions of Society were glorious and joyous, his descriptive language conjured imagery of a spectacular and beautiful world of celebrity. By contrast Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, as the title may have suggested, looked beneath the glamorous spectacle of Society.

Like Castlerosse, who adopted a dual status as both a gentleman and a journalist, Waugh also created a dual-identity as a gentleman and novelist. Whereas the newspapers presented the columnists' aristocratic titles in emboldened typography to the audience as

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 5 June 1927.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 12 June 1927.

evidence of their place at the heart of Society, a visual signifier of a gentleman's guarantee of their closeness to Society and celebrity culture; Waugh also immediately presented his active involvement with a respectable and influential section of Society when he dedicated his novel 'With Love to' the wealthy Society couple Bryan and Diana Guinness.<sup>403</sup> However the content of *Vile Bodies* differed in a number of key ways to the content of Castlerosse and his fellow columnists' gossip features. For example, Waugh's novel provided the reader with the extremely scintillating and sensational narrative detail of the gossip columnists' private life that the short, sharp paragraphs of the gossip column avoided: the disreputable 'Mr Chatterbox' a.k.a Adam Fenwick-Symes and his gossip columnist colleagues formed the basis of Waugh's alternative version of celebrity culture in late 1920s Britain. Fenwick-Symes, the son of an academic, was presented as a bohemian failed novelist and social drifter with unclear career or life ambitions.<sup>404</sup> As he lunched with his fiancée at 'the second-most expensive restaurant in London', he was approached by the 'Eton-cropped...social editress of the *Daily Excess*' who was desperately searching for a 'good mutt' that would 'stick' out the job of gossip columnist for longer than a 'week or two.'<sup>405</sup> Here Waugh reported the sense of disregard and unprofessional attitude the press had towards its gossip column and its readers and also suggested the formidable pressure Adam's predecessor the aristocratic Earl of Balcairn was under to gather Society gossip; made worse by the disdain and disregard his newspaper colleagues had for his work. After being flung out of a Society party on being discovered as a 'Sneak Guest' who had no invitation, his disguise ritually stripped away, Balcairn was forced to invent the subjects of his gossip column over the telephone to the demanding *Excess* staff, after which 'the last

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<sup>403</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986 edn.), p. 5.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 23-25, 28-35.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Earl of Balcairn...[whose] fathers had fallen for many lands and for many causes...at Acre and Agincourt and Killiecrankie, in Egypt and America...' committed suicide in the distinctly unmanly, domesticated gas oven of his city flat.<sup>406</sup> In comparison, the reader learns that Fenwick-Symes shares no such qualms about the truth of the events he describes in his version of the column: 'with sultan-esque caprice...Adam began to invent people...Mr Chatterbox's page became almost wholly misleading.'<sup>407</sup> He also showed none of Balcairn's fastidious work ethic or commitment to the authorship of his column, handing over the responsibility of writing the column to his fiancée or friend when he deemed aspects of his private life more important than his work.<sup>408</sup>

By juxtaposing Balcairn's and Fenwick-Symes's approach to their work as gossip columnists in quick succession, Waugh encouraged the reader to compare these two figures' personalities and lifestyles and make judgement on their moral character. Balcairn, a gentleman of honourable and historic British heritage, was not suited to the modern world of gossip writing although he was acutely aware of its demands, as his sudden shocking exit symbolised. Depressed at having to resort to a 'a profession in which literally all conversation is "shop"', and equally alarmed by the scandalous behaviour of those in Society that he was compelled to write about (including his own 'awful-looking', 'twice-divorced mother'), Balcairn decided, in very certain terms, that he was best out of a world he found foreign, alienating, confusing and obsessed with a morally fickle celebrity

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-107. For the circumstances leading up to Balcairn's suicide see *Vile Bodies*, pp. 97-107. For the editorial demands on gossip writers to find new 'names' for the column see *Vile Bodies*, p. 50. For other contemporary descriptions of the 'Sneak Guest' phenomenon see, Balfour, *Society*, p. 98, and 'People and their Doings by A.D.C', *Daily Mail*, Monday 13 June 1927.

<sup>407</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 112, p. 116.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

culture.<sup>409</sup> In contrast, Symes coasted into the heart of celebrity culture and showed no signs of personal resistance. He was engaged to one of the BYP's key protagonists and prolific party-goers, the upper-class Nina Blount.<sup>410</sup> He attended some of the most outrageous parties and social events depicted in the novel, for example, he heartily partook in the excessive drinking and all night revelry on offer at Society figure Archie Schwert's house party in the extremely exclusive Hertford Street, Mayfair.<sup>411</sup> Perhaps showing the extent of his acceptance in Society, he received an invitation to Lady Metroland's party, the same event from which Balcairn was excluded.<sup>412</sup> Unlike Viscount Castlerosse, who as stated earlier, often used his column space to present frank discussions on current affairs and lifestyle with members of the lower classes, Symes was more likely to be found drinking himself silly with the eclectic and dubious clientele of 'The Shepherds Hotel', gambling all of his savings on the instructions of a down and out, untrustworthy and eccentric 'drunk' Army Major, or smoking and drinking with a group of sailors.<sup>413</sup> His shady negotiations with a disreputable and slippery underworld of figures were hidden behind the ordered, precise regularity of his printed gossip column. Yet by showing the effect of Adam Fenwick-Symes' character on a national newspaper column that now consisted of almost entirely fake news, Waugh situated his story of the gossip column in a broader narrative of cultural and social decline. This is symbolised in the final chapter of the novel entitled 'Happy Ending', when Symes finds himself as a soldier in the 'unrelieved desolation' of another world war.<sup>414</sup> Waugh's feelings about Society and the celebrity culture of press were clear if war was

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<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29, pp. 50-60.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16, pp. 41-46.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

defined as a 'happy ending'. By linking Society and their lifestyles with war, Waugh invited the popular audience to become critics of celebrity culture and its effect on British society.

Waugh not only referred to the social life of the columnist when he attempted to break the bond between the gossip writer and his reader: the blackguardly behaviour of 'Mr Chatterbox' and his fake column of made-up names and occurrences, was poignantly underscored when 'fan' letters showed their trust and faith in his persona by telling him of their private and intimate worries and the 'comfort' they received from his column.<sup>415</sup> Not only are the more vulnerable Britons victims of his false public image, Waugh also provided the columnist and his Society friends with a complex language: it was also difficult to decode the meanings of Fenwick-Symes' communications amongst his private group of friends whose own 'too-shaming' special language was littered with double meanings.<sup>416</sup> Evidence of Fenwick-Symes' intensive involvement in an exclusive and superficial world was evidenced through his inability to connect with the lifestyles and experiences of the common reader. For example, the youthful figure was oddly emotionless and cold as he observed the poppy wearing crowds on Armistice Day.<sup>417</sup> He was also unable to comprehend the existence and lifestyles of the two middle-class housewives he overheard gossiping about their families on a train journey out of London.<sup>418</sup> Whilst Castlerosse had been attempting to ground the gossip columnist's public persona by pushing the columnist's and the readers' worlds closer together as he highlighted an increased set of common experiences and attitudes, Fenwick-Symes' alienation from the beat and pace of ordinary life was striking.

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<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137-139.

Finally, Waugh sealed his contempt and lack of respect for the gossip columnists and their decadent lifestyles when he challenged the foundation of their national celebrity by playfully satirizing their traditional authority as Society figures. He manipulated their formal titles into a ridiculously long, muddled and amusingly pompous list:

At Archie Schwert's party the fifteenth Marquess of Vanburgh, Earl Vanburgh de Brendon, Baron Brendon, Lord of the Five Isles and Hereditary Grand Falconer to the Kingdom of Connaught, said to the eighth Earl of Balcairn, Viscount Erdinge, Baron Cairn of Balcairn, Red Knight of Lancaster, Count of the Holy Roman Empire and Chenonceaux Herald to the Duchy of Aquitaine...<sup>419</sup>

The novelist's narrative went on to reveal that behind this spectacular façade of antiquated titles these columnists showed very human failings. Their inefficiency and inadequacy as both gentleman and gossip columnists simply did not match the splendour and honour that their titles implied. Paradoxically, Waugh attempted to engage and persuade the reader by adopting a similar tone to Viscount Castlerosse here, targeting the middlebrow sensibilities of the same imagined reader as presented in the print of Castlerosse's column. Waugh's description of the hidden world of the gossip columnist would encourage the sensible and reasoned reader to think twice about whether the gossip columnist was a trustworthy, respectable and admirable figure, and even to mistrust the contents of the newspaper which the columnist represented.

The satirical and coolly observant style of *Vile Bodies* suggested Waugh's distance and discordance in lifestyle and moral outlook from the current sector of Society gossip

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

columnists and their mass-produced version of celebrity culture. Unlike Smith and Donegall, whose persona relied on evidence of their active involvement in modern forms of Society nightlife, Waugh's persona as an author depended on a sense of distance from celebrity circles. This was partly achieved through what biographer Mark Amory defines as Waugh's 'historian' voice, which meant that Waugh placed the day to day activities of his character into a wider historical narrative of social, political and economic downturn.<sup>420</sup> Fellow Waugh biographer Stannard believed that Waugh's distancing from the activities of his 'Bright Young People' was the result of an entirely personal set of events, arguing that the trauma Waugh felt after the divorce from his first wife permeated the contents of *Vile Bodies*. According to Stannard, Waugh's authoritative and distanced persona hid an emotional response of 'disillusionment and even revulsion' about an 'anarchic younger set' in which he had long sought to be involved.<sup>421</sup> However, both of these biographers avoid a discussion of the commercial circumstances for a book detailing the lives of the gossip columnists and Society. Waugh's exposure of the gossip columnists' private lives was probably motivated by an understanding that a plot centred on such public and popular figures as the newspaper gossip columnist would sell well: as Richard Dyer argues, part of a celebrity's appeal was the desire to learn more about the 'real' person behind the public image.<sup>422</sup> The son of the managing director of popular publishing house Chapman and Hall, Waugh's previous work on celebrity culture and the popular press including the novel *Decline and Fall* and an essay on the modernisation of the popular press in the periodical *Passing Show* in February 1929 suggest that Waugh knew the discussion of the celebrity

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<sup>420</sup> Waugh and M. Amory, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* (London, 1980), p. 39.

<sup>421</sup> Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh* (1999), pp. 64-71. M. Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: the Early Years 1903-1939* (London 1986), p. 204.

<sup>422</sup> Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* (2003), pp. 1-4.

gossip column would be a popular topic amongst a large group of readers.<sup>423</sup> In writing about a topic such as the gossip column, Waugh was using a similar method to the gossip columnist who focused on the new or modern in forms of leisure and culture. In so doing, Waugh was also, like the gossip columnist, presenting himself as a relevant man of the times who could expertly process and explain modes of contemporary living to a mass audience.

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Forming part of a popular culture where there was an increasingly dominant public profile of newspaper gossip columnists, the plot of *Vile Bodies* uncovered the private life of this new national celebrity through parody of spectacular form. Offering a critique of Society, the popular press and the celebrity culture formulated around the newspaper gossip column, Waugh capitalised on the current celebrity persona of newspaper columnists like Donegall in the *Sunday News* who presented himself as an upper-class figure at the heart of Society's social life. Waugh cleverly manipulated the columnists' supposed transparency and directness about their everyday lives in print, and provided a distinctly murkier, scandalous version of their journalistic conduct and private lives. He demonstrated the lack of moral character that informed the columnists' private and professional conduct and exposed the gap between the columnists' private and public personas; in so doing Waugh attempted to undermine the gossip columnists' celebrity status and also the respectability of the national press.

## 2) The Critical Reviews of *Vile Bodies*.

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<sup>423</sup> Waugh, *Decline and Fall: an Illustrated Novelette* (London, 1928), Gallagher (ed.) and Waugh, *The Essays* (1983), pp. 49-50.

It was a theme of detachment from the unrespectable and modern social world of Society celebrity and the Society gossip column that dominated journalists like Rebecca West's response to the novel. The novelist, feminist, prolific critic and journalist agreed with Waugh's assessment of the 'low-priced and fatuous' figures amongst Society in her critique of *Vile Bodies* in the 'influential and respected' *Fortnightly Review*, founded in 1865 by authors including Anthony Trollope.<sup>424</sup> With the magazine's historic culture of literary criticism and its history of the promotion of the literary industry within Britain it is perhaps not surprising that West supported Waugh's satirical treatment of the celebrity culture of Society in the sensational national press. Yet the *Review* was also known for its radicalism, intellectual elitism and discussion of national political affairs, and has not historically been associated with the discussion of bestselling comedic novels about Society lifestyle.<sup>425</sup> Founded as a journal 'designed to free the "higher journalists" of the time from "the views of an Editor or Political party"', it is perhaps here that we can begin to see the cultural context behind Waugh and West's shared public views of Society and the gossip writer of the mass press.<sup>426</sup> The magazine was created to offer opposing views to those found in the most widely-read and commercially successful newspapers, and West's criticism of the popular gossip columnist and his promotion of celebrity culture can be seen as part of this tradition of criticising the content of newspapers. In this sense Waugh and West's agendas were the same in that they sought to expose the faults of Society and the gossip columnist, yet it was likely that they had different motives behind their work. For example, West was working within the generic conventions of the journal, and as discussed in section one, biographers of Waugh argue that he was motivated by his own disillusionment with his

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<sup>424</sup> R. West, 'A Study in Disillusionment', *Fortnightly Review* (February, 1930), p. 273. <http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/about/> [last accessed 28 June 2013].

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

Society friends and a desire to monopolise upon a popular interest in Society lifestyle in order to make money; a combined reasoning that was at once very personal but was also fuelled by the desire for financial success and to meet public demand.<sup>427</sup> West agreed with Waugh's ideas that the 'gossip-writers' and their BYP subjects including the 'deplorable Miss Runcible', were 'however much they wriggle with excess of vitality...doomed to destruction'.<sup>428</sup> Both Waugh and West's interest in the youth of Society, their social life and the celebrity culture of the popular press can also be interpreted through their similar social backgrounds. Both born in London, Waugh was the son of a publisher and West's father was a journalist. Waugh and West had written for national newspapers, Waugh had tried 'with success' to become the press's 'spokesman of Youth- unorthodox, rebellious, irreverent' in the mid- to late-1920s, and West was also a novelist albeit less comedic than Waugh having written the dramatic social commentaries the *Return of the Soldier* (1918) and *The Judge* (1922).<sup>429</sup> Her condemnation of the morals and decadent social lives of the young Society characters in *Vile Bodies* arguably contradicted aspects of her own personal life, which, according to her biographer, involved extra-marital affairs with HG Wells and Beaverbrook.<sup>430</sup> Through satire and criticism both Waugh the novelist and West the literary reviewer took the moral high ground over the celebrity subjects of the gossip column and columnist, and both were able to conceal aspects of their private lives through these literary personas. Yet just as Waugh's novel was not a straightforward condemnation of Society, nor was West's review. For example, West's association of an active social life and enjoyment of metropolitan nightlife with 'vitality' agreed with the content of columns by

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<sup>427</sup> See Section One.

<sup>428</sup> West, 'A Study in Disillusionment' (February, 1930), p. 273.

<sup>429</sup> Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh* (1999), p. 68. B. K. Scott, 'Andrews, Dame Cicily Isabel [Rebecca West] (1892–1983)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011 [<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/31819>, last accessed 28 June 2013].

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

Donegall and Smith and their excited descriptions of their social life, as well as the attitudes of characters like Agatha Runcible within the novel; that enjoyment of new forms of leisure and a hectic social life were invigorating and a central aspect of a fulfilled and lively personality.

West's review can be read in terms of how an expanding, new popular print culture of both national newspapers and bestselling novels might have impacted on an older, established canon of literary criticism and novel-reading in the early 1930s. According to historians of the publishing industry and the press, the interwar period was one of great expansion and development to meet the rising public demand for both newspapers and books. For example, McAleer states that the immediate post-war period saw the rapid industrial expansion of the production of cheap, bestselling novels in particular.<sup>431</sup> Jay Dixon writes that the 'escapist' 'romance' literature of Mills and Boon saw this publishing company 'prosper' in the early 1930s at a time when 'most publishers were not doing well', perhaps, he argues, 'because of' a mass readership's need for 'escapism' during the 'economic depression'.<sup>432</sup> John Stevenson writes that the national newspaper market expanded throughout the period so that by the 1930s, 'newspapers were easily the most important form of mass communication in Britain'.<sup>433</sup> He explains that the sales of the 'major national dailies...including the *Express*, *Herald*, *Mail* and *Mirror* rose by 80% between 1920 and 1939.<sup>434</sup> Placing the reviews of *Vile Bodies* within the context of the development of the popular print industry, the responses of critics like West can be used as alternative evidence to illustrate moments of change not only within the book publishing industry but national

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<sup>431</sup> McAleer, *Passion's Fortune* (1999), pp. 1-26.

<sup>432</sup> J. Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills and Boon, 1909-1990s* (London, 1999), p. 18.

<sup>433</sup> J. Stevenson, *British society 1914-45* (London, 1984), p. 403.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

print culture more broadly including the gossip column. Historians like McAleer have focused on the business history of companies like Mills and Boon after the war analysing changes in editorial policies and the relationships between publishers and the novelists. Dixon has analysed the content of the novels within a social history of Britain, yet reasons for shifts in the production of fiction literature can be interpreted by exploring the critical responses to it.<sup>435</sup>

It could be argued that West's praise for the novel encouraged the continuance of a popular celebrity culture of *Society* focused on the discussion of their social lives, as a positive review, of the author if not the characters, must have encouraged readers' interest in the book and the gossip column. We can read West's enjoyment of the novel but her criticism of its wealthy *Society* characters as a continuance of the 'guilty pleasure' culture surrounding elite nightlife that had begun with the investigations by journalists like Moseley into the night clubs of the 1920s.<sup>436</sup> The mixed messages about the 'vitality' of the *Vile Bodies* characters but also their 'deplorable' moral stance showed that West herself was a participant within this popular culture that had voyeuristically examined the lifestyles, actions and dress of *Society* and made moral judgements about *Society* as a result. Yet West's review also suggested in strong terms that the 'movement' of 'Bright Young People' would now be 'over' as a result of the novel's bestselling success.<sup>437</sup> She argued that if a novel exposing the decadence, immorality and avid consumerism of such hugely popular national public figures could be a best-seller, then a significant change was surely looming in the content, tone and format of popular print culture. This suggestion for content change

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<sup>435</sup> Dixon, *The Romance Fiction* (1999), pp. 27-196. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune* (1999), pp. 11-18, 145-171.

<sup>436</sup> See Section One.

<sup>437</sup> West, 'A Study in Disillusionment' (February, 1930), p. 274.

was mainly directed at the national press: she argued that the 'success' of 'Lord Monomark' the fictional proprietor of the mass-produced *Daily Excess* was representative of a 'past' newspaper culture where 'nothing' was 'honourable or valid'.<sup>438</sup> West's criticism of the validity of the press and her questioning of its honour publically articulated her mistrust of the content of the national press. West's praise for *Vile Bodies* was also framed through a discussion of its literary merit and the author's talents as a writer, his 'exuberance' and 'indomitable creativeness' were used as the 'best proof' that the celebrity culture of the BYP was over.<sup>439</sup> Whilst descriptions of Waugh's 'exuberance' could be related to West's earlier discussions of Agatha Runcible's 'vitality', the key difference was Waugh's liveliness-but seen through his skills as a writer- not by his participation in the latest dance crazes or racing motor cars like Runcible.<sup>440</sup> As if to further distance novelist Waugh and herself from Society and the celebrity culture of the gossip column, West likened Waugh to a number of authors who shared similar ideas of 'disillusionment', including fellow 'artists' T.S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley.<sup>441</sup> Yet, that such a coherent and powerful attack on the popular newspaper gossip column came from a novelist who continually drew on aspects of popular culture to shape his writing was particularly momentous to West. West's review seemed to provide evidence of an attempt to bridge a cultural and social divide between highbrow and middlebrow forms of literature. For example, she believed that Huxley and Eliot could learn from the writing of Waugh, as they did not share Waugh's sales success. Her language merged a commercial concern with sales traditionally aligned with the motives of newspaper proprietors and paperback romance- and the literary devices through which social and political ideologies could be most powerfully expressed. For example, she argued

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>440</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986 edition), Chapters Seven to Nine.

<sup>441</sup> West, 'A Study in Disillusionment' (February, 1930), p. 274.

that the 'value' of Waugh's language lay in its accessibility to a broad range of readers, in comparison to the complex linguistic structure and 'intellectual airs' in Eliot's *The Waste Lands* [sic]', and the elitist and specialised knowledge of 'certain psychologists' present in Huxley's literature.<sup>442</sup> West's reference to the 'certain...airs' of Eliot and Huxley insinuated hidden, complex, even unrespectable, bohemian aspects to their personalities, reflected in the challenging style of the authors. The interpretative capabilities of the imagined mass readership are crucial to West's championing of popular author Waugh's direct and entertaining tone and the logical flow of his chronological narrative. West's interest in the inter-relationship between writers and their audience, and, most significantly, the potential of a writer to change or shape an audience's political and social outlook by influencing their perceptions of modes of culture, was a result of the bestselling novel *Vile Bodies* and the continual rise in popular press readership figures over the decade.<sup>443</sup> West's analysis of the success of *Vile Bodies*, as a bestseller, but also an important social commentary on modern Britain, disagrees with Deane's argument that questions of national culture were confined to the work of an elite group of academics and intellectuals in the early 1930s.

Neither was discussion of social concerns confined to the leftist working-class novels like *Love on the Dole*. West's review provides evidence that not only questions of society and its relationship to print culture were being asked in the bestselling Society novel, but that elitist critics were actively encouraging intellectuals to take on modes and styles of popular culture within their work. In short, West praised Waugh's writing style as the basis for the success of his ideological campaign against the worst excesses of Society and the corrupt methods of the gossip columnist. Waugh had qualities as a contemporary role model; a witty and

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>443</sup> See Chapter One.

entertaining communicator with a moral basis to his work. She hailed Waugh as an exemplar of how popular culture can literally be improved from within: how by drawing on the celebrity of the gossip columnist, and, ironically, by adopting his clear, friendly and humorous style, a novelist and intellectual could make a massive impact on the content and form of the modes of mass culture they critique.

Gerald Gould was also an experienced journalist and wrote a review of *Vile Bodies* in the *Observer* for a mainly middle-class audience on 2 February 1930. Contradicting the cosmopolitan and transnational social world that columnists like Eleanor Smith enthused about in the late 1920s, Gould emphasised that the celebrity culture of *Society* was something 'strange' and foreign to him. Gould wrote:

It is a strange world to which Mr Waugh introduces us. How far it is a real one, I have little means of judging. That reference to St John's Wood, now...I live in St John's Wood, and should have thought it was the *last* place...And then...almost everybody in the story is frantically, madly, hysterically young; and I have one foot in the grave and the other -at parties- in my mouth. So to me it all comes only as a beautiful dream, no more amenable to the odious strictures of morality than the *Thousand and One Nights*, or the *Millers Tale*...<sup>444</sup>

Gould set about destabilising the celebrity culture of the youth of *Society* in a number of ways in this statement. Unlike West, Gould was perhaps not so accepting of Waugh as a social chronicler of the times as he questioned whether it was a 'real' world which Waugh presented to his audience. However, Gould's statement did not only raise questions about the line between fact and fiction in the novel and the motives of Waugh as an author, but was also intended to demonstrate Gould's own distance from the *Society* lifestyle and celebrity culture which *Vile Bodies* focused on. His distance from *Society* lifestyle can be

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<sup>444</sup> G. Gould, *Observer*, 2 February 1930.

read in both personal and professional terms: for instance, he talked about how he lived in the upper-middle class area of St John's Wood, some distance from Mayfair. Just as he never associated with Society in his local community, he also had 'no means of judging' whether Waugh's depiction of Society lifestyles and attitudes were real from his professional experience. This suggested that Gould did not read Society gossip columns or associate with Society gossip columnists in his work as a newspaper journalist, and also that he had never really investigated the lifestyles of Society as part of his work. Such an approach may have had something to do with the historic distinctions of the *Observer*, founded in the eighteenth-century and occupied mainly with political news and political figures, in comparison with the interwar boom of the modern national press with its new features of gossip columns, fashion features and film news.

Yet Gould's friendly and comedic writing style with its frequent use of 'my' and 'I' showed some similarities with the personalised and entertaining writing styles of columnists like Castlerosse and Smith even if he used the discussion of his own life and personality to emphasise his opposite traits to Society figures, such as his discussion of his lack of social skills at parties. The fact that Gould turned most of the book review into a discussion of his own lifestyle suggested that personal styles of journalism were being used throughout the British press at this time and not just in the gossip column. Gould's suggestions of his ignorance of Society lifestyle contrasted with West's emphasis on Society's central place within national culture; West seemed to regard Waugh's novel as fact rather than fiction that had a similar veracity to a social investigation. In one sense this is surprising, we might expect that West, by writing for an elitist journal of current affairs, would have dismissed the impact of Society on the 'real' lives of ordinary Britons, yet it was Gould the newspaper

journalist that did this. For example, for Gould, the novel's Society characters were nothing but a 'beautiful dream' an exotic mirage that had no logical or meaningful impact on his daily life. It seemed from Gould's account that personal associations with Society were not appropriate for the respectable journalist at the turn of the 1930s and neither was suggesting a journalist's support for the celebrity culture of Society. Here Gould seemed to be suggesting a cultural distinction between the novelist and the journalist by aligning Society and their lifestyles with fiction and the journalist with more serious 'real' concerns. In so doing he insinuated that the journalist was a more respectable figure than the novelist, particularly those who like Waugh focused on Society lifestyle. Even though the review had a self-deprecating tone in places, the fact that most of Gould's statement was about his own life rather than about the book that he was supposed to be reviewing suggested his own sense of self-importance. Opposite to the highly excitable and frantic personalities of columnists such as the youthful, upper-class Smith, Gould seemed to expose his own sensible and reserved personality traits to further his public status as a journalist.

In 1933 the *Sketch* and *Standard* gossip columnist Patrick Balfour mocked the middle-class newspaper readership which he stated avidly followed the fashions of Society women in the gossip column.<sup>445</sup> Like Waugh, Balfour offered a history of Society and their portrayal in the gossip columns of the mass press but in the guise of a social investigation and journalist memoir. Balfour's writing style was lively and humorous like Waugh and Donegall, and he described the readers' obsession with Society over political and economic news:

The editor of the...*Express* knows that quite as many of his readers will be as interested in the shingling of Lady Patricia Moore as in the resumption of trade relations with Russia- probably more. He knows that his women readers will exclaim

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<sup>445</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 23.

when they open their copy of the paper that morning: “See that, dear? Lady Droggeder’s daughter’s cut her pigtails off. We’ll have to be cutting our Gladys’s off now she’s getting to be such a big girl” ...<sup>446</sup>

Waugh had offered a very similar appraisal of the mass readership’s intellectual capabilities in *Vile Bodies* when he criticised middle-class women’s trivial interests in fashion and appearance.<sup>447</sup> If Waugh used the content of gossip columns to fuel his fictional examples of gossip paragraphs, now cultural influences were moving in the opposite direction with Waugh’s novel influencing Balfour’s memoir-social commentary. In 1936 former newspaper editor Hamilton Fyfe agreed with the two Society figures in his view of the mass readership, when he described them as mentally stultified ‘with no real interest in news’.<sup>448</sup> If Gould had sought to separate the journalist, novelist and Society figure into opposing social and cultural factions with different lifestyles and consequently moral characters, then by 1936 there was an agreement between these three groups of writers: firstly, about the mass public’s simplistic fascination with celebrity and secondly, that the gossip column fuelled a ‘snobbish’ national interest in Society lifestyle.<sup>449</sup> A widespread cultural perception about the negative effects the mass culture of celebrity had on national life was shared by journalists of the mass press as well as Society figures and was now being publicly voiced by gossip columnists themselves. Like Waugh, West and Fyfe, Balfour also felt that the national press was chiefly responsible for fuelling a mass public’s obsession with Society writing that ‘they’ (the papers) ‘invented’ an outlet for the ‘English-man’s...snobbery’.<sup>450</sup> Unlike Gould’s insinuations that Waugh had invented the Society characters he discussed in his novel, Balfour now accused the national press of a similar creative invention. Balfour

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>447</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986 edn.), pp. 65-66.

<sup>448</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936), pp. 1-2.

<sup>449</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 23.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

wrote that 'Society today is a fiction'.<sup>451</sup> Yet, Balfour believed that Society was a fiction in the press because gossip columns continued to align 'Society' with 'Aristocracy': if in the 1920s Society and aristocracy were interchangeable' then in the 1930s this was no longer valid. He wrote that the 'real' aristocracy, 'leads a life which is modest, unspectacular and, in short, not a Society life' and so the gossip column was misleading the public about major changes within the social make-up and functions of the British upper class.<sup>452</sup> By suggesting that there was a gap in the market within the popular print culture of Society, Balfour set up an impression of his own significance as an alternative expert on the British upper class, moreover, he would expose the real Society and their behaviour that he argued was not presented in the gossip columns of the national press. Like Waugh and West, Balfour presented his personal 'disillusionment' with Society, the national press and the gossip column.

Balfour perhaps recognised the impact of *Vile Bodies* on shifting attitudes of the mass readership towards the newspaper gossip columnist when he suggested that a mixture of caution and wonder was attached to the gossip columnist in the early 1930s. Writing in a sensational style, Balfour described the mixed feelings of women readers to the 'villainous and glamorous' gossip columnist, which evoked the caddish behaviour of Adam Fenwick-Symes in *Vile Bodies*. Balfour wrote that the female reader was now unsure of the gossip columnist and his intentions but was still very attracted by him and what he had to offer, filled with sexual connotations he wrote: 'A sensation of mingled awe and admiration titillates her senses. She is afraid of the forbidden fruit, yet longs to pluck it. She would enjoy the sensation of being "taken for a ride"...yet she would hate that operation to be

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

carried to its logical conclusions'.<sup>453</sup> Placing the ordinary newspaper reader, if even in a limited sense, as part of the body of critique against the Society gossip column and columnist was a new aspect of discussion about the gossip column's celebrity culture in the early 1930s. Balfour described a mass confusion surrounding the gossip columnist's true character and his respectability and this may have been underlined by Waugh's exposure of the fake columns and scandalous social life of 'Mr Chatterbox' in the bestselling *Vile Bodies*.

Although Balfour criticised the national press as fuelling a fake account of Society lifestyle in the gossip column, *Society Racket* was also a defensive piece in which Balfour sought to respond to criticism directed at his work as a gossip writer, which he described as a 'minor art'.<sup>454</sup> Here Balfour seemed to present a contradictory account, on the one hand he lambasted the national press for fake content about the upper-class and dumbing-down of the mass readership, but on the other he proudly identified with the work of the gossip writer and even exalted it to the status of 'art'. It seemed that Balfour was working with two competing themes in *Society Racket*, he both agreed with his friend Waugh's account of the gossip column but also attempted to add a new respectability to the gossip columnist that Waugh's bestselling work had done much to undermine. There may have been several reasons for Balfour's dual approach here. Balfour still had a career as a gossip columnist in 1933 and it was the chief source of his income, so he wished to protect and justify his work to a popular readership.<sup>455</sup> Balfour also wished to sell *Society Racket* to a mass audience, the same kind of readers who read *Vile Bodies* and Society gossip columns in papers like the *Express*, the same middlebrow readership who bought the sensational social reports on London nightlife by Moseley and Morton on London's nightclubs in the early 1920s. In other

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>455</sup> See Chapter Two.

words, Balfour sought to capitalise on a mass celebrity culture of Society within Britain and also block any attempts to limit it. Balfour's style of exposing the differences between the respectable representation of Society in the newspaper gossip column, and the 'real' lifestyles and behaviour of Society, was a new aspect to celebrity culture which I argue was begun in the bestselling *Vile Bodies*.

In *Society Racket*, Balfour sought to justify the gossip columnist's prominent public status in Britain. Responding to the ideas of journalist critics like Gould who had stated his distance from Society figures, Balfour wrote in bold terms: 'It is continually objected that the columns of the gossip writer do not reflect modern society but only a small and insignificant part thereof. Small, possibly. But how can it be insignificant? The very fact that its news is so prominently transmitted to so many millions of readers renders it significant.'<sup>456</sup> Balfour continued with his confident and forthright tone when he suggested a change in the gossip columnists' work. He argued that 'critics-that is to say the social columnists- should have a free hand in reporting' Society events including invitation-only parties. If Donegall and Smith had written playful and humorous accounts of Society, then Balfour wanted to openly criticise Society figures and events in the gossip column. Balfour wrote, 'the hostess cannot reasonably object when' columnists give 'a bad notice, any more than the dramatist can reasonably object to the critic who condemns his play, or the politician to the Parliamentary Correspondent who criticizes his speech'.<sup>457</sup> This quote suggested a number of things had changed in the gossip column by the early 1930s. Firstly, Balfour the gossip columnist was openly criticising the Society hostess and her attitudes: the deference to Society figures that figured in the vast majority of newspaper gossip columns throughout the 1920s was not

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<sup>456</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 82.

<sup>457</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), pp. 96-97.

present here. Secondly, he stated that the gossip columnist was viewed by Society as part of 'the Press' and that Society actively invited gossip columnists to 'advertise' themselves to the mass public. This suggested that by the early 1930s the gossip columnist was increasingly less associated with the Society figure and was now more often regarded as a journalist, part of a profession that was outside Society. Balfour seemed to confirm this when he wrote that gossip writers now 'make no attempt to hide their vocation'.<sup>458</sup> Balfour's comments also suggested that Society had a greater need for the national press and the gossip column in the 1930s in order to maintain their public status. Thirdly, where Balfour had earlier called his work as a gossip columnist an art, he now aligned himself more closely with the expertise of journalists, showing his knowledge of the work of the 'Parliamentary Correspondent' and the drama critic. In so doing, Balfour elevated his role as a 'social...critic' to the same level as those journalists who discussed high art and national politics. Here again as Waugh and West had done, Balfour undermined the behaviour of Society whilst he simultaneously stated that Society's celebrity culture was of important national concern. This evidence suggests that Balfour, even as the country was in the depth of economic depression in 1933, was determined to argue that the Society gossip column and the gossip columnist were of national importance in the 1930s.

Balfour continued to offer more evidence of the transition in the public persona of the Society gossip columnist in the early 1930s. For instance, Balfour wrote that 'the importation of "gentlemen"...into "journalists"...ranks has in no way lowered their morality'.<sup>459</sup> In this statement, Balfour suggested his uneasiness with contemporary

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>459</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 98.

definitions of 'gentlemen' and 'journalists' by placing them in quotation marks, as if he wished to show the overlap and easy cross-over of these two characters and not emphasise their opposition. He also showed his protective attitude towards his profession of journalism, defending accusations from figures like Waugh that national journalists worked in an immoral manner. Balfour publicly fashioned himself as the supreme, expert, gentleman-journalist. Balfour confidently described his authority and respectability within the journalistic profession, informing the reader of the gossip columnist's central role in the 'immense development of newspapers' and as a leading innovator in the new 'direction' of 'news' and 'the Press'.<sup>460</sup> Whereas Waugh's 'Mr Chatterbox' showed his lack of journalistic skill and personal responsibility, Balfour demonstrated his own intellectual engagement with the theories of his journalist colleagues on their modernising profession. With a similar tone to the training manuals written by well-known journalist and journalism lecturer Moseley, Balfour itemised the skills and training a specialist gossip columnist required. This included: 'an alertness of mind...a natural skill of observation...a natural style...lightness of touch...distinct personality...full of wit, good sense...and brains' and to be a 'young man-about-town'.<sup>461</sup> Although journalists like Moseley had been increasingly concerned about the informal writing style of journalists in the 1930s and the 'human-interest' style of reporting, he had also argued that the skill of being a journalist was something that was naturally found within an individual's personality, unsure whether the skills of a good journalist could be taught to just anyone.<sup>462</sup> Asserting his status alongside established 'news

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., p. 92. Moseley, *The Truth* (1935). Moseley, *Short Story Writing* (1939). Tracey, *The British Press*, p. 42. L. Warren, *Journalism* (London, 1922).

<sup>462</sup> Moseley, *The Truth* (1935), Introduction.

reporters' like Herbert Tracey, Balfour confirmed the extent of the columnist's professional development after the war, writing the 'amateur contributor is practically extinct'.<sup>463</sup>

Balfour attempted to show his solidarity with newspaper staff and his integration within newspaper journalism when he wrote about the mistreatment of journalists as shown in the quote below:

If you treat a journalist like mud he is likely to reciprocate the treatment. If you treat him like a gentleman you will often find that he is one. That is to say, if you ask a social columnist, politely, to keep his mouth shut it is quite on the cards that he will do so.<sup>464</sup>

There were insinuations here about the powerful status of the journalist within Britain; he could publicly undermine an individual if they treated him 'like mud'. Yet much in the statement went against the idea of a gossip columnist and even a journalist as a professional figure: what went into the column or newspaper seemed to be agreed on the basis of a gentleman's agreement between two individuals and not along any laid out professional codes, managerial guidelines or the importance of news values and the public interest over a journalist's personal interests. For example, Balfour suggested the importance of maintaining good personal relationships with journalists: if a gossip columnist was treated with respect then they would attempt to keep a figure's name out of the column if they did not want to be mentioned. In this statement the boundaries between the professional and the personal seemed to be clouded, the gossip columnist's and journalist's feelings and ego seemed to influence what would enter the print of the mass press. The fact that Balfour discussed his working life as a gossip columnist suggested that after *Vile Bodies* there continued to be a public interest not only in the personalities of

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<sup>463</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 99.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Society figures but also those that worked in the national press. In 1933 Balfour presented the working life of the gossip columnist with all the personal drama and personalities of the Society novel. By his account, the celebrities of the press were the powerful and influential gossip columnists who also happened to be members of Society.

### **3) The Reconfiguration of the Celebrity Gossip Columnist after 1930.**

This section analyses the gossip columns of Beverley Nichols and Tom Driberg in the 1930s, two figures who according to Taylor were part of the same elite social circles as Waugh.<sup>465</sup> It argues that like West and Gould, these gossip columnists shaped their public personas to distance themselves from Society and their social lives. I will show that this was a significant change in the public persona of the gossip columnist in comparison to fellow Society figures Lady Eleanor Smith and the Marquess of Donegall in the late 1920s who excitedly celebrated their friendships within Society. Nichols authored the new gossip feature of the 'liberal', weekly, popular newspaper the *Sunday Chronicle* which began on 27 September 1932.<sup>466</sup> All reference to the former 'Secrets of the Town' by 'Mayfairy' had disappeared, and perhaps in immediate recognition of the popular success of *Vile Bodies* but, perhaps also, to the recently folded column of youthful upper-class socialite Lady Eleanor Smith, a subheading in the feature read 'I am not a Bright Young Man'.<sup>467</sup> The suggestion of the attractive qualities of the youthful Nichols personality, combined with evidence of his varied and considerable writing experience, was an immediate priority in the editor's celebratory introduction of Nichols. Rather than referring directly to his aristocratic links or Society

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<sup>465</sup> Taylor, *Bright* (2007), Introduction.

<sup>466</sup> J. Drawbell, *Time* (London, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>467</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 25 September 1932, 2 October 1932.

connections as the editor's introduction of Donegall's column had done in 1927, the *Sunday Chronicle* editor promoted Nichols's public profile and acumen as the precocious multi-talented novelist, playwright, biographer and journalist. Nichols was an experienced figure within popular print culture rather than an experienced socialite.

The editor promised that Nichols would write in an almost shockingly direct style to engage the reader on topics not normally discussed in a social gossip column: his 'extreme and provocative' views on contemporary issues of 'war, militarism and the all the rest of it' would perhaps shift the gossip column into a forum that assessed a broader and more intellectually complex and varied remit than just Society lifestyle.<sup>468</sup> The column's both educative and entertaining basis was clear when the editor guaranteed the reader that 'your mental outlook will be brightened and sharpened...He stabs your complacency with a rapier'.<sup>469</sup> Similar to West's description of Waugh as both an entertaining writer and an important commentator on society and culture, Nichols' column was distanced from the narrow focus of 'Mr Chatterbox' and the Marquess of Donegall, whose columns were dominated by humorous commentary on Society fashion and parties.<sup>470</sup> Nichols would engage the reader in candid discussion about 'life', and did 'not forget that serious criticism is part of one's duties'.<sup>471</sup> Duty had not been a word that had featured heavily in the discussion of social life in the columns of Smith and Donegall. Here Nichols opened up the gossip column to discussion of national identity and national political life, he referred to his duty as a British citizen and this seemed to immediately shift his persona as a gossip columnist into a more serious, thoughtful guise. For example, as if to enforce critic Rebecca

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<sup>468</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 18 September 1932.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>470</sup> *Sunday News*, 5 June 1927.

<sup>471</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 2 October 1932.

West's view that Waugh's representation of decadent Society activity ceased to exist in both print and reality after 1930, Nichols used time and space as strategies in order to distance himself from the lifestyle of the gossip columnist depicted in the bestselling *Vile Bodies*.

Rather than only describing events he had witnessed, an important component of the gentleman gossip columnist's persona in the late 1920s, Nichols also discussed the gossip he had heard, albeit from Society intermediaries, friends and acquaintances, thus diffusing his connections with an elite social world. For instance, on 18 June 1933 he recounted the story of a female 'friend's' travels around Paris in the wake of the hugely wealthy American socialite and heiress Barbara Hutton. Criticising his friend's jealousy of Hutton's ability to buy expensive dresses, Nichols urged her to put these superficial desires into a moral and historical perspective writing, 'in these days of want, I should imagine that it must literally be *so dull*' to have the ability to buy dresses.<sup>472</sup> Here Nichols simultaneously demonstrated a connection with *Vile Bodies* but also showed a broader awareness of the political and economic state of the country during the economic depression. For instance, the use of '*so dull*' and the italicised text used to emphasise the phrase sounded very much like the phrasing and intonation of Waugh's BYP characters and their expressions such as '*too shaming*'.<sup>473</sup> His association with wealthy friends also suggested that he was from a wealthy background and mixed with wealthy figures. Yet Nichols also showed a broader social awareness which contrasted sharply with the BYP and their obsession with their own social life. He suggested that all should adapt their behaviour in line with the 'days of want' that the country was suffering; it was poor taste for wealthier individuals like Nichols's friend to continue with their extravagant lifestyle and follow the latest haute couture fashions.

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<sup>472</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 18 June 1933.

<sup>473</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986 edn.), p. 51.

Although here Nichols revealed similarities in his print persona with the entertaining, youthful and lively personality of 'Mr Chatterbox', Nichols was the polar opposite in terms of his moral character as he acted as a responsible moral guardian to his female friend.

Later in the column Nichols used another strategy to distance himself from the cosmopolitan celebrity culture of *Society* as he referred to his interactions with celebrities in the past tense. For example, he described how he used to go the same tailor as the US film star Rudolph Valentino, but was now careful to emphasise his more humble and sensible characteristics, recalling that he ordered only one suit in comparison to Valentino's twelve.<sup>474</sup> Although Nichols could afford to go to the same tailors as a Hollywood film star, this statement implied his relatively modest income as a gossip columnist in comparison to Valentino who could afford to buy twelve times as many suits. Yet what it really emphasised was his sensible and modest attitude to consumerism in comparison to an American film star. Here Nichols created a clever balancing act between less acceptable, older forms of celebrity culture and modern forms of gossip, simultaneously entertaining an audience with a scandalous story of a much-admired foreign film star of the 1920s, whilst adding an air of respectability, moral consciousness and social relevance to the paragraph. Moreover, Nichols also asserted his own celebrity in this story. By beating his old acquaintance Valentino to the moral victory, Nichols asked the reader to view him as the more respectable and therefore more admirable figure. Such an attitude towards consumer and leisure culture was similar to the middle-aged, Irish gossip columnist Viscount Castlerosse, and not to that of Nichols' own generation like Smith and Donegall.

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<sup>474</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 18 June 1933.

Nichols's commentaries on celebrity culture were becoming shaped by suggestions of his maturity and geographical distance from his celebrity subjects. Nichols suggested his physical distance from celebrity culture when he referred to his discussion of 'theatres, racing etc.' and any discussion of activities associated with the social elite as 'worldly'.<sup>475</sup> Whereas we might today label his discussion of religion, culture and 'moral problems' as 'worldly' topics, Nichols shaped such discussion in very personal terms and spoke very directly to his readers. For example on 21 June 1936 he wrote:

Now let us get this straight. Page Two is not a pulpit. It is a commentary on life. All the same, it is, I hope, a Christian commentary.  
But if anybody tells me that I cannot be a Christian and enjoy the theatre, or a race, or a cup-tie, or a boxing match, or a glass of beer in a pub, then he and I must part company. It is wild nonsense, and if those are the sort of people who want my support, they won't get it.<sup>476</sup>

In this statement Nichols very confidently reconciled his social life with his Christian moral values and refused to feel guilty about spending his leisure time at a boxing-match or in a pub. It is notable that the Society figure referred to his enjoyment of a demotic set of leisure pursuits rather than the social calendar of Court presentations, Ascot and Wimbledon, even though he wrote in the month of June. Nichols' column cultivated a sense of a common culture of leisure enjoyed across classes. On 1 June 1939, for example, he wrote that he much more enjoyed 'a Palais de Danse in a poor quarter of London where you pay a shilling to get in' to the 'high life' of an expensive hotel dance in the West End where the women covered in 'make-up' looked 'half dead'.<sup>477</sup> He wrote of the London Palais de Danse, 'You'd have to go a long way to see such gaiety, such exuberance, and above all such good dancing...They were actually dancing steps...they weren't just walking aimlessly round

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 21 June 1936, 1 June 1939.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 21 June 1936.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 1 June 1939.

the room as if they had lost something....'<sup>478</sup> Here Nichols contrasted the chaotic and unhealthy scenes in the West End haunts of Society with the order and collective 'exuberance' of working-class entertainment venues.<sup>479</sup> Rather than celebrate the leisure culture of Society this gossip columnist of the popular press was looking in the opposite direction for his descriptions of metropolitan leisure culture in 1939. If the gossip columnists of the *Mail* and *Express* scrutinised the dress of Society Ladies at the Epsom Derby, then Nichols provided his detailed observations of the social life of working-class subjects. However, reminders of Society were never far away and were a persistent theme in Nichols' writing throughout the 1930s, in this example Society figures were ghoulish and other-worldly spectres used to underline the 'vitality' of popular leisure culture. Like Balfour's *Society Racket*, who presented a sense of his uniqueness amongst the rest of Society of the 1930s, Nichols himself was the only Society figure in the gossip column who he presented in a positive light. Their difference rather than their similarity to Society figures was a key part of their celebrity appeal, a major difference to the columns of Donegall and Smith in the 1920s who always, as section one showed, discussed their close friendships with Society figures.<sup>480</sup>

If Nichols evoked notions of Society nightlife found in *Vile Bodies* to enhance his descriptions of a new kind of leisure culture, then Tom Driberg of the *Daily Express* almost completely avoided any direct discussion of Society in his column 'These Names Make News'. Nichols' fellow Oxford undergraduate and the future Labour MP Tom Driberg, offered an even more dramatic and complex reassessment of celebrity culture in his *Daily Express* gossip column between 1933 and 1943. Through a paradoxical and mysterious self-representation in

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> See Section One.

which his own interactions with celebrities were never fully disclosed, Waugh's steady correspondent, school friend, and university mentee, questioned whether an individual's class, social interactions and consumer habits were really a valid basis for national celebrity. This approach challenged the role and purpose of other columns including those by Lords Castlerosse and Donegall who still mainly detailed the social lives of the Society elite.<sup>481</sup> Driberg's use of a pseudonym would underscore the transformation of the gossip column into a forum for the profiling of a more socially diverse range of celebrity subjects. Whereas aristocratic titles had once shown gossip columnists to be authentic and fashionable members of a national celebrity culture, they were now markers of a gossip column's social and cultural limitations. The gossip columnist's upper-class status and leisured lifestyle, the details of which were once so integral to the gossip columnist's public persona and mass appeal, would now fall victim to its own daily exposure. As Nichols' treatment of celebrity culture had begun to show, spectacular displays of wealth and consumerism were distasteful, shocking, scandalous, and even immoral in the current economic and political climate.

Driberg's column distanced itself from the kind of decadent and superficial Society culture parodied to such powerful effect in *Vile Bodies*. He achieved this partly through the 'shock treatment' of the column's stylistic overhaul.<sup>482</sup> In his memoirs Driberg wrote that his column was influenced by the American Magazine *Time* and 'its sharply flavoured and jagged prose style', characterised by an unusual and abrupt 'staccato telegraphese' tone.<sup>483</sup> Driberg did not link his paragraphs in a chronological, diary narrative like the columns of 'Mr

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<sup>481</sup> *Sunday News*, 5 June 1927. *Sunday Express*, 6 January 1927.

<sup>482</sup> Driberg, *Ruling* (1978), p. 104.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

Gossip' of the *Sketch* or the 'Dragoman' of the *Express* in 1930 and also avoided the social geographies of London and the West End.<sup>484</sup> With little focus on the leisure and social life of the celebrity, Driberg parodied the gossip columns that filled their paragraphs with appraisals and visual imagery of celebrity beauty, their fashionable appearance and consumer habits.<sup>485</sup> His uniqueness and originality though, lay in his refusal to place himself physically in the narrative of those 'Names' that 'Make News'. The 'I saw' and 'I thought' located in the tales of the 'man about town's' daily pleasurable activities in 'A.D.C's' column in the *Daily Mail* of the 1920s was avoided.<sup>486</sup> Yet this certainly was not a return to the style of the anonymous 'Court and Society' columnist in the post-war *Daily Mail*: Driberg did not limit his description of subjects to their dress or their whereabouts to display his respect for social conservatism or the preservation of ancient social elites. Driberg shifted his focus from Society to a more varied set of political and cultural figures like MPs, artists and authors. If Balfour and West had argued that Society were an important part of national cultural life then Driberg did not seem to agree.

Driberg moved away from the social confines of Mayfair in order to introduce profiles of Labour Party figures. In the example below, these figures' working-class origins were strikingly different to the privileged backgrounds of those who had dominated the gossip columns of the most widely sold newspapers since before the First World War. Driberg's new approach seemed to borrow from the content of the gossip columns in the left-wing Co-operative Press newspaper *Reynolds's Illustrated News* whose column 'Talk of the Town Outside Mayfair' was presented as "'Gossip" without cocktails...'" and focused on celebrating

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<sup>484</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>485</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>486</sup> See Chapter One.

the current work of left-wing political figures and the contemporary political situation, and criticised figures within the National Government.<sup>487</sup> Yet in other ways *Reynolds's* gossip column was more like Nichols's 'Page Two' in that it continually relied on the cultural theme of an elitist, leisured and decadent culture of Mayfair Society to promote its otherness and opposition to conservative politics. Driberg's column did not swap the lively and entertaining tone of Castlerosse and Balfour for the sombre tone of *Reynolds's*. His new treatment of celebrity followed a format which combined a flurry of abrupt factoids detailing a celebrity's remarkable talents and achievements, balanced with a humorous break down of their usually very normal or even unattractive physical being or personal weaknesses as seen in the example below:

Herbert Morrison, short, shaggy-haired, gentle-voiced, downright, afraid of-almost- nothing. Speaks well, knows his own mind.

Ernest Bevin, Falstaffian, slightly overbearing, dark, likes his own way. Famed once as 'Dockers' K.C.'

Joe Toole once MP for Salford. As near cubic as human figure can be. Five feet nothing high: seems same other way. Ginger- and certainly plucky. Favourite pastime in House "Giving Ministers Hell"<sup>488</sup>

As if forming observational notes in a scientific study, all of Driberg's subjects were stripped of their dress and removed from their physical surroundings and social group. In so doing, Driberg reversed a pattern of the analysis of personality that Michael Saler argues became common in early twentieth-century popular print culture as a result of the Sherlock Holmes stories.<sup>489</sup> Whereas Holmes looked towards dress and environmental factors to deduce information about a figure's personality and lifestyle, Driberg refused to link apparel, and in

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<sup>487</sup> *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, 10 April 1932, 14 August 1932, 13 November 1932, 27 November 1932, 25 June 1933.

<sup>488</sup> *Daily Express*, 16 January 1934.

<sup>489</sup> M. Saler, "'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes'" Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c.1890-C.1940', *The Historical Journal*, 3/46 (2003), pp. 599-622.

this case physical beauty, size or individual health with strong-willed personalities, talents or achievements. In a celebrity culture which had linked fame with beauty, fashion and wealth, with yachting at Cowes and shooting parties on country estates, Driberg offered a profound revision of how and where celebrity could be achieved and who could attain it. These Labour Party members were famed for their works in Salford and docklands, and their social and political campaigns advancing the rights of working-class communities. Driberg's caricatures of their physical being only served to enhance his arguments about the ridiculousness of aligning beauty, metropolitan lifestyle and consumerism with celebrity. These depictions were similar to the spectacle of the physical oddity of the 'little man' in the extremely popular contemporary cartoons of Driberg's *Express* colleague Sidney Strube and David Low in the *Evening Standard*.<sup>490</sup> The 'little man' if not in girth but in height was like Joe Toole, 'five feet...high...same other way', but what he lacked in height was more than matched by his spirit. According to art and design historian Rod Brookes, the 'little man' was viewed with great affection by the British public.<sup>491</sup> Perhaps by using literary caricature, Driberg was trying to conjure a similar affection for these left-wing political figures in a gossip column that had rarely focused on political developments at Westminster, and had been conservative in both its traditional focus on the social lives of the British upper classes as well as in its political outlook.

The wholesale distancing from the tone and content of the post-war gossip continued through a re-evaluation of the national boundaries of celebrity culture. As Chapter Five goes

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<sup>490</sup> C. Seymour-Ure and Jim Schoff, *David Low* (London, 1985). Hampton, 'Inventing David Low', *Twentieth Century British History* (20, 2009), pp. 482-512.

<sup>491</sup> R. Brookes, "'Everything in the Garden Is Lovely": The Representation of National Identity in Sidney Strube's *Daily Express* Cartoons in the 1930s', *Oxford Art Journal*, 13/2 (1990), pp. 31-43. Hampton, 'Inventing David Low', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20/4 (2009), pp. 482-512.

on to discuss, Driberg profiled an increasingly eclectic and internationally dispersed group of figures such as politicians in Prague, and his satirical, comedic new treatment of celebrity was universally applied.<sup>492</sup> An example from June 1933 included paragraphs on the German nationalist leader Herbert Von Bismarck, the secret marriage of controversial Welsh author Caradoc Evans, and ‘the most challenging woman of the Empire’ Lady Willingdon, described as a political ‘pioneer’ and friend of the royal family.<sup>493</sup> At the helm of a new kind of celebrity culture that was not informed by the social life of the British upper classes, the anarchic Driberg did not have to justify his authority by revealing his own social connections and lifestyle to the British public. Yet giving the impression of authority was still an important part of his public persona. As seen in the example below, Driberg’s writing style demonstrated his superior intelligence and admirable wit, and his short, impatient, almost aggressive tone provided the illusion that he had some sort of power and control over his celebrity subjects. Also, Driberg increasingly presented himself as an expert on modern literature, plays and art works and, as LeMahieu argues, was one of the figures who expanded the definitions of popular culture in the 1930s to include forms of culture traditionally defined as highbrow. Here Driberg publicised the latest work of John Betjeman and the magazine *Architectural Review*, quite different to the descriptions of expensive clothes and jewellery in the columns of the *Daily Mirror* in 1930.<sup>494</sup>

Mr John Betjeman, author of a penetrating architectural essay published to-day under the title “Ghastly Good Taste” is one of those young men who seem eccentric and visionary and suddenly surprise you by their efficiency and application. He was at Oxford...He is only twenty-six years old. Yet he is already assistant editor of the authoritative “Architectural Review” and has acquired an established reputation as an expert...ALTHOUGH he is connected with the art world, Mr Betjeman declares that he loathes art. He has strong likes and dislikes...MR

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<sup>492</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>493</sup> *Daily Express*, 22 June 1933.

<sup>494</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p. 45.

BETJEMAN is slight, dark and untidy, with projecting teeth, a pale green face, and a breathless manner...<sup>495</sup>

In this statement Driberg displayed the 'lightness of touch' that Balfour had described as an essential writing skill for the gossip columnist in *Society Racket* and the comedic wit of Waugh in *Vile Bodies*. Although, perhaps unbeknown to the mass audience, Betjeman was like Driberg a Society figure in the late 1920s, Driberg described Betjeman's working life as well as a caricature of his physical appearance.<sup>496</sup> This was another example of Driberg's common treatment of his celebrity subjects regardless of their social background; as discussed earlier, a similar treatment had been given to political figures like Joe Toole. Driberg described his active and personal engagement with the art and design of Betjeman and this was an example of a broader development in the content of the gossip column as it moved away from the discussion of Society: it appeared that Driberg had broken with the older forms of the gossip column from the 1920s as he no longer used the art gallery, the book and magazine launch, or the West End theatre as sites to observe and describe their wealthy visitors but to discuss the content of the work that was presented.<sup>497</sup> For example, on 1 June 1927 Donegall had used his visit to the theatre to describe who he saw there rather than what he thought of the show, writing 'I noticed Lady Curzon, beautiful as ever in a box...Another box was occupied by Lady Headfort and "Molly" Taylour, her daughter'.<sup>498</sup> Driberg's assertions about his personal enjoyment of the arts were also met by a more explicit definition of his public role as a gossip columnist and the relationship between himself and the audience. Driberg's skill as a gossip columnist was demonstrated by the intimate and detailed knowledge of the lives of his subjects like Betjeman, yet the humour

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> See Chapter One. Wilkes, *Scandal* (2007), p. 150.

<sup>497</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>498</sup> *Sunday News*, 5 June 1927.

and affection with which he treated his subjects implied the existence of an alternative relationship between the celebrity and columnist, which Driberg refused to discuss in public. There had been a similar mystery attached to Waugh's persona as a novelist in *Vile Bodies* when he alluded to his connections with Society celebrity but did not make them explicit.

In some senses, the social aspect of celebrity culture in the *Express* gossip column was also pushed aside further by Driberg's use of the pseudonym 'William Hickey'. This replaced the pseudonym of his predecessor, the exotic sounding 'Dragoman' with that of an 18<sup>th</sup> century English diarist. This historical title emphasised Driberg's refusal to be directly associated with the Lord and Lady gossip columnists, and distanced him from the criticism of Society gossip columnists from journalist figures like West and Gould. Making no overt attempt to reveal his own upper-middle-class background or Society connections, Driberg instead embedded himself within a journalistic tradition of anonymity, or at least near anonymity, like most of his reporter colleagues in this period. Indeed, paradoxically, using a pseudonym would perhaps be viewed as a progressive symbol intended to distance himself not only from the contemporary celebrity of Society figures but on the nature of the modern mass press and the representation of journalists and commentators within its pages: whether this be the celebrity gossip columnist, the celebrity 'author' of the life story, or even the established feature writers such as Sydney Moseley whose 'signed' articles indicated not only their professional renown but also national celebrity.<sup>499</sup> Whereas Castlerosse, Smith and Donegall had displayed their title to represent their authority on elite social life, it could be argued that Driberg's use of a pseudonym helped to forge his individuality amongst his contemporaries. Adopting the name of an obscure, eighteenth-century figure meant that it

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<sup>499</sup> Moseley, *The Truth* (1935), p. x.

was more difficult for the readers to make judgement on the columnist's authority or his motives to discuss certain topics over others, as they did not have any concrete details about the columnist's lifestyle, upbringing or education. This meant that Driberg could present himself as an authority on a wider variety of subjects without need for personal justification. If Balfour and Waugh had suggested the gap between celebrities' representation in the paper and their actual behaviour and personality, the mysterious persona of 'William Hickey' made it even more difficult to check the veracity of his gossip paragraphs. For Driberg, accusations of political favouritism could also be avoided by using the pen name 'William Hickey'. Contradicting Driberg's new anti-consumerist tone, the eighteenth-century Hickey, according to P.J. Marshall, was something of a libertine, characterised by a "disinclination for systematic work or study, his capacity to spend money, and a 'propensity to women'".<sup>500</sup> Aside from suggesting Driberg's heterosexuality to a mass public when he was homosexual, the name Hickey suggested the caddish, leisured behaviour of man-about-town Adam Fenwick-Symes which of course contradicted with the political and cultural topics discussed within the content of 'These Names Make News'. This created a level of ambiguity and complexity in Driberg's public persona which allowed for his own membership of the Communist Party and political ambitions to be obscured from the *Daily Express's* readership, and which was perhaps necessary for his employment to continue on a paper which aligned itself more easily with the policies of the Conservative Party. Driberg left the *Express* when he took public office as an Independent MP in June 1942.<sup>501</sup> The elite political journal the *New Statesman and Nation* commented:

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<sup>500</sup> P. J. Marshall, 'Hickey, William (1749–1827)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/37542>, accessed 20 Feb 2012]

<sup>501</sup> Christ Church College Library, (Driberg Papers), E1, Press cuttings regarding Driberg's exit from the *Daily Express*, 1943.

Tom Driberg, M.P., the liveliest of our columnists, is no longer William Hickey...I cannot say that I am surprised that Driberg should part company with the *Daily Express*; his double position as progressive M.P. and journalist on a Conservative daily paper must long have been full of embarrassment.<sup>502</sup>

In his public guise at least, Driberg's confident and assertive writing style displayed no embarrassment about his professional role as a celebrity gossip columnist. Unclear to this elite commentator but accessible to millions of *Daily Express* readers throughout the 1930s, Driberg had conducted a progressive refashioning of celebrity culture, influenced by the humour, satire and the social and moral messages of the cheap bestseller *Vile Bodies*. Yet this comment from the *New Statesman* suggested a number of things about the gossip column, politics and print culture: firstly, it suggested a large cultural divide between political magazines and the national daily press, the *Express* was referred to by this author as an 'embarrassment'. Secondly, it suggested that working as a gossip columnist was a disrespectable career that could not be combined with working as a respectable politician. Even though Driberg had done much to distance himself from the scandalous depictions of celebrity and the mass press found in *Vile Bodies*, it appeared that for the *New Statesman's* journalist the content of Waugh's fiction was very influential in the formulation of his ideas about the gossip column and the mass press.

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Waugh and Balfour had shown the limitations of the Society gossip column at the turn of the 1930s: they did not represent the 'real' personalities of Society figures and the full extent of their private lives. Neither did the gossip columns of Nichols and Driberg in the 1930s. Both columnists created print personas to display their unique personalities as

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<sup>502</sup>*New Statesman and Nation*, 10 July 1943, p. 21, taken from a collection of periodical and newspaper trade press cuttings in Driberg Papers.

celebrity gossip columnists: they were unlike other Society figures because they distanced themselves from the social life of Society so avidly discussed in the Society gossip columns of the late 1920s and *Vile Bodies*. Balfour had become the author of a social study to garner a public credibility as a social and cultural commentator on Society. Driberg created a similar authoritative persona in the national newspaper gossip column by avoiding discussion of the social life of Society. Driberg and Nichols avoided the criticism of the press surrounding their lack of transparency about the real lifestyles of Society by distancing themselves from these figures. The avoidance of Society did not necessarily suggest that there was a moralistic motive in these papers to quieten discussion of luxurious upper-class lifestyles during the Great Depression. The distancing from Society in these gossip columns could also be regarded as an avoidance of the awkward questions about the lines between public and private in the national press, a measure to prevent any further damage to the image of Society and the British upper-class by avoiding any further discussion of their private lives and personalities in the newspaper gossip columns of the 1930s. As journalist Rebecca West had stated in her review of 1930, the celebration of Society in popular print culture 'was now over'. However, the gossip columnist's associations with the upper-class leisured gentleman were not completely lost in the minds of *Express* readers by the Second World War. As analysed in chapter one, a middle-class housewife from Northampton complained in 1942 of 'Hickey's' petty worries about writing 'Christmas cards' 'flapping about' and how to 'entertain his American visitors'.<sup>503</sup> The celebrity gossip columnist continued to be a cultural target in times of political and economic turmoil and in this case war.

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<sup>503</sup> Christ Church College, H2 (Driberg Papers), letters to 'Hickey'.

#### 4) Reflecting on the Interwar Gossip Column and Gossip Columnist.

This final section considers the legacy of the celebrity culture of the interwar gossip column on the authorial persona of the gossip columnist Robert Bruce Lockhart after the Second World War. Like Balfour, the former *Evening Standard* gossip columnist Lockhart produced professional memoirs, but this section argues that his avoidance of his discussion of his gossip columnist past *and* his derision of the national press suggested growing cultural divisions within British print culture of the 1950s. In 1957, Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart (1887-1970), an *Evening Standard* gossip columnist turned author, memoirist and social and political commentator, published few details of his own Fleet Street past. Lockhart's autobiography of this year, *Friends, Foes and Foreigners*, was his ninth in a series of reminiscences, political biographies and European travel memoirs, the product of an authorial career which had begun after the success of his first book in 1932, which described his diplomatic work for the British Foreign Office in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.<sup>504</sup> Whereas Lockhart had always been keen to discuss his professional encounters with the governments and leaders of central and eastern Europe, his history of the early twentieth-century press did not once refer to his former position as the editor of 'The Londoner's Diary' from 1928-1937, or his significant role in the rapid development of the news industry he described in this period. As chapter one has discussed, Lockhart's salary had been a massive £3000 per annum in 1928, making him one of the highest paid journalists of the interwar years, yet he refused to draw on this part of his life story to enliven his historical narrative.<sup>505</sup> If gossip columnists like Nichols and Driberg avoided

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<sup>504</sup> R. Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London, 1932).

<sup>505</sup> This wage is equivalent to approximately £150,000 today. <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/result.php#>: Last accessed 8 November 2011. Lockhart's salary is detailed in Parliamentary Archives, London, The Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/H/19, *Daily Express* and *Evening Standard* wage records, 1930.

discussion of Society in their gossip columns in order to create a responsible and credible public persona it now seemed that it was damaging to the public persona of author Lockhart to mention his substantial journalistic work between the wars.

Lockhart's formal, guarded approach—his guilty secret—and his focus on his professional career are striking because both confound many of our expectations of life writing's private and confessional nature in mid-twentieth century Britain. Matt Houlbrook has argued that new serials of confessional life stories of Society and criminal figures in the mass press of the 1920s evidenced the 'commodification of the self within'; a process in which the author-confessor's 'private life was made public' and their 'interior' thoughts and feelings presented in new forms of print for popular consumption.<sup>506</sup> To the reader attuned to popular biography and celebrity life stories in contemporary newspapers, and also to the personalised, confessional writing styles of columnists like Castlerosse and Nichols, Lockhart took a strikingly different and unusual approach. His 1957 autobiography intertwined his own expert commentary, anecdote and professional opinion directly into his assessment of European political leaders and major historical events including the world wars, a style which allowed him to write himself into the major social and economic trajectories of the period. Unlike columnists such as Nichols and Castlerosse, Lockhart refused to be drawn on his home life, social life, upbringing or any other aspects of his private life which might display a more rounded sense of his personality: a key factor within the celebrity personas

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<sup>506</sup> M. Houlbrook, 'Commodifying the Self-Within: Ghosts, Libels and the Crook Lifestory in Interwar Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, forthcoming 2013. Thank you to Matt for letting me read this article in manuscript form.

For examples of such works by Lockhart, see: *Retreat from Glory* (London, 1934), *Guns or Butter. War Countries and Peace Countries of Europe Revisited* (London, 1938), *Jan Masaryk: A Personal Memoir* (London, 1954), and, *My Europe* (London, 1952).

of newspaper gossip columnists of the 1930s. In his memoir, Lockhart directly contradicted a well-established style of life writing developed in part by the emerging generation of interwar gossip columnists of which he was included. From the mid-1930s to his final published memoirs of the 1950s, Lockhart's depersonalised style worked against the logic of his own earlier gossip column; a form of journalism, which as this chapter has shown was at the centre of questions surrounding the boundaries between public and private life. The strangeness of Lockhart's life-writing opens up a number of historical questions about how the generic conventions of print culture change over time, and what influences these changes. In Lockhart's case the answer to these questions seemed to lie within his own understanding of his public status as a gossip columnist between the wars, and particularly his lack of celebrity status compared to his famous rival Castlerosse.

Lockhart did not avoid the discussion of the gossip column altogether in his memoir, but instead shifted his scrutiny to other gossip columnists. He identified the gossip column and the columnist as representative of the changing character of the national press and defined the 1930s as 'the decade of the personal columnist' when 'English gossip-writers were being paid on a scale such as they have never known before or since'.<sup>507</sup> Focusing on the career of the deceased *Sunday Express* gossip writer Anglo-Irish peer Viscount Valentine Castlerosse (1891-1943), Lockhart wrote, 'the English loved a lord' and 'Fleet Street certainly loved Lord Castlerosse'.<sup>508</sup> Lockhart's language suggests that the commercial success of the national press was built on a new found intimacy between the gossip columnist and their readers, but also that this relationship was influenced by a traditional sense of social leadership and hierarchy. The Scottish Lockhart set out to distance himself from the 'English' celebrity

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<sup>507</sup> Lockhart, *Friends, Foes and Foreigners* (1957), p. 247.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247, p. 286.

culture of the mass press, his own former career as a gossip columnist and the brash, flashy kind of success and flamboyant celebrity he believed Castlerosse had achieved as a result of his involvement with the popular press. Presenting himself as the authoritative, well-researched and confident press historian by 1957, and never revealing himself to have been one of those 'gossip-writers', his writing was only briefly punctuated by a vague one sentence reference to his 'nine years...in London as a professional journalist'.<sup>509</sup> This was a phrase which concealed as much as it revealed about the specific nature of his journalistic role. Presenting himself as a relative outsider to the goings on of the popular press, but nevertheless justifying the accuracy of his newspaper history by emphasising his worldly, experienced authorial persona, Lockhart's language was reflective of a wider academic and cultural critique of mass culture and the mass press, and the moral, intellectual and social distancing of critics such as Richard Hoggart from the press's content and its readership.<sup>510</sup>

This culture of critique, beginning in the interwar years through the work of the Leavises and continuing after the Second World War, provided the context for the consolidation of a particular professional ideal of journalism and authorship, dubious of those who worked for the 'feather-brained', Americanised and sensational mass press.<sup>511</sup> The ethical questions of this ideal focused around an author's use of language, a text's format and its literary genre and target audience, as well as questioning the investigatory modes and commercial aims of journalists and editors.<sup>512</sup> In the same year that Hoggart was describing the 'massification' of popular culture and newspaper historian Francis Williams was criticising the money-

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid., p.247.

<sup>510</sup> R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London, 1958), pp. 32-33.

<sup>511</sup> Deane, *History* (1998). Leavis, *Fiction* (1932). Wiener, *Papers* (1988), pp. xi- xii.

<sup>512</sup> Leavis, *Fiction* (1932), pp. 3-22. S. Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 115-119. F. Williams, *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers* (London, 1957), p.5.

making motives of hugely wealthy newspaper monopolies and the popular newspapers' 'dangerous' non-educational, 'gossip' content, Lockhart hinted that Castlerosse's personality, whilst ideally suited to gossip writing on Fleet Street may have been unsuited to the level of personal autonomy he had in his work.<sup>513</sup> He suggested that his celebrity and reputation as a gossip columnist provided an inadequate basis for the manipulative, almost oligarchic power and control he was able to wield over less famous and therefore less influential Fleet Street journalists.<sup>514</sup> Within Lockhart's popular history of the press, which included biographies of the key figures and their working relationships, a story full of human drama and the personalities of the press was developed. Suggesting that social discord existed between journalists in the inter-war period – he observed that, 'among the journalists you could divide the goats from the sheep by differentiating those who gave him his full title and the select who called him Valentine' -- Lockhart implied that there was a particular rivalry between gossip writers.<sup>515</sup> Celebrity status was a significant factor in this journalistic hierarchy and he also used the social term 'class' to insinuate Castlerosse's place in a different social system, set 'apart' from the lives of his former colleagues.<sup>516</sup> Here Lockhart suggested the limits of the professional culture of journalism in interwar Britain by providing an account of the personal tensions and egos that clouded professional co-operation. Lockhart's representation of the tensions between journalists between the wars was very different to the comparably serene account of journalistic co-operation given by Balfour in 1933 when he suggested a growing social and professional solidarity between journalists including gossip columnists. Lockhart wished to single out Castlerosse not only for his celebrity status as a gossip columnist but also his uniqueness amongst his Society

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<sup>513</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1958), pp. 32-33. Williams, *Dangerous Estate* (1957), p.5.

<sup>514</sup> Lockhart, *Friends, Foes and Foreigners*, p.247

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

contemporaries. Unlike 'the others', those gossip columnists also from wealthy backgrounds who forged alternative careers as successful cultural commentators and authors in this era, including 'Harold Nicholson, John Betjeman and Peter Fleming ... Valentine Castlerosse was in a class by himself in that ... he was proud of being a journalist, proud of the *Londoner's Log* ... and proudest and most jealous of his self-created reputation of being the greatest English columnist.'<sup>517</sup> Here Lockhart emphasised a sense of cultural distinction between national newspaper gossip columnists and authors. Castlerosse, who was, paradoxically, an Irishman, had his 'heart' in 'Fleet Street', and Lockhart's description of Castlerosse's jealously-guarded position suggested an unattractive ruthlessness to Castlerosse's personality but also showed his commitment to Fleet Street.<sup>518</sup> Odd and distinct from other upper class figures, submerged within an unattractive profession but also admirable for his commitment to journalism and his readers, the complexity of Lockhart's feelings towards his former colleague, gossip-writing, the national popular press and his own career hint at the complex and contradictory status of the gossip columnist as journalist, and the unease that many interwar gossip writers had about their own success and celebrity.

Other former gossip writers reflected on their past in memoirs and autobiographies. In 1939, columnist turned novelist Lady Eleanor Smith expressed a completely different attitude towards Society than she had done in her columns of the late 1920s. While she had often described Society figures as her 'friends' in her column, in her memoir of 1945 she remembered Society 'as a loathsome clique of advertising nit-wits...who ignobly revolved in

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

the limelight'.<sup>519</sup> Such an attitude resembled Balfour's distaste for publicity-seeking Society figures in *Society Racket*, and the discussion of her depression and 'indifference' to her gossip-writing work resembled the desperate outlook of the suicidal Simon Balcairn in *Vile Bodies*: 'I suppose I hated journalism...I hated gossip writing...I found gossip writing insufferable'.<sup>520</sup> Although the popular novelist Smith seemed to turn her back on her social class and seemed deeply embarrassed by her gossip columnist past, she still referred to the content of the Society literature of *Vile Bodies* and the gossip column in order to publicly make sense of her past. In 1974 broadcaster and author Malcolm Muggeridge who had worked on 'The Londoner's Diary' on the *Evening Standard* in the 1930s, argued that he had been in danger of becoming 'corrupted' by his work on the newspaper gossip column. He argued that the content of the gossip column crossed over into the professional culture of the office and steadily into his understanding of himself. In Muggeridge's memory there was no gap between what appeared in newspaper print and the private world of the newspaper office and journalist: he stated that only the 'most base was elevated, and the only acceptable measure of anyone or anything was money, the only pursuit worth considering worldly success'.<sup>521</sup> Such an attitude contrasted sharply with Nichols' public persona as a gossip columnist in the 1930s when he had professed to a strong moral character, 'Christian values' and a modest, sensible attitude towards money as a result of his lack of association with wealthy Society subjects. Whereas the influence of celebrity culture on his lifestyle was something that Nichols suggested he was in control of in the early 1930s, in comparison Muggeridge reflected that the power and wealth of celebrity was something

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<sup>519</sup> Smith, *Life's a Circus* (London, 1939), p. 122.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> M. Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, Vol. 1 (London, 1973), p. 62.

that was 'insidious' that surrounded newspaper staff like 'sulphur', alarming in the way celebrity infiltrated both his working and personal life.<sup>522</sup>

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Lockhart's distancing from his gossip columnist past in the memoir of his career suggested that he and his audience did not regard his former career as a gossip columnist as either respectable or professional. If *Society* had become the 'other within' the gossip column of the 1930s, then the gossip column and the mass press occupied a similar position within the memoirs of former gossip columnists and *Society* figures like Lockhart and Smith after 1939; difficult to reconcile in their understanding of themselves yet also impossible to avoid.<sup>523</sup> Respectability was a persistent theme in the print personas of gossip columnists, whether in their columns between the wars or in their later memoirs. Whereas columnists like Castlerosse's personal associations with *Society* had been a marker of their respectable print persona and their celebrity status in the 1920s, this changed after the publication of *Vile Bodies*. From 1930 gossip columnists began to distance themselves from their personal involvement in *Society* lifestyle and formulate a new celebrity persona as opinionated and educated commentators on society, politics and culture. However, as this analysis has shown, *Society*, the national press and celebrity culture remained important themes when the columnists presented their life stories in their biographies and memoirs after 1939.

## 5) Conclusion

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Y. Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos, Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton, 2009).

This chapter has explored the relationship between *Vile Bodies*, the national newspaper gossip column and a public fascination with the gossip columnist in the interwar period. It has argued that an important aspect of columnists like Castlerosse, Smith and Donegall's celebrity appeal in the late 1920s was their titled status. Through analysis of these figures' columns I have emphasised that an important aspect of their celebrity appeal was the discussion of their participation in Society lifestyle and fashionable social activities both in the metropolis and in Europe. Yet, I have also shown that at the turn of the 1930s there was a popular culture of criticism developing on the gossip columnist and his column, as evidenced in the bestselling novel *Vile Bodies* which disapproved of the columnist's decadent social life within Society and also his unprofessional approach to his work on the newspaper. I have argued that *Vile Bodies* was not, however, a straightforward condemnation of the Society columnist and his lifestyle as the novel relied on the promotion of the idea that a wealthy, leisured and modern social elite existed and that they continued to have an important and influential status within British society. Likewise in placing the gossip columnist as the central character in his novel, Waugh created a similar impression of the significance of the gossip column and columnist in British culture, arguably securing the columnist's celebrity persona at the turn of the 1930s. Like the national press, *Vile Bodies* had a mainly middle-class audience, and I have argued that the novel was part of a middlebrow print culture of interwar novels and investigations which both sensationalised Society's participation in a modern leisure culture of metropolitan nightclubs, jazz and drugs and also simultaneously condemned the morality of these figures by judging Society's lavish lifestyles. This definition of a middlebrow print culture which looked towards Society's wealth and social life is very different to that provided by Alison Light, who argues that middle-class readers became increasingly interested in stories of the middle-class housewife

and family life in interwar Britain.<sup>524</sup> This suggests that interwar popular print culture was more varied and complex in content than previous historical accounts have allowed. The content of bestselling *Vile Bodies* can also be regarded as evidence of a very modern aspect of celebrity culture in terms of its treatment of the private lives of celebrities. I have argued that the novel was much more scandalous than the newspaper gossip column ever was in this period, in the sense that *Vile Bodies* exposed the differences between the public persona of the gossip columnist and his subjects in newspaper print- and their behaviour in private. Crossing established boundaries of public life and newspapers' ordinary treatment of the aristocracy, Waugh delved into Society figures thoughts, feelings and personalities which apart from the columns of Donegall, Smith and Castlerosse was highly unusual in the national press at the end of the 1920s.<sup>525</sup> In so doing, *Vile Bodies* suggested to its popular audience that the falsely shaped content of the gossip column provided grounds for their mistrust of the national press. For example, whereas Mr Chatterbox might have described the dress and beauty of a Society subject like Nina Blount and her attendance at an outwardly respectable debutante's ball in his newspaper gossip column, Waugh the novelist went considerably further by describing her actions, behaviour and personality. He described her drunken state at Society parties, her sexual relationship with her fiancée Adam Fenwick-Symes and her promiscuous affair with Ginger: in the process showed that expensive dress, upper-class manners and outward appearance did not necessarily suggest a respectable personality.<sup>526</sup> This is a very important point, as historians have attributed the public exposure of celebrities' private lives to journalists and the content of the gossip column in the 1920s and not to the content of popular novels like those by highly regarded

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<sup>524</sup> Light, *Forever England* (1991).

<sup>525</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>526</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1986), Chapter Seven.

author Waugh.<sup>527</sup> For example, as the comparative survey of the content of newspaper gossip columns in chapter one showed, illicit details of love affairs or the drunkenness of Society figures were hidden from the readers of the gossip column in the national press throughout the interwar period.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Taylor, *Bright* (2007).

<sup>528</sup> See Chapter One.



## Chapter Four:

### The 'Spectacularization' of the Interwar Popular Press? The Visual Culture of the Celebrity Gossip Column.

It is widely acknowledged, particularly by art historians, that celebrity culture has developed through a multifaceted visual culture of film and photography, that images of an individual's face and body are an intrinsic part of celebrity status in modern popular culture.<sup>529</sup> However, there has been little study by historians in Britain of the content and production, context and meanings of celebrity photography in newspapers, fanzines and magazines. Aside from the research of LeMahieu in 1988, until quite recently most historical work has focused on analysing the prose of magazine and newspaper interviews and articles.<sup>530</sup> Through an analysis of national newspapers including the *Express*, *Mail*, *Mirror*, *Sketch*, *Standard* and *World's Pictorial News*, this chapter shows that it was not only photography that was integral to the interwar gossip column, but also illustration and varied typography. By taking apart and analysing the segments or layers of the gossip column and decoding the visual messages within it, this chapter explores the development of a visual culture of celebrity in the national press, the changing meanings of celebrity within the gossip column

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<sup>529</sup> See the two recent exhibitions, Tate Modern, *Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera: Celebrity and the Public Gaze*, 28 May-3 October 2010. National Portrait Gallery, *Man Ray Portraits*, 7 February- 27 May 2013.

<sup>530</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988). Mark Hampton has made one of the most substantial contributions to the history of the visual culture of the popular press in interwar Britain. See his articles, Hampton, 'Inventing David Low', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20/4 (2009), pp. 482-512, and the forthcoming, 'The Political Cartoon as Educationalist Journalism: David Low's Portrayal of Mass Unemployment in Interwar Britain', *Journalism Studies*, 14/5, October 2013. Also See Brookes, "'Everything in the Garden is Lovely'", *Oxford Art Journal*, 13/2 (1990), pp. 31-43. S. Hyde, "'Please, Sir, he called me "Jimmy!"' Political Cartooning before the Law: 'Black Friday', J.H. Thomas, and the Communist Libel Trial of 1921", *Contemporary British History*, 25/4 (2011), pp. 521-550. Bingham and Houlbrook have also examined the visual culture of the popular national press to a certain extent. See, *Bingham, Gender* (2004), and, Houlbrook, 'Commodifying the Self-Within', *Journal of Modern History*, forthcoming 2013.

over the interwar period, and the similarities and differences, between the visual culture of newspaper gossip columns.

Michael Saler argues that British popular print culture became 'spectacularized' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. The advancement of printing mechanisms, which allowed illustration and photography to be reproduced at cheaper and quicker rates, he suggests, transformed the visual content and appearance of magazines and newspapers. As creative innovations in photography and illustration were developed, newspapers and periodicals became an increasingly imaginative space for readers. At the same time, the advanced visual formats of newspapers and magazines also meant that a popular audience's skills in reading visual material became more sophisticated and analytical.<sup>531</sup> What did this mean in the context of the interwar popular press? Like my earlier investigations of the authorship, tone and types of celebrity subject in the column, the systematic analysis of the visual culture of the gossip column is another important way in which we can gain a more thorough understanding of the nature of the national press in interwar Britain, its place within print culture, and more broadly, the national press's historical significance in British society. In the more specific context of the history of newspapers, this study can help to nuance and clarify understanding of contemporary 'news values' in individual newspapers and pinpoint moments of change in these news values.<sup>532</sup> My study also opens up new lines of enquiry about the working roles of newspaper staff such as the photographer and sub-editor and their impact on developing features like the gossip column, which I argue, meant that their work was becoming more prominent and diverse in the interwar period. I will

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<sup>531</sup> Saler, "'Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes'", *The Historical Journal*, 3/46 (2003), pp. 599-622, p. 604, 607.

<sup>532</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936), p. 102.

show that in the late 1920s and early 1930s the gossip column remained a collaborative project despite the growing investment in the persona of the individual columnist.

This chapter argues that visual content became an important aspect of the celebrity culture of the national newspaper gossip column in interwar Britain. Part one explores the context in which the newspaper column developed, analysing the visual culture of the gossip column in Society periodical the *Bystander*, and two Sunday newspapers mainly purchased by a working-class readership, the *News of the World* and *World's Pictorial News*. It goes on to examine what I argue was a visual culture of Society in the 'pictorial press' at the end of the First World War in the *Mirror*, mainly purchased by a lower-middle-class audience, and the middle-class and Society paper the *Sketch*. Part two explores the changing visual culture of the gossip column as defined in newspaper office archives and journalistic training guides and memoirs. It uses this behind the scenes material to pinpoint moments of change in the production of the gossip column and its visual culture over the period, and considers how illustrators and photographers employed on the gossip column impacted on the professional culture of newspaper journalism in this period. Part three argues that a visual culture of Society became established in the gossip columns of the *Mail* and *Express* in the mid- to- late 1920s, and this became closely associated with consumerism. It then examines how changes in the tone and style of authorship of the column in the early 1930s, after the publication of *Vile Bodies* and during the economic depression, impacted on gossip columns' visual culture, causing the form of two of the most purchased newspapers of the early 1930s the *Mail* and *Express*, and their representations of Society, to greatly diverge for the first time.

### **1) Context: the Visual Culture of the Gossip Column after 1918.**

Chapters one to three of this thesis have argued that Society dominated the written content of celebrity gossip columns in the national press of the immediate post-war years. As shown in the image below, on 20 June 1920, the 'Gossip of the Day' column in the *News of the World* was the sixth of six slim columns on the page. Each of the columns on the page was of an equal width, and the title of the gossip feature shared a font style and size with four of the six columns on the page, including the column to its left, 'Your Pension.' Each of these titles was in bold upper-case lettering, separated from a subtitle by a thin black line. Each subtitle was in the same font as the main column title, but half the font size, and was also written in bold upper-case lettering. The boldest and largest text on the page was an advert for 'Hoe's Sauce', followed by the illustrated title of *News of the World* which accompanied the editorial column:

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**Fig 27. *News of the World*, 20 June 1920.**

Although the PEP survey of the national press later reported that readers' eyes naturally focused on the right hand side of the page first, there was nothing that was visually striking to really distinguish the visual style of the Society and celebrity column from the rest of the page of news stories.<sup>533</sup> The PEP report and a number of sub-editing experts in the interwar years (as section two discusses), had described photographs and illustrations as an important way of helping to quickly engage the reader with news content; but there were no such inclusions in the *News of the World's* gossip column.<sup>534</sup> This suggested that for the editors and sub-editors of the *News of the World*, the celebrity gossip column was not an important feature in relation to other sections of the paper. This challenges the usual historical chronologies for thinking about the column's growing prominence between the wars.<sup>535</sup> For example, compared to the rest of the paper which featured large photographs on the first two pages and regular cartoon series, this page had fewer photographs and illustrations: there was one large photograph which took up approximately an eighth of the page in the top centre of Balfour, Lloyd George and Bonar Law receiving honorary degrees at Cambridge University, and two small, passport style photographs of individuals which had been sent in by readers in the weekly 'Missing from Home' feature.<sup>536</sup> There were, however, some differences between the Society gossip column and the rest of the page's layout even if these were very subtle. For example, the paragraphs were shorter than those featured on the rest of the page such as the 111 line block of editorial; the gossip paragraph ranged from two to thirteen lines. Each of these paragraphs were separated by a thin black

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<sup>533</sup> PEP, *Report*, p. 250.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 250-252. G. Montague Ellwood, *The Art of Pen Drawing; a Manual for Students, Illustrators, and Commercial Artists* (London, 1927), p. 68. F.J. Mansfield, *Sub-editing: A Book mainly for Young Journalists* (London, 1932).

<sup>535</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), pp. 44-47.

<sup>536</sup> For examples of the visual format of the *News of the World* after the war see the photographs of actress Billie Carleton and the 'John Bull' cartoon feature on 8 December 1918.

line, in the same size and style as that which separated the title of the column from the subtitle. Even though the text in some paragraphs discussed the same subject as its preceding paragraph, the visual distinctness of each paragraph gave the impression that the column was quick and easy to read and could be accessed by the reader at any point of the column. There was no need to read the whole feature, unlike a news story where it was logical to read from start to finish if a reader wanted to be sure that they had made sense of its content. It was possible that readers could scan the names in the feature, picking and choosing to read paragraphs that sounded interesting to them. The separated nature of each paragraph also created ambivalence about how or if the subjects of each paragraph were connected. Although the subjects were all contained within one gossip feature, the visual format of the column gave a limited sense of any social or geographical connections, or differences, between subjects. This suggested that promoting the idea of Society, a group distinguished and drawn together by their wealth, their shared social activities, lifestyle and beauty, was not a vital aspect of the *News of the World* gossip column. There was no visual grouping of types of subject, or an indicator to an individual subject's status and characteristics through the use of photograph or illustration. Each were treated in the same *discrete* manner, and this was in a dual sense of both the subject's physical separation from each other, and the lack of visual clues into a subject's lifestyle or personality, whether politician, actress or industrialist.<sup>537</sup>

However, if a Society figure went incognito on the 'gossip' page then there was a different treatment in examples from the rest of the paper. On 13 December 1931, a story of a 'Lady' with a large banner headline 'Titled Woman Gassed' and a subtitle 'Committed Suicide' was

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<sup>537</sup> *News of the World*, 17 June 1920.

a main news story.<sup>538</sup> With its conspicuous headlines and photography, this Society story was treated with the visual hallmarks of the crime and human drama story that had been a feature of the lowbrow press since the nineteenth century, a development which had turned the news story into a visual spectacle.<sup>539</sup> Although much more visually spectacular than the gossip column, the format and layout of the Society suicide article differed little to news stories whose subjects were of lower social classes. The suicide story was submerged between other stories with bold headlines and photographs including ‘Woman finds husband dead in piggeries’ and ‘Bluebird to hang’.<sup>540</sup> I argue that the common visual treatment of such news articles placed their subjects within a press culture of notoriety rather than celebrity that disregarded social class to a large extent. Equally, the submerged, undistinguished visual culture of the gossip column also suggests Society’s lack of celebrity status in the *News of the World* of 1920.

There were similarities in the visual style of the lowbrow *News of the World’s* gossip column with two national papers purchased mainly by middle-class readers, the ‘Court and Society’ column of the *Mail* and ‘A Diary of To-Day’ in the *Express*: photographs, illustrations and bold typography were very rare in all three of these features in the post-war years and early 1920s.<sup>541</sup> Even though, as chapter one has analysed, a central focus of the *Mail’s* column in the early 1920s was to provide highly detailed descriptions of Society’s ‘beautiful’ evening dress and formal wear, there were no photographs or illustrations of these dresses accompanying the paragraphs. In the example from the *Mail* below there is one small

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<sup>538</sup> *News of the World*, 13 December 1931.

<sup>539</sup> L. Stratmann, *Cruel Deeds and Dreadful Calamities: the Illustrated Police News, 1864-1938* (London, 2011).

<sup>540</sup> *News of the World*, 13 December 1931.

<sup>541</sup> *Daily Mail*, 1 June 1923. Also see Chapter One.

passport- style photograph of the head of a Society lady.<sup>542</sup> LeMahieu has argued that there was a limited use of innovative typography, illustrations and particularly photography in the popular press of the immediate post-war years because of the limits of printing technologies and the technical difficulties of merging text with images; it was also expensive to reproduce photography and illustration.<sup>543</sup> Yet my analysis of other newspapers in the early 1920s will show that photos and illustration were in fact commonly employed in the gossip column. I believe that the gossip columns of the *Mail*, *Express* and *News of the World* followed the long-established format of the 'Court Circular' and Society news found in *The Times* since the eighteenth century, these papers' representation of Society promoted a sense of editorial conservatism and newspaper tradition. So, what appeared like the lack of typographical design could be a deliberate choice to link the celebrity gossip column to tradition and the status of the newspaper. In the *Mail* of the immediate post-war years, the visual content and format of 'Court and Society' was similar to that of *The Times's* 'Court Circular'. Both columns used the same highly decorative and archaic font in their titles, an embellishment which emphasised the prestigious social status of its royal and Society subjects:

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<sup>542</sup> See Chapter One, section one for *Mail* content analysis in 1922.

<sup>543</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p. 76.

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**Fig 28. *The Times*, 24 January 1920.**

**Fig 29. *Mail*, 2 June 1920.**

Yet there was an important visual difference between *The Times* and *Mail* of the early 1920s; the *Mail* had introduced the gossip paragraph. In the immediate post-war years the 'visual identity' of the Society gossip column in the *Mail* came under some scrutiny from proprietor Northcliffe.<sup>544</sup> In one of his frequent bulletins to the *Mail's* staff in 1919, Northcliffe stated that the number of 'stars' or asterisks separating paragraphs needed to be altered, and that the 'columns are too long.'<sup>545</sup> This can be viewed as evidence that the Society gossip column was an important part of Northcliffe's editorial policy to remodel and improve the *Mail* at the end of the war in order to increase the paper's appeal to a mass audience: what appeared to be relatively minor visual reorganisations were the product of considerable thought and debate amongst editors and journalists. Whereas the 'Court Circular' was made up of a longer block of text, the *Mail's* clearly demarcated paragraphs, separated by 'stars' and by 1923 short lines, looked more accessible and less time-consuming to read.<sup>546</sup> With their lack of photographs and illustration the visual culture of the Society gossip column in the *Mail*, *Express* and *News of the World* was similar to that of the 'Londoner's Diary' of the *Standard*, as seen in the example below. As discussed in chapter one and five, the *Standard's* gossip column mainly presented gossip about politicians, government and politics: the sense of the power and respectability of both Society and national government after the war was mediated through the visual sobriety of these gossip columns<sup>547</sup>:

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<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>545</sup> Bodleian Library, Northcliffe's Bulletins, MSS.Eng.hist.d.303-5, 1919-1920, 22 September 1919.

<sup>546</sup> *Daily Mail*, 15 January 1923, 1 June 1923, 8 June 1923, 13 June 1923, 5 November 1923.

<sup>547</sup> See Chapter One and Chapter Five.

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**Fig 30. *Evening Standard*, 24 June 1920.**

Celebrity culture has been defined as the celebration or widespread admiration of an individual who is admired for certain personal qualities and/or achievements.<sup>548</sup> As chapter one has discussed, figures in *Society* were venerated in the gossip column for their beauty, their appropriation of the latest fashions and their acquisition of the latest consumer goods such as the motor car, for example on 18 August 1934 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* described the 'smartest frocks' seen at Cannes.<sup>549</sup> In the general public's mind, columnist Balfour argued, *Society* was still associated with the aristocracy, the titled, the upper-class, and was linked to the British royal family.<sup>550</sup> For Waugh, a public fascination with youth culture was a key factor in *Society's* celebrity status in the interwar years, describing the public interest in the usually wealthy and socially well-connected, 'Bright Young People' or BYP.<sup>551</sup> From this perspective, an important element in the BYP's celebrity was sex appeal, which Waugh incorporated into *Vile Bodies* with his discussion of debauched parties at hotels and the sexual relationship of the novel's two main characters, *Society* figures Adam Fenwick-Symes and Nina Blount.<sup>552</sup>

In the visual culture of another 'lowbrow' paper the *World's Pictorial News* it was not British *Society's* sexuality or their decadent social life and leisure culture that was celebrated. The *World's Pictorial News* had three distinctive gossip features in the 1920s, positioned in the same order and on the same pages: five to eight.<sup>553</sup> Unlike the gossip columns in the *News of the World*, *Mail* and *Express*, the *World's Pictorial News* developed gossip features that were much more prominent and visually appealing (see below). This meant that the titles of the gossip features were at least double in font size compared to those in the *News of the*

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<sup>548</sup> R. Dyer and P. McDonald, *Stars* (London, 1997). Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure* (2002).

<sup>549</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>550</sup> Balfour, *Society* (1933), p. 23.

<sup>551</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1930, 1986 edn).

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-81.

<sup>553</sup> *World Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.

*World*, the feature occupied a greater percentage of page space and included photographs and illustrations. Celebrity culture had literally and visually become a diverse and spectacular 'feature' in at least parts of the popular press by 1920. In *World's Pictorial News* the staid and haughty tones of 'Gossip of the Week' conjured up visions of tradition and respectability through depictions of the town and country-based elite of British Society. The next column 'Greenroom and Smokerroom' aligned its focus, tone and visual format with the West End stage and was a spectacular feature. The final column 'On the Boulevards', was also spectacular, but is what I argue to be the only 'sensational' and scandalous gossip feature in the paper with its discussion of wealthy Parisian lifestyle and French celebrity.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1923.

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**Fig 30. 'Gossip of the Week', *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.**

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**Fig 31. 'Greenroom and Smokeroom', *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.**

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**Fig 32. 'On the Boulevards', *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.**

As seen in the examples above, the gossip features in *World's Pictorial News* did share some visual characteristics as all utilized aspects of a common gossip column format in newspapers with short paragraphs and subtitles; also used in the gossip column of other papers like *News of the World*. There was some association between the British 'Gossip of the Week' and the French 'On the Boulevards' as they used the same short, five-dotted line to separate its paragraphs. The Society gossip column was the smallest feature with three columns and twelve paragraphs.<sup>555</sup> Almost half of the page was taken up by advertisements for 'Dr Cassell's Tablets' and 'Nestle's Milk'. The French gossip column was larger as it occupied four of five columns on the page, and the British theatrical and music hall gossip feature filled a whole page with twenty-nine paragraphs. I argue that the distinct visual culture of each feature markedly separated and codified groups of subjects according to nationality and social status. In the 'Gossip of the Week' feature, 83% of space was taken by the gossip paragraphs. There was one photograph, produced in a studio, of Lady Cynthia Mosley. Mosley was seated in profile and had a serious expression on her face. It was a formal, highly polite and mature portrait, arranged to suggest her respectability and propriety, after all, the photograph's caption stated that she was the wife of MP Oswald Mosley and that she had just become a mother. Her smart dress, neat pearl necklace, firmly positioned hat that pinned back and hid her hair in a tidy and pristine fashion suggested her maturity and her moral values. Yet the photographer's studio lighting also emphasised the quality and luxury of the materials of her clothes, adding a sense of classical beauty and sensuality to the clearly wealthy upper-class subject. Neat lines framed the portrait and it was enclosed in a clean-edged rectangle, resulting in a sophisticated and orderly effect.

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<sup>555</sup> *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.

In contrast, the feature of theatrical and entertainment gossip 'Greenroom and Smokeroom' had a far less ordered sense of layout.<sup>556</sup> It had much more photographic and illustrative content than 'Gossip of the Week' with six photographs compared to the one photograph in the Society gossip feature. One third of the feature was taken up by photographs and illustrations. In this feature which was focused on actors, dancers and entertainers, there appears to have been much more experimentation and creativity permitted to photographers, illustrators and subeditors. This suggested that more expertise, more collaborative work between a range of newspaper staff, and consequently more money in terms of staff wages, was put into 'Greenroom and Smokeroom' compared to Society 'Gossip of the Week'. The combined efforts of photographers, illustrators and subeditors were seen in the photographs of ballerinas Ninette de Valois, Princess Seraphine Astafleva and actress Sybil Arundale. Borders from each of these women's photographs had been removed and the images were cropped to encase their bodies. Instead illustrators brushed dark ink to surround the figures softening the images and at the same time highlighting the subject's femininity. The image of actress Sybil Arundale was a particularly good example of this technique: her figure was enhanced against the black background setting because of her tightly-fitted, white and low-cut costume and her profile standing position. Similar representations of actresses and scenes from the stage were also seen in the *Mirror* double page photo-spread after the war, such as on 16 February 1923 with the image of an actress from the 'new De Maurier Play' in a dramatic pose, another photograph of a 'French actress in London' and a third of the famous US stage actress 'Miss Tallulah Bankhead'.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid. See also, *World's Pictorial News*, 23 June 1923, 16 June 1923.

<sup>557</sup> *Mirror*, 16 February 1923, 1 February 1921, 31 August 1920, 28 September 1923.

The lack of formality in the images in 'Greenroom', and the scrapbook way in which they were arranged, contrasted sharply to the more restrained and ordered layout of 'Gossip of the Week'.<sup>558</sup> This implied that the actresses and performers of the stage had a very different status and personalities to figures in Society. For example, in 'Greenroom and Smokeroom', the visual representation of stars of the West End stage included reference to their lively, outgoing and energetic personalities evidenced by Arundale's broad and engaging smile; the physical appeal of these entertainers suggested that the world of the West End was a more enticing and welcoming world than Society.<sup>559</sup> If Lady Mosley's pose was rigid, set and constrained with her arms clasped by her sides, then there was an energy and fluidity in the images of exotic and foreign ballerinas de Valois and Princess Seraphine, who seemed to have both been photographed whilst dancing. Reading the visual culture of these gossip columns can tell us something about acceptable modes of public behaviour in the immediate post-war years, and provides evidence that codes of feminine behaviour were in fact formulated in the visual culture of the gossip columns themselves. For example, on the stage of the West End, the flesh, head and hair of the actress could be exposed; the ornate decoration of her dress was celebrated as was her youth and skills of performance. Within Society, and away from the stage, women were expected to demonstrate their dignified and respectable status through their expensive but sophisticated dress and deportment. However, the French women depicted in 'On the Boulevards', brought the glamour and sexuality that was confined to the performers on the West End stage in Britain to the streets of Paris.

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<sup>558</sup> *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*

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**Fig 33. 'On the Boulevards', *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.**

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**Fig 34. 'On the Boulevards', *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.**

The photograph of the 'continental...beauty' 'Frau Petstrauss' seemed to have a softer focus and lighting than that of Lady Mosley.<sup>560</sup> As with the actress Arundale, the reader was invited to fully scrutinize Petstrauss's facial features whereas Mosley's face had been partly obscured by her position in profile. The Society woman kept more of herself private or hidden from the readers of the lowbrow press than those on stage or 'On the Boulevards' in France. In contrast to the simple and plain dress of Mosley, Petstrauss wears a lavish, low cut dress, hemmed with large blossoming flowers around the collar. Such a costume choice not only emphasized her feminine form to the viewer, but its floral symbolism might have contained messages about her fertility. The frills and trim of the 'continental' woman's costume suggested a decadence in dress and personality in comparison to the more modest Mosley. Petstrauss also wore no hat and her hair was uncovered at a time when it was deemed polite and proper for respectable women in England to wear hats in public. Such visual signifiers, I argue, suggested the social differences between the French and British women, and fuelled 'On the Boulevard's' sensational speculation about the respectability of French women, as discussed in chapter five.<sup>561</sup> The illustrations of French women in 'On the Boulevards' completely inverted the photographic representations of British Society women in 'Gossip of the Week'. Although the women of Society, the West End stage and Paris all shared the treatment of being exposed in visual form in the national newspaper to varied degrees, the differences between their bodies, and representations of their sexuality, were used to suggest ideas about the opposing national identities of the British and the French. For example, in the illustration of the 'Dashing Dame' above, we have a curvaceous and scantily- but luxuriously dressed young woman complete with a theatrical feather fan posing

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid. For other examples of 'Greenroom and Smokeroom' see also, *World's Pictorial News*, 23 June 1923, 16 June 1923.

<sup>561</sup> See Chapter Five.

on a statue or fountain. Here, the contrast between the Society photographer's and newspaper illustrator's technical approach was stark. For example, in the photograph the reader saw Lady Mosley's covered arms and shoulders, and the illustrator has revealed the French woman's whole legs, arms and chest. The anonymous artist drew the French woman with her head tilted backwards and her hair up, so as to expose even more of the flesh of her neck, and the black of her fan and costume emphasized the white of her flesh and the extent of her nakedness. Even in contrast to the poses of the actresses and dancers of 'Greenroom' the French woman's unguarded body language is especially sexual. Of course, the vast differences between the French and British woman's appearance can partly be explained by the circumstances in which the images were created, the photographer worked with a living Society subject, as did the photographers who went to the theatres to photograph actresses, and, we presume, the illustrator's work was an imaginative creation. Photographs were understood to mirror the subject and capture a true likeness, taken in an instant through the technology of the camera. An illustration, by contrast, was constructed line by line by an artist, it was understood at this time during the infancy of press photography, as a more creative and skilled role. The differences between the representations of women can therefore tell us a little about the limitations, codes of practice and expectations within these two genres of popular culture after the war and how public space, codes of behavior and social class, as well as the visual appearance of the medium, might have shaped how a subject was represented. The contrast between the staging of photographs of actresses, dancers and that of Society women is evidence to suggest that photographers had established methods of representation for these different 'types' of women by the early 1920s. For instance, it seemed that within the national press of the early 1920s an illustration of a French woman was allowed to be particularly sexually

suggestive, however photographic images that had been constructed in a public space and involved the interaction of both a photographer and a Society subject were not. As this chapter will later show however, even though the gossip column illustrator perhaps had the freedom and ability to suggest the most about a woman- not only her personality, her social status but also her sexual availability- photography became the dominant mode of Society representation in the gossip column throughout the rest of the period, as different types of photography evolved.

There were however alternative representations of Society to be found in the popular press of the immediate post-war years: images that contrasted with the serious and formal impression of Society as presented in the photograph of Mosley in the *World's Pictorial News*, or that did not adhere to the official-looking format of *The Times* 'Court Circular' like the *Mail*. This alternative visual culture of Society existed in the gossip columns of the pictorial papers the *Mirror* and *Sketch* of the early 1920s which presented Society as fun, entertaining figures, and paid particular attention to Society women. Firstly however, I analyse some examples from the Society paper *Bystander* which showed some striking similarities with the *Sketch* in its treatment of Society, and I argue that the *Sketch* drew this mode of representation directly from Society periodicals like the *Bystander*. For example, one cross-over influence from the *Bystander* was that illustrator Helen McKie left this periodical in the early 1920s and went on to work as an illustrator in the gossip columns of the *Sketch* and *Express*.<sup>562</sup> McKie and Olivia Maitland-Davidson who wrote under the pseudonym 'Blanche', worked on the 'In England Now!' gossip feature which tracked both women's shared experiences of new and fashionable activities in London, like 'news plays at

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<sup>562</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, Archive of Art and Design, London, Helen McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46.

theatres' and 'packed restuarants'.<sup>563</sup> The upper middle-class McKie had always lived in London and trained in a number of disciplines as an artist at Lambeth Art School. Her biography at the Victoria and Albert Museum states that she was the 'first woman in a tank' on the Western Front, and during her working life she completed a number of projects for a variety of journals and newspapers, created posters for railway companies, took on commissions to paint murals at businesses and shops, painted Winston Churchill and the inside of Nazi Headquarters in Germany in the 1930s, and authored and illustrated a number of guides to London and places in Europe.<sup>564</sup> She was in her late 20s at the end of the First World War, the time when most of the examples of her illustrations below are from. Focusing on McKie's work, I analyse images from the gossip column alongside a series of fan letters to better understand the visual appeal of this Society gossip column at the end of the war. For instance, I will argue that these readers' letters show that the inclusion of illustrations in the Society gossip column helped to personalise the gossip column, making it more appealing and interesting to readers, but also giving them another print persona, that of the illustrator to admire and engage with.

By the end of the First World War, McKie had received handwritten letters from a diverse cross-section of the reading public: in 1918 a boarding-school girl in Kilkenny begged for 'a sketch for my autograph book', a housewife in Glasgow found McKie's 'drawings of dancing couples absolutely inimitable' and a young woman in Cumbria asked McKie if she would 'be so kind as to draw me something, anything, however small, as I collect drawings by famous artists for my room....I wonder if you would draw an American Army Officer?'<sup>565</sup> All of these

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<sup>563</sup> *Bystander*, 10 April 1918.

<sup>564</sup> V&A, Archive of Art and Design, McKie, AAD/2005/5/1-46.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, letters dated, 2 February 1920, 6 January 1920, 6 September 1919, 24 February 1918, 1 December 1915.

women provided some personal information about themselves for McKie, with a sense of their own personal and physical confinement a common theme. The girl from Kilkenny felt cut off from the world whilst she was at boarding school, the Glaswegian spent most of her time in the home, and it seemed that the lady from Cumbria had one room to herself. It appeared that McKie's illustrations provided a sense of escape for these women from their everyday lives, and judging by the content of her work this was based on themes of romance, leisure, youth, beauty and British Society. The housewife from Glasgow had specifically requested an illustration which incorporated these themes when she asked McKie for an illustration of a couple dancing. Even though McKie's illustrations alluded to the austerity measures of wartime and work on the home front, her earlier themes of wealth, beauty and leisure were still present in the examples from 1918 below:

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**Fig 35. *Bystander*, 10 April 1918.**

**Fig 36. *Bystander*, 3 April 1918.**

Striking, bold and vibrant, this image of a smiling, attractive young woman was made more conspicuous through the use of various artistic effects; there was significant white space around the black-ink figure, she looked directly at the reader, almost smiling in recognition, the hand on her hat emphasised that her frame was turned towards them, providing the reader with her full attention.<sup>566</sup> The dark halo of the woman's hat brim drew the viewers' attention to her face and the clearly defined large eyes, nose and lips. Personality and vitality exude, she was not the fashion mannequin of highbrow *Vogue* where the illustrator paid little attention to the details of the face and focused on details of the dress. Here like in 'Greenroom and Smokeroom' attention was focused on the details of the woman's face, which seemed to be wearing make-up, and her voluptuous figure.<sup>567</sup> Such a glamorous and relaxed appearance sat somewhat oddly with her war work on an allotment or farm, but this was evidence of the continuation of themes of femininity, beauty and sexuality throughout wartime. In contrast to the young woman, the clear outline of the female was replaced by fuzzily drawn lines on the soldier's body, the features of his face were more angular and less open, with dots for eyes and a line for the mouth.<sup>568</sup> His pose was inelegant and manly, yet he did not seem to be the typical 'Tommy' in terms of his looks and build. Although on the western front, he still retained a somewhat suave and well-kempt appearance, his hat and pipe sat at a somewhat jaunty angle. He had a muscular, tall and upright build and a healthy appearance, and did not seem to have physically suffered any ill effects of trench warfare. Like the woman, youth and attractiveness were themes in this

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<sup>566</sup> *Bystander*, 10 April 1918.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 April 1918.

image.<sup>569</sup> Two other images from 1918 were focused on humorous depictions of wealthy lifestyle.<sup>570</sup> Unlike the young man and woman, the gaze of the two male figures below was focused away from the reader as they actively went about their everyday activities. The wealthy status of the man in the image on the left was suggested by his luxurious lounge suit and slippers and the grandfather clock he was about to walk past.<sup>571</sup> He also had a stately, upright stance which implied his respectable upper-class status. The golfing gentleman also had a very smart and eye-catching outfit and a suave, sophisticated body language. Again he appeared slim and healthy, both his deportment and his attire suggested his wealthy status, particularly compared to the scruffier appearance, neckerchief and gait of the small boy who accompanied him:

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**Fig 37. *Bystander*, 3 April 1918.**

**Fig 38. *Bystander*, 3 April 1918.**

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 3 April 1918.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

Like in the *World's Pictorial News* gossip columns after the war the messages within the visual culture of McKie's were complex and multifaceted. For instance, it was not only the humour and attractiveness of McKie's characters that formed part of the column's appeal to readers. Some, such as 'Mrs McBride' of Didsbury, Manchester praised her 'clever' skills and techniques of drawing, and so scrutinised the way McKie drew and painted, and deconstructed her images of Society figures.<sup>572</sup> This kind of praise demonstrated that some readers of the *Bystander* not only interpreted and valued McKie's work for its representation of Society but also the way such representations were constructed by the artist. The fan letters McKie kept in her personal scrapbooks also demonstrated the nature of McKie's own celebrity appeal and status. Hampton has argued that illustration redefined the format of the interwar popular press and the relationship between journalist and reader. He states that through the use of illustration and particularly cartoon in the press, this interaction between reader and the press became more 'intimate', the intricacies and humour of illustration crossing the formal barriers of language and style present in traditional written articles.<sup>573</sup> The feeling that readers knew McKie, and felt that she was a friendly, approachable and kind woman pervaded the informal tone of most of the letters. For example, many readers did not hold back in 'begging' for autographs or a 'small sketch', and used gushing, excitable language like 'please, please', and 'so, so'.<sup>574</sup> The informal but direct and forceful writing style present in these letters echoed the tone of the paragraphs by 'Blanche' which accompanied McKie's illustrations in the *Bystander*, and there may have

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<sup>572</sup>Victoria and Albert Museum, McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46. Undated letter from 'Mrs H McBride, West Didsbury'.

<sup>573</sup> Hampton, 'Inventing David Low', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20/4 (2009), pp. 482-512, pp.482-3.

<sup>574</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46, 2 February 1920. 6 January 1920, 6 September 1919, 24 February 1918, 1 December 1915.

been some element of mimicry of Blanche's and McKie's interactions in the articles. For example, Blanche's written persona was loud, excitable and highly emotive, on 10 April 1918 she used phrases such as 'hearts beat faster and faster', 'our useless tears' and 'terror and tragedy'.<sup>575</sup> In contrast, there was a more obscured, complex impression of McKie's personality in comparison to 'Blanche' due to the nature of her work as an illustrator: the focus was less directly on her and more about who she observed. Yet from the intricate nature of her drawings and their usually light-hearted and humorous themes it was possible to read McKie as a calmer, sweeter, less fiery and opinionated figure than 'Blanche'. The subject matter of McKie's drawings, usually focused on upper-class Society and their leisure pursuits, for example, dancing at exclusive hotels and clubs in London, also suggested something about her class and her social position: the details and the intimacy of her work suggested that she was part of the world that she observed. Yet class barriers did not prevent readers from middle-class housewives in the provinces to schoolgirls providing intimate details of their lives to McKie or writing in informal, excitable styles. Class was also not a factor that prevented readers from asking for autographs or sketches, readers were embarrassed because they felt that she might be too busy working to answer their letters, or that she must be sick of being bombarded with similar requests from fans.<sup>576</sup> This suggested that to the readers of the *Bystander* McKie was regarded as a celebrity and a working magazine illustrator and not a Society figure. As a result, I argue that there was a culture of celebrity surrounding not only the columnists but the illustrators of the gossip column in existence in Britain as early as the First World War, an informal language and

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<sup>575</sup> *Bystander*, 10 April 1918, 3 April 1918, 12 April 1920.

<sup>576</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46, 2 February 1920. 6 January 1920, 6 September 1919, 24 February 1918, 1 December 1915.

system of asking for autographs that bypassed traditional considerations and restrictions of social class.<sup>577</sup>

Sexuality was an important part of McKie's celebrity persona, as evidenced in the letters she kept from men serving in the war. They too disregarded any deferential considerations about her possible social class, and were often sexually suggestive. For example on 24 February 1918 one soldier wrote, 'are you anything like the girls you draw; because if so you have my congrats!'<sup>578</sup> It seemed that some male readers directly inferred from her illustrations that she was like the young, beautiful, flirtatious women that she drew. They assumed that McKie, perhaps because of her working status and/or her subject matter of metropolitan social life that she was single and unmarried, and not too innocent a woman as to be offended by sexual banter and innuendo. Similar themes of flirtation and insinuations about McKie's sexual availability were apparent in a letter from a naval officer of 'H.M.S King Edward VII, 3rd Battle Squadron' on 1 December 1915. He wrote:

Please forgive me this liberty, but it is the only way in which I can show my admiration for your knowledge of naval officers- I refer of course, to your splendid drawings...In fact the correctness of detail in their uniforms is what causes me to think that you are not of the "Gentler Sex". Perhaps you will clear up this point for me?<sup>579</sup>

The officer's immediate suggestion of politeness and formality was immediately undermined by his suggestive comments about McKie's intimate knowledge of the bodies of naval officers. There was double-meaning again when he questioned if McKie was of the 'gentler sex'. For example, it can be read that the officer was not only asking if 'she' was in fact a 'he', but also implying her lack of sexual propriety, that she was not like most other

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<sup>577</sup> See Chapter One, Barron and Driberg letters.

<sup>578</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46, 24 February 1918.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 1 December 1915.

'gentle' women. It appeared that from the tone of these letters that McKie's work as an illustrator of a Society gossip column publicly compromised her association with respectable forms of feminine behaviour. Yet the tone and language these men used in their private fan letters also meant that they were not acting in line with codes of respectable and moral behaviour outlined for British men at this time.<sup>580</sup> McKie's Society gossip column seemed to prompt an alternative world in which normal codes of propriety and gender norms were almost forgotten. It seemed that the suggestion of McKie's sexual availability was positively condoned and encouraged by her publishers, when her editor wrote to her on 27 December 1918: 'Bien Chere Helene, The men that Helen draws each week, Are Devilish lucky men, to meet the charming quills that come, fra' oot of Helen's pen.'<sup>581</sup> From this evidence from her manager, it seemed that a major part of her journalistic duties on the gossip column of the *Bystander* was to flatter and sexually titillate men.

Just as McKie's illustrations of Society lifestyle in the *Bystander* celebrated the social life and leisure of Society, and presented young women in particular as happy and friendly figures, so did the visual culture of the gossip column that developed in the *Mirror* after 1918. In the example from 26 June 1918 below a total of four young and attractive Society women are shown, all smiling for the camera and looking relaxed. The two women in the top left-hand side of the feature looked directly at the lens: the other two women had their heads tilted as if to create an attractive, coy impression. Such relaxed body language was similar to the French women in 'On the Boulevards', the actresses in 'Greenroom' and the young Society women in 'Bystander'; evidence that the gossip columns of magazines and newspapers shared many visual qualities at the end of the war. The *Mirror's* representation

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<sup>580</sup> J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009).

<sup>581</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46, 27 December 1918.

of Society women was unlike the formal portrait of Lady Mosley in the *World's Pictorial News*, and also unlike Mosley three out of the four Society women did not wear hats. Therefore, the newspaper reader was invited to view these Society women in a 'private' moment, not as they normally would have been when they were outside their houses in public.<sup>582</sup> As these photographs were likely to have been constructed in photographers' studios, the informality of the images also says something about the changing relationship between the photographer and the Society subject, and perhaps suggests a greater familiarity and easiness between them. It seemed that as a result of the sub-editing decisions at the end of the war in some papers, Society was becoming more open and welcoming to the scrutiny of middle-class readers of the *Mirror* and *Bystander*, but not to the working-class readers of *World's Pictorial News*:

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**Fig 39. *Mirror*, 26 June 1918.**

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<sup>582</sup> *Mirror*, 26 June 1918.



Like the *Bystander* images of a varied set of Society men and women taking part in different activities, the *Sketch* also emphasized the variety and pace of Society life by using a combination of illustrations and photography. Its visual variety and level of collaborative work required by illustrators, sub-editors, typographers and photographers also matched *World's Pictorial News'* feature of West End stage gossip. This meant that British Society and the stars of the West End stage received a similar visual treatment in the early 1920s national press. It also suggested that 'Echoes of the Town' column was an expensive and therefore very important feature to the editors and proprietors of the *Sketch*. On 11 November 1919 the title illustrations emphasised the exotic, cosmopolitan and Americanised leisure culture of London, turning the city into a lavish spectacle for the *Sketch's* readers: hand-drawn illustrations of a jazz band of black musicians and a wealthy couple in evening dress eating dinner in a palm-tree lined restaurant accompanied the column's emboldened title 'Echoes of the Town'.<sup>583</sup> Other title illustrations promoted the busy and modern nature of metropolitan life, such as the humorous illustration of a carriage of an underground train packed with people on 2 August 1920. As seen in the caricature in the centre of the feature from 20 August 1918 below, as well as in the title illustrations, a humorous impression of Society figures and Society lifestyle was an important element of the column's visual culture, similar to the *Bystander*. The title illustration caricatured a range of figures of all ages, shapes and sizes and promoted the pace of metropolitan life.<sup>584</sup> It showed a bustling street scene of 41 London characters of all social classes, which suggested the variety of lifestyles of young and old all in close proximity in London.<sup>585</sup> Unlike the women shown in the illustrations of Paris streets, it was mainly men depicted in

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<sup>583</sup> *Sketch*, 11 November 1919.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 August 1918.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 January 1919, 2 August 1920.

this London street scene, but embedded within the written content of the *Sketch's* column were photographs only of women. Whilst men dominated the public space of the streets of London, it was Society women who were most displayed in the national newspaper print of the gossip column:

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**Fig 40. *Daily Sketch*, 20 August 1918.**

On 5 June 1923, the title of the column was accompanied by two illustrations presented as if to mirror the actions of the reader, one of a young man and the other of a young woman reading the *Sketch*.<sup>586</sup> Such an illustration allows us to begin to understand how the

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<sup>586</sup> *Sketch*, 5 June 1923.

newspapers constructed and/or understood their readers and how newspapers represented the readers to the readership themselves. In this example both the man and woman were expensively and fashionably dressed and lounging on lavishly furnished sofas suggesting the wealthy status of these two young readers: the PEP survey suggested that this illustration reflected the reality of the *Sketch's* readership when it said that the *Sketch* was read by a greater percentage of families surveyed within the upper-class and upper-middle class than those in lower economic groups.<sup>587</sup> One of McKie's illustrations in the *Bystander* in 1922 also suggested that 'Mr Gossip's', 'Echoes of the Town' was popular with fashionable Society readers. A caption to an illustration of a dancing couple gossiping at a 'cocktail party' read: 'I can't think how you get all those interesting glimpses of people', to which the other person replied, 'I suppose I must give the game away at last. As a matter of fact I read "Echoes of the Town" by Mr Gossip in the *Daily Sketch* each morning.'<sup>588</sup> The fact that the gossip column was intended to entertain a Society audience, might reveal an explanation about the differences between the austere representations of Society in the middle-class *Mail* and the working-class *News of the World* and *World's Pictorial News* in the early 1920s. It was acceptable for Society audiences to laugh at themselves, and for the *Sketch* and *Bystander* illustrators to produce amusing representations and caricatures of Society figures, but if the newspapers were known for their lowbrow audiences then making a joke out of Society by caricaturing them in the gossip column was not acceptable. In some senses the visual variety and entertaining qualities of the *Sketch's* gossip column seems strikingly demotic, but this has to be put into the context of the type of readers who accessed the column.

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<sup>587</sup> PEP, *Report* (1938), p. 233.

<sup>588</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/34.

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This section has used evidence from the visual culture of the gossip column to emphasise the technical sophistication of the lowbrow and pictorial press at the end of the First World War, and the sophisticated, collaborative work present in papers like *World's Pictorial News*, the *Sketch* and the *Mirror* at this time. This is significant in the history of the British press because like the gossip column, papers like *World's Pictorial News* and the *Sketch* have rarely been studied in any significant detail. Yet, as I have argued, these papers pioneered many of the major changes in the visual culture of the national press in this period. This section has also begun to explore the similarities and cultural networks across genres and brows of popular print culture in the early 1920s. It was in this context that the appearance of the Society woman, her beauty, her figure and her appropriation of the latest fashions became a common theme in the gossip column both in magazines and newspapers.

## **2) Context: the Professionalization of Journalism between the wars and the Visual Culture of the National Press.**

Perhaps one piece of evidence to suggest the commercial artist's integration within a newspaper's staff in the early 1920s can be found in the scrapbooks of McKie, which contain a photograph of her, the only woman, in the centre-front row of a 'Delegation of Journalists' in Dinard, Brittany in 1924.<sup>589</sup> The growing importance of photography and illustration in the popular press is also evident in the wage records of the *Express* and *Standard* in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The inclusion of 'artists' in the listed staff of both papers was striking: in November 1930, there were 23 'reporters' and 21 'artists' employed on the

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<sup>589</sup> McKie Papers, AAD/2005/5/1-46, 2.

*Standard*.<sup>590</sup> There were also ten sub-editors, each responsible for a different part of the *Standard*'s: '(a) news organization and variety of "features," and (b) typographical display and...make-up.'<sup>591</sup> These office archives explain firstly the growing emphasis on how papers looked in the interwar period, and secondly the status of the gossip column as a collaborative project. Such categorisation of staff and their roles also demonstrated the levels of organisation within the management of the national popular press at this time. The categorisation of staff into their different specialisms was also evidence of the complex ways in which proprietors and editors thought about the content of the press and their support for the different means, both written and visual, by which news could be conveyed. On the *Express* on 29 Nov 1930, the weekly wage for the highest paid reporter 'S. Bishop' was £29 8s 0d, and the highest paid 'artist' was the cartoonist Sidney Strube with a week's wage of £76 18s 5d. Strube received over double the wage of the news reporter, suggesting Strube's status on the *Express* in 1930 and the importance placed on his illustrations in the paper's news culture. In comparison Driberg, author of the 'Talk of London' gossip column earned £13 13s that week, and out of four photographers the highest paid was a 'P. Tovey' who earned £11, 11s.<sup>592</sup> If a wage reflected a worker's status and value within a company, then the skills and work of the gossip columnist and photographer were almost equally regarded by the editors of the *Express*. From the examples of gossip columns provided in section one it should be noted that many photographs, particularly those of Society women, were produced in photographers' studios and not by a photojournalist. Evidence suggests that this was not uncommon practice for national newspapers throughout the period and immediately after the Second World War: according to a journalist's guide published in

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<sup>590</sup> Parliamentary Archives, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/H/19, *Evening Standard* wage records, 1930.

<sup>591</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (1932), p. 130.

<sup>592</sup> Parliamentary Archives, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/H/19, *Daily Express* wage records, 29 November 1930.

1947, the photographs that accompanied articles were often requested from professional studios or were the work of freelance and amateur photographers sent in to the newspapers.<sup>593</sup> In the *Sketch* 'Echoes of the Town' of 1918 photographers' names or businesses were stated under a photograph. Whilst on 28 November 1918 one photograph was attributed to a *Sketch* photographer on 12 June 1918 the businesses of 'Russeil' and 'Lafayette' photography were attributed to two portraits of Society figures. This evidence suggested the business potential that the changing visual appearance of the gossip column had for studios in the interwar period and that the collaborative professional networks of the gossip column stretched outside the newspaper offices. Evidence from the *Mirror's* gossip column also suggested that young Society women were also very much part of the network of publicity provided by the national press and the gossip column: that there was collaboration not only between the press and photographer but the Society woman also. For example, on 1 January 1936, Winn of the *Mirror's* 'Personality Parade' criticised debutantes' celebrity status and their blasé, superficial attitude towards photographers and the popular audience:<sup>594</sup>

Latest game of sophisticated debbies: They accept every invitation from Mayfair photographers to have a free sitting, and are enjoying a right royal time before the floodlights.

One of them, having collected seventeen pictures of herself, is planning a cocktail party at which the ones to be released to the breathlessly waiting world will be chosen...<sup>595</sup>

By the early 1930s the transformation of the visual culture of the press had also created a professional debate about the use of photography, illustration and formatting of news

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<sup>593</sup> W.A. Bagley, *Illustrated Journalism: A Practical Manual* (London, 1947), p. 47.

<sup>594</sup> *Mirror*, 1 June 1936.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.* See Introduction and Chapter One for discussion of Winn's gossip column in the *Mirror*.

amongst journalists, sub-editors and illustrators, evidenced in journalist memoirs and professional guides for news reporting, photojournalism, commercial art and illustration.<sup>596</sup> Some referred to the influence of Northcliffe and praised his fastidious attention to the details of his newspapers' 'make-up' or format, but for very different reasons.<sup>597</sup> For example, in 1936 former *Mirror* editor Hamilton Fyfe stated that Northcliffe had been a passionate champion of traditional 'news values', recalling that Northcliffe had supposedly criticised the encroachment of advertising into the domain of the news article.<sup>598</sup> Fyfe regarded the increase in illustration, photography and large headlines after the war as symbols of the increasing sensationalism of the press, and that journalists were increasingly being drawn in to promoting consumerism and fashion to boost advertising and sales of the newspaper.<sup>599</sup> For Fyfe, the visual transformation of the press meant that journalistic work was becoming a lowbrow career option lacking in professional prestige or personal value. However, sub-editing expert F.J. Mansfield (former president of the NUJ 1918-19, a member of the board of editors on *The Times* and Lecturer and Examiner in Practical Journalism at the University of London) did not see the 'spectacularization' of the press as a symbol of the press's intellectual downturn, but viewed the 1930s as a moment of unprecedented creativity and diversity in national newspapers. He described Northcliffe as the founder of complex new theories and practices in the page make-up of the popular press in the early twentieth-century:

Newspaper making...is a most subtle and most difficult craft...To the mind of...Harmsworth [Viscount Northcliffe], print seemed...a medium almost as sensitive as are the pigments of an artist. He saw associations between typesetting and authorship, between the nature of an article and the manner in which it was

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<sup>596</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (1932). Fyfe, *Press* (1936).

<sup>597</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing*, p. 130.

<sup>598</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936), p. 102.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-105.

presented. He began to understand the immense power of suggestion which rests in headlines and cross-headings. He began to think in pages as well as columns and lines.<sup>600</sup>

Mansfield's account suggested an increased amount of 'art' in the popular press of the interwar period and the varied use of both typography and formatting techniques. It also proposed that editors and proprietors were beginning to think more visually and creatively about the means through which the content of a newspaper could not only be 'presented' but also how best its meaning could be conveyed to the readers after the war: such as the use of bold 'headlines and cross-headings', or how an article's shape worked with the format of the rest of the page. LeMahieu's study of the visual culture of the press goes some way to confirm that the First World War marked an important watershed in the visual culture of the national press, writing that the use of, 'bolder headlines reflected the intensified passions of the war' and that the employment of 'banner, streamer, and multi-deck headlines' became a 'matter of routine' in national newspapers.<sup>601</sup> Also, 'press photography gained new legitimacy during the war...shots...often supplemented the news in a dramatic manner...'<sup>602</sup> This emphasis on increasing the 'legitimacy' of news, making it 'bolder' and to convey 'passion' through photography and typography supports a central theme of this thesis: there was a personalisation of the press after the First World War. The transformation of the visual culture of the gossip column through the use of photography and new formatting techniques should be viewed as part of this process of personalisation, and Northcliffe defined the importance of the visual in the new personal approach of the press when he said, 'right page-making corresponded exactly to clear and forcible speaking. "Does anybody", he asked, "prefer a monotonous, indistinct voice to a

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<sup>600</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (1932), p. 132.

<sup>601</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), p. 76.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

musical and distinct voice?”<sup>603</sup> In the immediate post-war period the formatting of some national newspaper gossip columns was increasingly about demonstrating visual variety through which newspapers attempted to make an increasingly personal impact on the reader.

The professional debates surrounding the visual culture of national press suggest the increasing professionalization of journalism in the early 1930s, in the sense that photographers, artists and typographers were being excluded by some from definitions of journalism as a career which focused on written skills and a knowledge of political and economic affairs.<sup>604</sup> Whether Northcliffe was presented as determined to protect the traditional columned format of newspapers, or an enlightened newspaper reformer who wished to convey news messages through a variety of visual formats, what is clear is that the visual format and visual content of the press was a contested issue by the 1930s, with different ‘expert’ voices competing, including journalists and sub-editors. The tensions present in the accounts of Fyfe and Mansfield resemble the professional debates about the working identity of journalists and their criticism of gossip columnists in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>605</sup> It seemed that the gossip column with its inclusion of a set of controversial figures like the gossip columnist, photographer, illustrator and typographer, was at the heart of professional criticism surrounding the future of journalism and the professional duties of journalists at the start of the 1930s. The angry and reactionary tone of Fyfe’s commentary on the popular press suggests a pervasive sense that his role as journalist was

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<sup>603</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (1932), p. 133.

<sup>604</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936).

<sup>605</sup> See Chapter Two, section one for these debates.

under threat by changes in the visual culture of the press. Yet if on the one hand Mansfield seemed to confidently celebrate the creative and artistic opportunities the press provided to typographers, illustrators and photographers at the start of the 1930s he also suggested that their work was bound by the editorial policies of their employers, and also that their work should primarily be shaped by the written content of the newspaper content it accompanied. He wrote:

The art of make-up has been perfected to give striking and original effect to the immensely varied products of news and feature organization. The resources of typography are used to the full in the service of this ever-expanding art, which aims not only at proportioned expression of the inherent value of stories, but also at arresting the reader's attention and interest...<sup>606</sup>

Mansfield noted that the press's attitude towards the visual make-up of the newspaper changed as a result of the introduction of 'human interest' to 'the orbit of news', there was now a need for 'more comprehensiveness and variety, and make-up schemes which assist the hurried reader to find what is wanted with the minimum of effort.'<sup>607</sup> He commented: 'an original and creative outlook has pushed activity into regions left entirely untouched in past generations....older papers...their pages often arid Saharas of type, difficult and uninviting to read...events...recorded in classic prose of stately dimensions, which the hasty reader in the tube and the omnibus of to-day would be unable to absorb.'<sup>608</sup> In one sense Mansfield's attitudes about the engaging qualities of visual culture linked with the lively and attractive visual content of the *Sketch* and *World's Pictorial News* which had depicted Society lifestyle after the war. Yet the entertaining qualities of the illustrations and typography in the *Bystander* and *Sketch* gossip columns became a point of tension for Mansfield in the early 1930s, as he reassessed the purpose of news and the newspaper's

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<sup>606</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (London, 1932), p. 130.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*

visual culture. Mansfield stressed the value of commercial art and photography as a part of news culture, rather than simply as ways of selling consumer goods. He stated that the visual make-up of the page had to be carefully 'proportioned' to the content of newspaper text; it had to express 'the inherent value of stories'.<sup>609</sup> Here Mansfield's comments seemed to accept and condone the criticism of newspaper editors like Fyfe who believed that there was too much visual sensation in the press caused by the inclusion of too many adverts, and importantly, Mansfield's comments also suggested a closer collaboration between journalists and those that worked on the press's visual culture. He asserted that 'the actual production of the news, the feature and even the "stunt," comes first in order of time and also of value', and wrote, 'in the store the art of the window dresser must always be the complement of the work of the inventor...'<sup>610</sup> Here Mansfield seemed to confirm the existence of a newspaper hierarchy by the early 1930s where those who found and wrote the news had the most important, fundamental role in the press, and sub-editors assisted in emphasizing the written contents of the news and emphasising the importance of the news reporter in their page designs. Mansfield's work was also striking in suggesting the need for a more collaborative approach between a newspaper's staff. Many professional guides like that by Montague Ellwood in 1927, had explored the personality of the commercial artist and suggested ways in which the artist could express 'his meaning' and 'temperament', and use the skills and knowledge of art he had developed at art school within popular print culture.<sup>611</sup> Mansfield however, viewed the 'advanced school' of commercial artists and designers or the 'cubist maker-up', as distorting the 'genuine...values' of news, because they

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<sup>609</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (London, 1932), p. 130.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>611</sup> Ellwood, *The Art of Pen Drawing* (1927), pp. 68-75.

were too focused on their own artistic and professional agendas.<sup>612</sup> By suggesting the need for a common understanding about news values, and stronger communications between an increasingly diverse newspaper staff, Mansfield wanted the visual design of the popular press to suggest a newspaper's distinct role and purpose in society, separate from both the more 'sensational' values of commercial advertising, films and magazines and highbrow forms of modern art. First and foremost, newspapers were about reading text and understanding news, not viewing images. Mansfield's tone and comments also seemed attuned to the political and economic context of the early 1930s, he emphasised a duty to the readers and attentiveness to the social and economic climate in which they existed. In 1933, he set out a professional-moral code to sub-editors, clearly instructing those in charge of the formatting and design of the press to: 'in particular' keep 'a thorough grasp of questions and persons of the day-political, industrial etc...and close acquaintance with contemporary journalism literature...'<sup>613</sup> Most significantly, he outlined a shift in news values at this time, stating that there was a need for 'sobriety' and 'honesty' in newspaper page format for 'sensible and discerning readers'.<sup>614</sup> Mansfield stated that readers would 'not be attracted for ever by counterfeit thrills, i.e. news put into the exaggerated garb of a...sensation-mongering...“machine-made” splash.'<sup>615</sup>

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Mansfield's critical language of stunt journalism agreed with famous journalists like Sydney Moseley who had trained in the pre-war years, when photography and illustration in the

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<sup>612</sup> Mansfield, *Sub-editing* (1932), pp. 131-132.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*

national newspaper press was not nearly as common as it was by the start of the 1930s.<sup>616</sup> This suggested that there was a new agreement between sub-editors and journalists about a new need for 'sobriety' in the visual culture of the press at the turn of the 1930s, quite different to the lively, entertaining visual content of the gossip columns in the *Sketch* and *Bystander* in the early 1920s.

### 3) Society and Consumerism in the Visual Culture of the Gossip Column.

If by the early 1930s Mansfield was arguing that sub-editors should show a greater awareness of the political and economic climate they were working in, then this was not evident in the columns of the *Mail* and *Express* in the late 1920s. This section considers the changing representation of Society, particularly the Society woman, in the gossip column in the mid-late 1920s. It goes on to argue that by the early 1930s the changing persona of the gossip columnist brought about a visual transformation of the newspaper gossip column. *Bystander* illustrator McKie provided illustrations for the new 'Talk of London' gossip column in the *Daily Express* in the mid-1920s. As can be seen in the example below from 23 August 1924, her *Express* illustrations utilised very similar themes to those in the *Bystander* in the sense that they focused on London life, wealthy and attractive young men and women, intricate details of fashionable dress, and emphasized themes of romance and glamour.<sup>617</sup> This again emphasised the influence of the Society periodical in informing the visual culture of the newspaper gossip column in the 1920s. In the centre foreground two statuesque men in morning suits and a slim young woman wearing a lavishly detailed dress and holding

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<sup>616</sup> Moseley, *Short Story Writing* (London, 1926).

<sup>617</sup> *Express*, 23 August 1924, 4 November 1924. McKie Papers, 1889-2004, scrapbook of fan letters and *Bystander* drawings, AAD/2005/5/1-46, 4. *Bystander*, 3 April 1918, 10 April 1918, 3 April 1920, 14 April 1920.

a parasol stand in conversation. There are however some key differences in the style of McKie's illustration of the woman with the parasol in the *Express*, and the smiling, curvaceous Society lady on the allotment in the *Bystander*: the well-dressed woman with the parasol was tall and slim and stood with the posture of a fashion mannequin and the details of her face are obscure, as was her character and personality. It seemed that from the representation of the Society lady in the *Express* that she had become increasingly associated with fashion and consumerism. This was, I argue, a pervasive and revealing theme in the popular press between the wars. From the mid-1920s to the 1930s the gossip columns of two of the most widely sold newspapers of the period, the *Mail* and *Express* would increasingly promote the Society gossip column as a shop window for a burgeoning consumer culture of fashionable clothing and accessories.

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**Fig 41. *Express*, 23 August 1924.**

The work of the illustrator helped to promote consumer goods to the reading public. McKie's sophisticated shading techniques in her metropolitan scene provided the figures with a spectacular three-dimensional effect, and also emphasised the quality of the materials that her subjects wore, providing their clothes with the impression of a luxurious sheen. The glamour and beauty of these three resplendent characters was carried through into the montage of London scenery in the background where lush trees and foliage formed a park scene, and expensive motor cars drove through what looks like one of the gateways of Hyde Park as the sun shone.<sup>618</sup> This coherence of styles meant that elite fashion and consumerism were strongly associated with the metropolis. The dominant themes of the opulent beauty and fashionable behaviour of Society within McKie's illustration were matched in the photograph of the ballerina Anna Pavlova in the centre of the 'Talk of London' feature. In the same pose as McKie's hand-drawn young woman, Pavlova throws her head to the left hand side in a simultaneously coy but alluring manner, and the lighting of the photograph suggested that it had been arranged by the photographer for dramatic effect. Both McKie and the anonymous photographer used their skills and knowledge of monochrome reproduction to produce images that stood out on the newspaper page. The block colour of the Society party's clothing in McKie's illustration was stark amidst the surrounding white space, and a similar effect was produced from the photographer's arrangement of the image of Pavlova: the contrast between the dark background in which Pavlova was set and the lavish headdress of pale flowers she wore created a dramatic image.<sup>619</sup> The photographer's lights also illuminated her pale face and her hair, which contrasted sharply with her dark lip-stick and eye make-up. Just as similar techniques and narratives were shared in both the photographer's and illustrator's work suggesting an

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<sup>618</sup> *Express*, 23 August 1924.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*

artistic cohesion, both Society figures and European dancers were also being drawn closer together through similarities in their visual representation.

As seen in the example below, by June 1930 the *Mail's* gossip column had undergone a similar 'visual revolution' to its rival the *Express*, introducing illustration and photography into a new Society column 'Looking at Life', a title which in itself suggested the significance of physical appearance and the value the column placed on presenting images of Society.<sup>620</sup>

On 2 June 1930, photographs of Society figures Mr Siegfried Sassoon and Lady Cynthia Tothill had their rectangular edges softened and manipulated by newspaper artists, which provided an informal and intimate scrapbook effect, not dissimilar to the methods used in photographs in film fanzines like *Picturegoer*.<sup>621</sup> Like the publicity shots of carefully groomed film stars, the Society subjects all seemed to have been directed to stare through the camera lens, which were then positioned on the page as if to directly mirror the reader's gaze. The largest photograph of the wide-eyed young blond Maureen Guinness was particularly striking; a sense of innocence and aristocratic status was combined with signs of modern consumerism signified by the pearl necklace, fashionably styled hair and carefully applied make-up.<sup>622</sup> The visual themes within this example from the *Mail* were similar to those found in the earlier example from the *Express*; wealth, fashion, femininity, sexuality, appearance and behaviour in modern society.<sup>623</sup> Here the Society subjects shared the Americanised glamour of film stars through their visual representation in photographs, or shared the exotic allure of wealthy, international celebrities like the Russian dancer Pavlova, evidence which suggests an increasingly international culture of celebrity between the wars.

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<sup>620</sup> *Mail*, 2-7 June 1930. 2 June 1930.

<sup>621</sup> *Picturegoer*, January 1921, April 1921, 30 May 1931.

<sup>622</sup> *Mail*, 2 June 1930.

<sup>623</sup> *Express*, 23 August 1924.

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**Fig 42. *Mail*, 2 June 1930.**

As seen in the example from the *Mail* above, by 1930 the Society gossip column was closely associated with consumer culture. Here, the gossip column is sandwiched between two very bold, large and attractive advertisements for hosiery and lingerie. As chapter one has discussed, gossip columns like those in the *Mirror*, *Mail* and *Express* were becoming increasingly associated with consumer culture in the 1920s.<sup>624</sup> In one example from the *Mail* on 4 June 1930 the feature breathlessly discussed fashionable consumerism.<sup>625</sup> It reeled off the vogue for private flying lessons, steel-shafted golf clubs, mentioned the fan base of the film stars Greta Garbo and cricketer Don Bradman, Siegfried Sassoon's work in progress, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, his Hawthornden Prize-winning book on fox-

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<sup>624</sup> See Chapter One, section one.

<sup>625</sup> *Mail*, 4 June 1930.

hunting and his war poetry, a description of Noel Coward and his book *The Withered Nosegay*.<sup>626</sup> It promoted the West-End plays *Hamlet* and *Loose Ends* and the leading actors involved, mentioned a new larger golf ball from America, endorsed the professional golf shop at Addington, the English Open golf championships and Lloyd's bookmakers, and even discussed next season's fashionable scents.<sup>627</sup> From March 1930, the title of the *Mail's* column was accompanied by an eye-catching strip of cartoons which provided a striking advertisement of modern consumer culture and quickly defined the consumer focus of the Society gossip column. On Wednesday 4 June 1930, the image contained a wealthy, young and smart couple in evening wear, the Houses of Parliament, horse racing, dancing well-dressed young couples swathed in shafts of artificial lights, and another young couple at a restaurant drinking champagne.<sup>628</sup> As in the earlier examples from the *Mail*, fashionable consumer culture was once again associated with the metropolis and young figures within Society:

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**Fig 43. *Mail*, 4 June 1930.**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 44. *Mail*, 1 June 1933.**

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<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 2 June 1930.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid., 4 June 1930.

The increasingly spectacular and vivid association of Society and their lifestyles with fashionable clothes and consumer goods was further displayed in the *Mail's* gossip column of 1 June 1933.<sup>629</sup> The style of the image was like a fashion sketch, similar to those that could be found every day in the popular press, in the advertisements for department stores and in the fashion features of the women's pages.<sup>630</sup> In the *Mail* of the early 1930s, the gossip column was a site for the upper-class to be presented as voiceless, statuesque fashion mannequins, idealised on one level as those that could afford the latest fashions and

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<sup>629</sup> *Mail*, 1 June 1933.

<sup>630</sup> See *Standard*, 8 January 1929, 27 June 1929, 3 August 1929.

on another as the role models for how to wear the fashions well. The group of women appeared homogenous: they were uniform in size with their slim bodies and beautifully made-up faces and coiffed hair. The personalities and vivacity of Society women did not appear to be celebrated as they had been in McKie's sketches in the *Bystander* in the early 1920s.<sup>631</sup> The image worked as an advertisement on a number of levels. The presence of the beautiful group of the upper-class advertised it immediately as the gossip column, as this chapter has shown, the upper-class having become a trademark for the gossip column in the *Mail*, *Mirror* and *Express* by the mid-1920s. The column's quality was assured by their presence, even if it was not in reality an accurate physical portrayal of these figures. It advertised an idealised, fashionable, sociable lifestyle to an audience who, as the columnist described, were themselves defining and experiencing new forms of leisure in this period, detailing the modes, manner, public behaviour and status of the British upper-class at this time. On another level it advertised the importance of individual appearance, depicting fashionable clothes, hats, jewellery, handbags, coats and the fashionable lengths for skirts. Derby Day symbolised the start of the summer season, it promoted excursions, rest and leisure, romanticised horse racing and promoted gambling. As encouraged in the advertising guidance manuals of the period the illustration connected with the audience on a human level by promoting the fundamental desires of want and aspiration and played on human emotion, the gloriously glowing figures presented a sense of ideal behaviour.<sup>632</sup> Evidence from the PEP report suggested that the addition of images to articles encouraged the reader to stop and read the contents of the column, but even if the image was only viewed, it reminded the reader of a Society presence in their lives and a distinct social

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<sup>631</sup> *Bystander*, 3 April 1920, 14 April 1920.

<sup>632</sup> H. Eley, *Advertising Media* (London, 1932). D.B. Lucas and C.E. Benson, *Psychology for Advertisers* (London, New York, 1930).

order.<sup>633</sup> If in the early 1920s the Society woman was admired for her beauty and added visual appeal to the gossip columns of the *Mirror*; by the early 1930s the Society woman, and her representation as a fashion mannequin firmly associated her with wearing and selling fashionable clothes. Indeed, a section of the advertising industry developed in interwar Britain used Society women to endorse consumer products, seen in adverts in the *Express* on 26 November 1931 in which Lady Diana Wellesley endorsed a skin cream, as did Lady Gresham on 26 November 1934.<sup>634</sup> Even the gossip columnist Viscount Castlerosse was drawn into advertising on 20 September 1928 when he endorsed 'Wix Cigarettes' and was referred to as the 'famous journalist-peer': importantly this title can be used as evidence of the popular acceptance of Castlerosse's dual status as a gentleman-journalist in the interwar period and the advert as evidence of the gossip columnist's celebrity status at this time.<sup>635</sup>

It was exactly the columnist's status as a gentleman-journalist that influenced a refashioning of the Society gossip column in papers including the *Express* and the *Sunday Chronicle* in the early 1930s. This thesis has discussed the employment of figures like Tom Driberg and Beverley Nichols as gossip columnists at the start of the 1930s. This new generation of columnists formulated their print personas in reaction to the decadent impression of Society and the youthful 'Bright Young People' in the best-selling *Vile Bodies*, as well as turning their back on the Society calendar in response to the deteriorating state of the national economy.<sup>636</sup> A similar response can be seen in the visual culture of Nichols's and Driberg's gossip columns: a celebration of Society women and their consumerism, or visual

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<sup>633</sup> PEP, *Report* (1938), p. 250.

<sup>634</sup> *Express*, 26 November 1931, 26 November 1934.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1928.

<sup>636</sup> See Thesis Introduction, Chapter One and Chapter Two.

references to the cosmopolitan nightlife of the metropolis was replaced by a plainer, less visually diverse feature.<sup>637</sup> For example, Nichols proclaimed in a subheading on one of his early gossip columns in the *Sunday Chronicle* that 'I am not a Bright Young Person'.<sup>638</sup> There were visual signifiers of his status in the large photograph of Nichols that took up two-thirds of his gossip feature which is shown below.<sup>639</sup> Yet whilst his clothing suggested the business-attire of an office-based journalist rather than the evening suit of a Society figure, the spectacle of the young, attractive Nichols left the reader in little doubt who the central celebrity in this gossip column was. It seemed that Nichols had simply replaced the visual celebration of the young and beautiful Society lady with his own celebrity status. In the example below from Driberg's 'These Names Make News' of 26 June 1937, it is the title or headline of the feature that stands out.<sup>640</sup> Yet this was sparsely presented: no illustrations decorated it like the images of metropolitan nightlife that accompanied the titles of the *Mail* and *Sketch* in the 1920s.<sup>641</sup> With its one photograph, the text-image ratio was more akin to that found in the 'Londoner's Diary' of the *Evening Standard* throughout the period (see thesis introduction), or the *Mail* in the early 1920s.<sup>642</sup> In effect, Driberg's column presented a de-spectacularization of the gossip feature in the 1930s, a development that would have appealed to, but appeared to have gone unnoticed, by Fyfe in his publication of 1936 which had heavily criticised the sensational visual culture of the press.<sup>643</sup> This perhaps suggested

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<sup>637</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 21 June 1936, 18 June 1933, *Express*, 10 January 1934, 26 June 1934, 15 August 1934, 17 November 1934.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 October 1932.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>640</sup> *Express*, 7 June 1937.

<sup>641</sup> *Sketch*, 4 January 1921, 15 June 1921, 15 August 1921, 16 November 1921, 9 January 1923, 5 June 1923, 14 August 1923, 1 November 1923. *Mail*, 1 June 1928.

<sup>642</sup> *Mail*, 1 June 1921, 2 June 1921, 4 June 1921. *Standard*, 1 June 1925, 2 January 1939.

<sup>643</sup> Fyfe, *Press* (1936), pp. 1-19. My argument about the de-spectacularization of the gossip columns in papers like the *Express* represents a critical engagement with the work of Saler, who argues for a progressive spectacularization of the popular press from the late- nineteenth century to the 1940s. Saler, "'Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes'", *The Historical Journal*, 3/46 (2003), pp. 599-622.

that the by then retired Fyfe was influenced by the content of the growing body of journalist memoirs and academic publications that criticised the national press in the 1930s, and perhaps less by the content of national newspapers themselves. The stark visual culture of 'These Names Make News' reflected the *Express* column's move away from discussing the fashions of Society lifestyle. For example in the column below a central theme was individual rights to privacy. Driberg criticised the work of Mass Observation and the information it was gathering on the lifestyles of ordinary readers. Yet there were aspects of Driberg's print persona that the visual culture of the column did not seem to reflect: although the bold text and contrast between the black print and white space linked with his direct and forceful writing style Driberg was also very humorous and entertaining.<sup>644</sup> Humour, however was no longer reflected in illustration or caricature in the column as much as it had been in the early 1920s. It appeared that the gossip column, at least in visual terms, was no longer associated with providing entertaining spectacle to the reader; by 1936 they had to read the text of the columnist to be entertained. As the *Express* was the most widely-purchased newspaper in Britain by 1938, it seemed that the mass audience enjoyed this new style of gossip column. Yet, as the examples from the left-wing *Reynolds's Illustrated News* show in the early 1930s, there were still columns who wanted to entertain and attract an audience through caricature, photographs and illustration, utilising the visual devices of the celebrity gossip column that had been in place since the First World War.<sup>645</sup> As can be seen in a subheading in the column from 13 November 1932, the column was described as a 'no frills' gossip feature.<sup>646</sup> This was ironic considering its spectacular visual diversity. Yet this statement was to do with the column's content: it discussed gossip

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<sup>644</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>645</sup> *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, 7 August 1932, 13 November 1932.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 November 1932.

'outside Mayfair' away from Society, and it associated 'frills' and decadent living with Society subjects only. Yet there was further irony in the visual style of the column: the photographs of young attractive women and themes of leisure that dominated the column like that of the 'airman's wife rollicking on the beach' had long been associated with the Society gossip column; even if the visual origins of the Society gossip column were seen in the spectacular and technically-sophisticated gossip columns about France and popular entertainers in the working-class, 'lowbrow' press.<sup>647</sup>

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 45. *Express*, 26 June 1937.**

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 7 August 1932.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 46. *Sunday Chronicle*, 2 October 1932.**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 47. *Reynolds's News*, 7 August 1932.**

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

**Fig 48. *Reynolds's News*, 13 November 1932.**

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In the mid-late 1920s the gossip column had effectively become a shop window culture:

Society women acted as fashion mannequins who displayed consumer goods in

photographs or fashion drawings, illustrations and photographs of leisure activities such as golf and a day at the races were included. Yet, the visual culture of the gossip column became less spectacular in the early 1930s when the persona of the male columnists began to move away from discussions of Society life and metropolitan leisure. Increasingly their own opinions and lifestyles began to dominate the written content of the gossip column, the persona of the columnist became less of a leisured and highly sociable man-about-town and more of a man of letters, prone to presenting his opinions on the state of British society rather than details of his social life with Society. In an era of economic depression photographs and illustrations of Society and Society women became less common—perhaps even less acceptable. The links between elitism, celebrity and consumer goods were not as visually apparent as they had been after the war and in the 1920s. In the most widely purchased newspaper of 1939, the *Express*, the gossip column had almost deleted all visual reminders of the wealth and consumer culture of British Society.

#### **4) Conclusion**

This chapter has looked beyond the ‘spectacle’ of the newspaper gossip column. The introduction of photography and illustration into the national press and the increased use of different styles of typography have often been viewed as a sign of the popular press’s intellectual downturn and sensationalism. I argue that with its combination of text, photographs, illustrations and innovative formatting styles, the newspaper gossip column was a complex cultural construction. Whereas I argue the Society periodical was an influence on the content of newspaper gossip columns immediately after the war, the cinema fanzine represented a new and distinctly modern magazine genre which influenced the visual culture of newspapers from the late 1920s. The visual culture of the gossip

column therefore provides evidence that themes of celebrity and Society were shared across print genres that have usually been studied discretely by historians. Indeed, I would argue that more can be learnt about the nature of celebrity culture and popular culture in interwar Britain through comparative studies of popular print culture.

It is perhaps ironic that the complex, multi-layered content of the newspaper gossip column had its cultural origins in what were often presented as 'lowbrow' papers like the *News of the World* and *World's Pictorial News*. Yet in terms of photography and illustration, 'spectacle' was rarely attached to British Society in these papers' gossip columns and the mainly working-class audiences were more likely to see a gossip column with a visual culture dedicated to theatre and music hall entertainers and later British and American film 'stars'. It was a different story for the middle-class readers of papers like the *Express* and *Mail*. A visual culture of a glamorous and vivacious Society, particularly Society women, did exist in the gossip columns of the 1920s. By analysing the visual culture of the gossip column, finally, this chapter has identified and considered the various roles and working processes of journalists and other newspaper staff. The working life and conditions of newspaper staff is an area not yet fully explored by historians of the interwar press. I have argued that the visual culture of the gossip column shows the collaborative nature of some journalistic work in interwar Britain and how the visual culture of the gossip column fed into contemporary debates about the professionalization of journalism.

## Chapter Five:

### **Cosmopolitanism and the Newspaper Gossip Column, 1918-1939.**

The key aim of this chapter is to analyse and compare the content of newspaper gossip columns, which have been dismissed as superficial and Americanised by some historians, in order to explore the relationship between concepts of national identity and celebrity culture and popular culture in interwar Britain.<sup>648</sup> I will explore how the column related to contemporary ideas of nationhood, and how it often worked to redefine Britishness within a transnational framework rather than as simply inward-looking or imperial. Exploring the developments in the form, content and tone of the gossip column, the chapter also argues that changes in the visual form of the gossip column including the introduction of new types of typography, photography and illustration, and the gossip columnist's increasingly personable, friendly tone facilitated what I term the gossip column's 'cosmopolitanization'.<sup>649</sup>

By studying the content of the gossip column, and revealing its discussion of not only British but imperial, trans-Atlantic and European networks of celebrity, I argue that the national press was not quite as occupied with questions of national stability as many accounts of the interwar press and popular culture suggest. In so doing I challenge Alison Light's concepts of interwar national identity, which suggest a re-working of conservative structures within the content of the modern mass-produced, middlebrow novel. She argues for the emergence of the middle-class mother and wife heroine in the popular novel and short story and describes a reimagining of Victorian family values and domesticity for the inter-

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<sup>648</sup> Barker, *Newspapers* (2000). Wiener, *Papers* (1988).

<sup>649</sup> Chris Rumford, *Cosmopolitanism and Europe* (Liverpool, 2007), p. 2.

war 'modern couple and small family'.<sup>650</sup> Light links the popular, 'middle-class novels' representations of nationhood directly with national political developments in this era, including the dominance of the Conservative party, the policy of appeasement, eventual support for war in 1939 and patriotic imaginings of the home front. Analysing novels set in the British Empire, she argues that women could seek limited feelings of power, control and freedom within the 'imperial idea'.<sup>651</sup> However, Light's national and imperial framework for understanding popular culture does not consider events such as Britain's loss of political control in Ireland in 1922 and how this might challenge understandings of the 'imperial idea'. Likewise, she does not place the novel in the wider context of popular print culture, not least the alternative discussions of femininity and class found in national newspapers also read by middle-class audiences.<sup>652</sup> My study of the gossip column and its paragraphs celebrating 'cosmopolitan ... London' suggests that interwar popular culture was never inward-looking in a straightforward sense but demonstrated the ways in which ideas of Britishness were reformulated and contested through a complex process of transnational exchange.<sup>653</sup> As a result, the gossip column offered a version of Britishness that was outward-looking and cosmopolitan. However, there was a flipside to this in the 1930s: economic depression encouraged criticism of cosmopolitan upper-class Society in some gossip columns like that of the *Sunday Chronicle*, and in other columns there was a much less confident attitude towards the outside world with the increasing prospect of war and the deterioration of foreign politics. Yet as my analysis of the gossip columns' content will show, there was a substantial increase in discussion of European celebrities and places by 1930 compared to 1922.

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<sup>650</sup> Light, *Forever England* (1991), p. 214.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>652</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004).

<sup>653</sup> *Express*, 7 June 1924.

There has been persistent debate about the national press's place within interwar society and politics.<sup>654</sup> Yet an enduring cultural perception surrounding the intellectual and creative limits of popular print forms, directly linked to the product's commercial design for a mass market, link Light's conclusions about the middlebrow novel with studies of nationhood and the mass press. Rather than track changes in the content of the popular press over a sustained period, Lucy Bland, Shani D'Cruze, Marek Kohn and Laura Tabili have pinpointed news stories in newspapers read by mainly working-class audience including the *World Pictorial News* to suggest that moral panics surrounding femininity, nightlife and the modern metropolis characterised the 1920s.<sup>655</sup> Kohn writes of a readership far too obsessed with the internal state of the country, too scandalized by the shocking behaviour of criminals and undesirables to be interested in life beyond its borders.<sup>656</sup> In these accounts the popular press's role is constant, stagnant and fixed, either as a 'fourth estate' whose purpose was to reflect and bolster conservative State attitudes, and/or a dangerous vessel of sensationalism which blotted out any rational consideration of individuals' agency and purpose as citizens. I challenge these conclusions by tracking and comparing the content of the gossip column in a range of newspapers over a twenty year period, demonstrating their consistent approach of looking outwards, particularly towards France, to shape and explore ideas of national character. Finally, my analysis of the gossip column offers a more nuanced corrective to accounts of the 'Americanization' of British culture between the wars. Historians including Daniel LeMahieu have suggested that interviews and

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<sup>654</sup> Ibid. McKibbin, *Classes* (1998).

<sup>655</sup> Bland, "'Hunnish Scenes'" *History Workshop Journal*, 73/1 (2012), pp. 118-143. Bland, 'The Trials and Tribulations of Edith', *Journal of British Studies*, 47/ 3 (2008), pp. 624-648. Bland, 'White Women', *Gender & History*, 17/1 (2008), pp. 29-61. D'Cruze, 'Intimacy', *Women's History Review*, 16/5 (2007), pp. 701-722. Kohn, *Dope* (1992). Laura Tabili, "Women 'of a Very Low Type': Crossing Racial Boundaries in Late Imperial Britain," in Laura Frader and Sonya Rose (eds.), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (New York, 1996), pp. 165-190.

<sup>656</sup> Kohn, *Dope* (1992, 2003 edition), pp. 7-9, 105-182.

profiles of American film stars and other celebrities became increasingly important in the interwar press, but the column indicates that the influence of America was always felt alongside the continued importance of continental Europe and Britain's global empire.<sup>657</sup>

### 1) Context: Transnationalism and the Gossip Column

On 7 June 1924, the *Daily Express* Society gossip column 'The Talk of London' described 'London as the most cosmopolitan city in the world'.<sup>658</sup> The term cosmopolitan has been defined as 'belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants', and, 'having the characteristics which arise from, or are suited to, a range over many different countries; free from national limitations and attachments'.<sup>659</sup> The title of the *Express* columnist the 'Dragoman', was in itself a 'cosmopolitan' name signalling the same transnational associations on which he commented. 'Dragoman' meant a translator or guide, usually applied in 'exotic', 'oriental' locations like the Middle East. Yet his remarks about London seemed influenced by national and imperial understandings of race and political power. Printed during the British Empire Exhibition, which aimed 'to stimulate trade, strengthen bonds that bind mother Country to her Sister States and Daughters, to bring into closer contact the one with each other...', the Dragoman's comments excitedly celebrated the spectacle of different nationalities in London.<sup>660</sup> In what now seems a racist

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<sup>657</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture* (1988), pp. 46-48. Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales', *Cultural and Social History*, 4/4 (2007), pp. 529-543. Also see the special issue, 'The Press and Popular Culture in Interwar Europe', *Journalism Studies*, forthcoming October 2013.

<sup>658</sup> *Express*, 7 June 1924.

<sup>659</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 2012), <http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2277/view/Entry/42259> [Last accessed 12 September 2012]

<sup>660</sup> *British Empire Exhibition, 1924: Wembley, London, April-October: Handbook of General Information* (London, 1924), *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London and the British Empire Exhibition 1924* (London, 1924, 45<sup>th</sup>)

tone derived from imperialist understandings of racial difference and hierarchy, he described a 'turbaned Indian', 'a couple of gaily bedecked Ethiopians' and a 'couple of Chinese' which the author saw drive past him as he sat on a 'No.10 Omnibus ... at Charing Cross'.<sup>661</sup>

What did the 'Dragoman' mean in identifying London as a cosmopolitan space? Political and social theorist Chris Rumford defines cosmopolitanism as a way of thinking which draws 'attention to new relationships between the individual, the community and the world- and to the fact that these relationships are fluid and evolving.'<sup>662</sup> This thesis has already shown how individual upper-class columnists were making sense of their identities as private gentlemen, national celebrities and journalists in their diaries and letters, negotiating and 'relativizing' their 'relationship to the communities' in which they lived, and 'crossing and recrossing territorial and community borders'.<sup>663</sup> Building on these conclusions, this chapter argues that the interwar gossip column was a site of cosmopolitanism understood in its broader geographical and cultural sense—that the changes in tone, content, authorship, visual style and format of the gossip column were employed to 'imply a recognition that the world is being transformed and that the direction this transformation takes is open and contingent.'<sup>664</sup> In other words, the stylistic changes in the gossip column, including the increasingly personalised and informal style of the columnist, contributed to the existence of a transnational culture of celebrity in the gossip column. In the interwar period the world was being transformed through challenges to imperial power, the impact of socialism and

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edition), <http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/1924-british-empire-exhibition> [Last accessed 13 September 2012].

<sup>661</sup> *Express*, 7 June 1924.

<sup>662</sup> Rumford, *Cosmopolitanism and Europe*, p. 2.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Fascism, improved technologies of communication and transport, and a developing mass culture of film, magazines and newspapers. The gossip column was not insulated from these changes, and posed questions and themes of national and geographical difference: the new personalised style of the gossip columnist in the mid- to late 1920s, where the gossip columnist described his own encounters and leisure pursuits and sometimes reflected on them, represents an understanding of cosmopolitanism which 'requires us to recognise that we are all positioned simultaneously as outsiders and insiders, as individuals and group members, as self and the other, as local and global.'<sup>665</sup>

Many subjects of the gossip column were not only national and imperial but also drawn from continental Europe and the United States, and from across national, ethnic and to a very limited extent, racial borders. In the 1920s many newspapers contained a gossip column discussing Parisian Society, fashion and social life. 'Paris Echoes' in the *Weekly Dispatch* was supposedly authored by a female correspondent called 'Marcelle' in Paris.<sup>666</sup> In January 1927 she discussed the 'short skirt' and 'fur garters' as the new 'dress feature' of 'the season', the fashionable way to cook and eat lobster, and the new home for the theatre company the 'Chauve-Souris' close to the Champs Elysees.<sup>667</sup> At the centre of the feature was a dramatically arranged photograph of members of the theatre group in sumptuous costumes acting out a murder scene. Seemingly written to excite, 'Paris Echoes' was placed on the same page as several entertainment features including a column of jokes, limericks and anecdotes called 'Wit of the World', a feature on real-life mysteries, and an article on the dance 'craze' entitled 'These Non-Stop Dancers'.<sup>668</sup> As I have shown in the earlier

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>666</sup> *Weekly Dispatch*, 16 January 1927.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid. 16 January 1927.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. 16 January 1927.

chapter on visual culture, France was associated with visual spectacle and the sensational physical appearance of its women. The visual spectacle of the Parisian gossip column in *World's Pictorial News*, 'On the Boulevards', contrasted sharply with the sparseness and sobriety of the paper's gossip column on British Society and created a visual sense of national differences between Britain and France.<sup>669</sup> A sense of national difference was also found in the text of the column: the sense of the French woman as the other was cultivated by linguistic devices such as sexual innuendo and jokes. For example, the anonymous columnist 'whispered' that mannequins were believed to have got 'changed' in the 'jockeys' dressing-rooms...at Longchamp.'<sup>670</sup>

In the working-class *World's Pictorial News*, Paris was also a site of exoticism, entertainment and high fashion. In the gossip column 'On the Boulevards', 'irrepressible Mademoiselles' moved around the streets and entertainment venues of the 'Gay City', Paris.<sup>671</sup> The feature played on an idea of British working-class consumer sensibility linked to moral codes of respectability and femininity: the visual and written culture of 'On the Boulevards' combined to create an extreme sense of national difference between French and British women. On 30 June 1923, the reader followed a young Parisian women enthralled by 'Dame Fashion' as they concocted a gold, 'glimmering' powder to make their legs more attractive in short skirts.<sup>672</sup> Another paragraph described a woman paying over the odds for a portrait on a whim, and models employed by couturiers who insisted on them changing their outfits at the slightest change in the weather. The fickleness of fashionable behaviour, and by implication French women, was also evoked in gossip describing how Parisian

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<sup>669</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>670</sup> *World's Pictorial News*, 23 June 1923.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 June 1923.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1923.

actresses followed the plot of a recent play and held Christening parties for their pet cats and dogs.<sup>673</sup> The columnist provided snippets of dialogue he had overheard in his carefully constructed anecdotes of Parisian wastefulness and decadence, describing a 'three hours thrill' and a woman who had written a blank cheque for an artist to fill out for a painting.<sup>674</sup> Rather than celebrating figures in a positive sense, the gossip column was used to undermine French figures, quite different to the deferential columns celebrating British Society in papers like the *Mail*.

Likewise, in the *Daily Express* gossip feature of 1924, 'This Week in Gay Paris', Parisian life was presented as lavish and decadent. Here it was the cosmopolitan and well-connected British author 'E.W.B' who provided first-hand experiences and observation of Society life. Comparing Parisian life to London, he hinted at the sexuality and sensuality of the fashionable 'Parisienne', suggesting that she had an extra level of glamour and sophistication in her appearance, but perhaps not the class, restraint and modesty of British Society women. The fashionable Paris woman was:

... adorning herself with as many buttons as...any pearly queen. Only hers are dyed demurely to match her gown. Many hundreds are seen on a single dress, and, needless to say, none of them is used to fasten it...<sup>675</sup>

Providing the intricate details of the 'latest fashion' and 'vogue' in hats, jewellery and accessories, 'E.W.B' sat in the restaurants, cabaret and theatres of Paris just as 'The Dragoman' was describing 'London as the most cosmopolitan city in the world'.<sup>676</sup> His column of 7 June 1924 focused on the social lives of London Society and elite entertainment venues in the West End and was positioned directly above the Paris feature; the two items

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 23 June 1923, 30 June 1923.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid., 30 June 1923.

<sup>675</sup> *Express*, 7 June 1924.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 7 June 1924.

were the same size with a similar paragraphed format and streamer headline. Their proximity and visual similarity suggested a certain amount of fluidity between French and British Society and the written content of 'The Talk of London' went some way to confirm this. The intermingling of respectable British Society and French culture meant a shift in tone from the more overtly sexualised language and imagery of earlier columns. Whereas French women and their interest in clothing and appearance had been the butt of bawdy jokes from columnists in the *World's Pictorial News*, here French lifestyle and culture was treated with a new theme of sophistication now that British Society were shown to spend time there.

On 12 January 1925 the 'Dragoman's' paragraph 'Britain in France', stated that 'many prominent English people' including 'Lady Cottenham and Lady Michelham' were 'already' at Cannes. In this sense the gossip column echoed the transnational and geographical rhythms of the Society season, following the upper class from London, to the country, to Paris and to Deauville. The transnational culture linking Society with the continent was confirmed on 23 August 1924 when the 'Dragoman' described the 'fashionable people' at spas at 'Aix, Vichy and other continental watering places'.<sup>677</sup> The gossip column also presented European celebrities and European royalty visits to London and Britain: on 23 August 1924 the columnist was keen to promote the British spa town of Harrogate as a holiday resort just as appealing as those on the continent for the international elite, mentioning the visit of 'Princess Marie of Greece and Admiral Ionides'.<sup>678</sup> It was not only the cosmopolitanism of Society that was celebrated in the gossip column however, as the 'Dragoman' discussed a developing Anglo-French celebrity culture of tennis players. A

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<sup>677</sup> *Express*, 23 August 1924.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*

paragraph called 'Riviera Tennis' described the English tennis player Miss Harvey's participation at a competition at Cannes.<sup>679</sup> On 29 June 1925, 'The Dragoman' discussed the famous French tennis player and an important interwar celebrity Suzanne Lenglen, describing her dress and behaviour at Wimbledon.<sup>680</sup> France was becoming a site for an increasingly socially diverse and international celebrity culture that both rivals and predates historians' perceptions of Hollywood celebrity culture in the late 1920s, a US culture which has also been celebrated for the social diversity and international backgrounds of its 'stars'.<sup>681</sup>

The celebrity culture of the Society gossip column was more complex than this, and stretched further than Paris and the Riviera. The 'Dragoman' also discussed British upper-class travel to parts of the Empire. On 2 August 1924 he presented the Duke and Duchess of York and Lord and Lady Elphinstone's travels 'off to Kenya' now that the London season had ended.<sup>682</sup> Britain was also a site of a transnational celebrity culture. On 13 June 1924 the 'Dragoman' described a 'man's day at Ascot' with the 'perfectly cut clothes' of an assembly of British gentleman, including Prince Henry and the Prince of Wales and 'Indian princes ... a tremendous number of United States, South Americans and Chilians [*sic*] and many Frenchmen...'<sup>683</sup> Here, the wealthy elite of Britain and the Empire but also France and the Americas were all placed under the same kind of scrutiny by the gossip columnist and judged in terms of their dress and demeanour. It appeared that the fashion code and etiquette of the Ascot gentleman was recognised and valued internationally, as 'The

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<sup>679</sup> Ibid., 12 January 1925.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid., 29 June 1925.

<sup>681</sup> Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* (2003), Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales' *Cultural and Social History*, 4/4 (2007), pp. 529-543.

<sup>682</sup> *Express*, 2 August 1924, 23 August 1924.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid., 13 June 1924.

Dragoman' had never ... seen clothes worn with such unobtrusive perfection.'<sup>684</sup> The gossip columnist relished this cosmopolitan scene, but also reasserted the importance of national difference in suggesting that variances in appearance and behaviour could normally be seen between men of different nationalities. The columnist's celebration of the international impact of the Ascot gentleman, demonstrated a confidence in Britain as the epicentre of an elite network of fashionable clothing, consumerism and entertainment. This was reflected in the broader content of the paper in the 1920s: on the front page and throughout the newspaper there were increasingly bold and attractive advertisements for clothing retailers and department stores selling the latest styles of dresses, millinery and suits. There were listings for cinemas, advertisements for special events in West End night clubs and restaurants, and prominent regular features describing the 'Green Room Gossip' from the theatres of the West End.<sup>685</sup> How did this transnational culture of celebrity play out in other newspapers? Section two goes on to analyse the similarities and differences between the transnational cultures of the gossip columns throughout the interwar period.

## **2) Geographies of the Gossip Column.**

This section argues that political and economic change, including challenges to imperial rule, the global economic downturn of the late 1920s, and the foreign policies of Germany in the late 1930s, all shaped the transnational culture of celebrity that was depicted in the gossip column. It also argues that Society remained a prominent aspect in the celebrity culture of the gossip column throughout the interwar period, even if the content of the column showed that the shape of their world was shifting. Through a comparative analysis of six

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> *Express*, 1 June 1923, 13 June 1924, 2 January 1925, 12 January 1925, 3 November 1926, 2 January 1928, *Mail*, 1 June 1928, 2 November 1928, *Daily Mirror*, 20 September 1929, *Daily Sketch*, 5 January 1925, *Dispatch*, 27 January 1929, *Sunday Express*, 14 November 1926, 2 January 1927, *World's Pictorial News*, 30 June 1923.

newspapers this chapter analyses the subjects of the gossip column in a global context. The papers are: the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *News of the World* and *Evening Standard*. The analysis is the result of sampled gossip columns from each of these newspapers in the months of January, June, August and November in the years 1922, 1930 and 1938 and the results are presented in pie charts. The subjects have been classified in terms of the subject's nationality, or where a place has been described, the region in which it is situated. The four main categories are Britain, Europe, Empire and United States; the other countries which are sometimes discussed in the column are also represented. The written analysis that follows the charts provides more detail of the individual countries represented in Europe and the Empire. There is no pie chart for the *Daily Mirror* of 1938, as the paper no longer contained its celebrity gossip feature by this time, the reasons for its changing treatment of celebrity culture have already been explored in chapter one of the thesis.<sup>686</sup>

### **1922:**

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<sup>686</sup> See Chapter One.

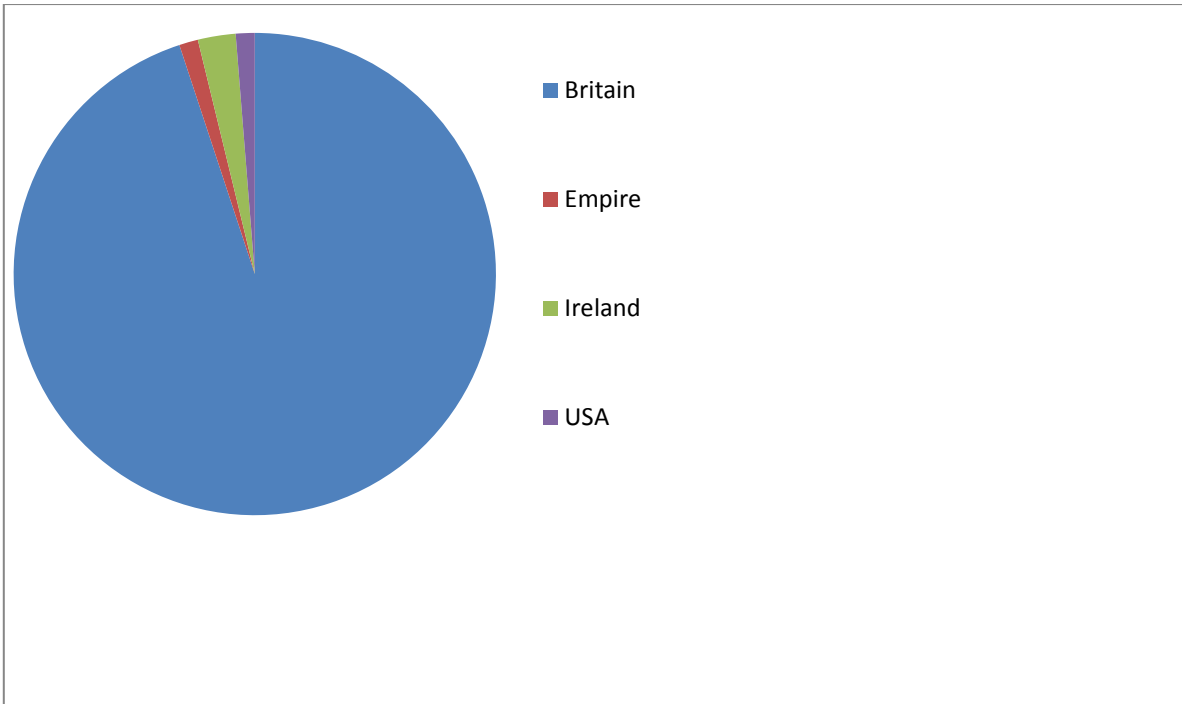


Fig 49. Geographical spread of the subjects of the gossip column, *Daily Express* (1922).<sup>687</sup>

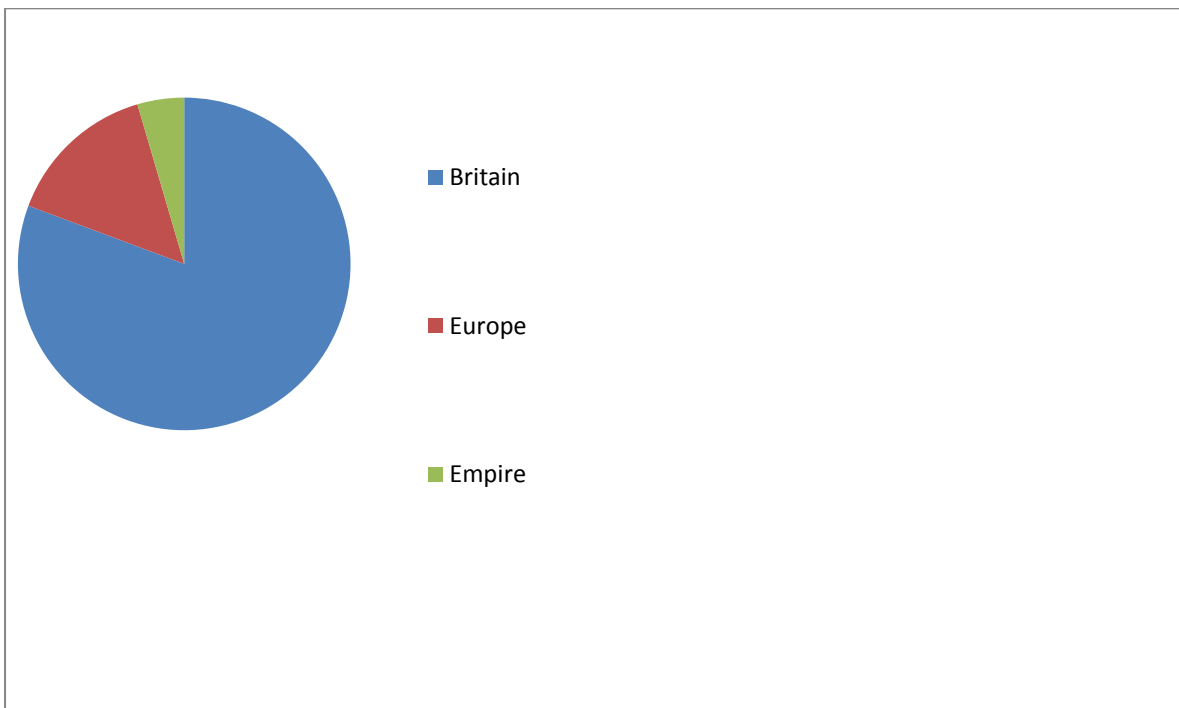


Fig 50. Geographical spread of subjects, *Mail* (1922).<sup>688</sup>

<sup>687</sup> *Express*, 2 January 1922, 28 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 20 November 1922.

<sup>688</sup> *Mail*, 3 January 1922, 30 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 9 November 1922.

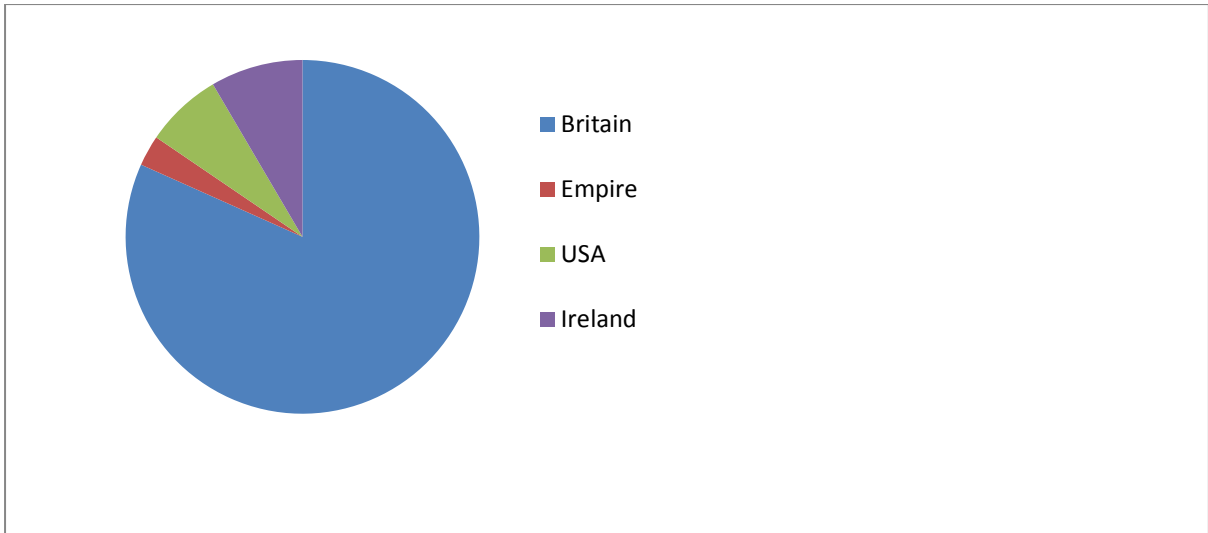


Fig 51. Geographical spread of subjects, *Mirror* (1922).<sup>689</sup>

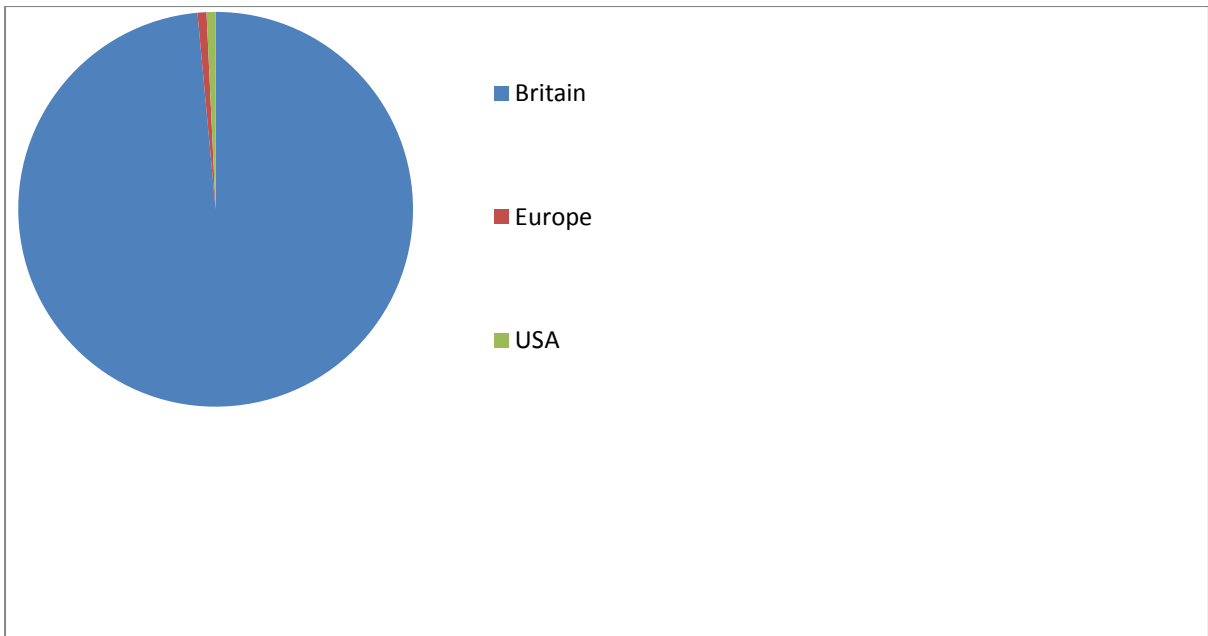


Fig 52. Geographical spread of subjects, *Sketch*, 1922.<sup>690</sup>

<sup>689</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 2 January 1922, 9 June 1922, 30 August 1922, 14 November 1922.

<sup>690</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 25 January 1922, 5 June 1922, 11 August 1922, 13 November 1922.

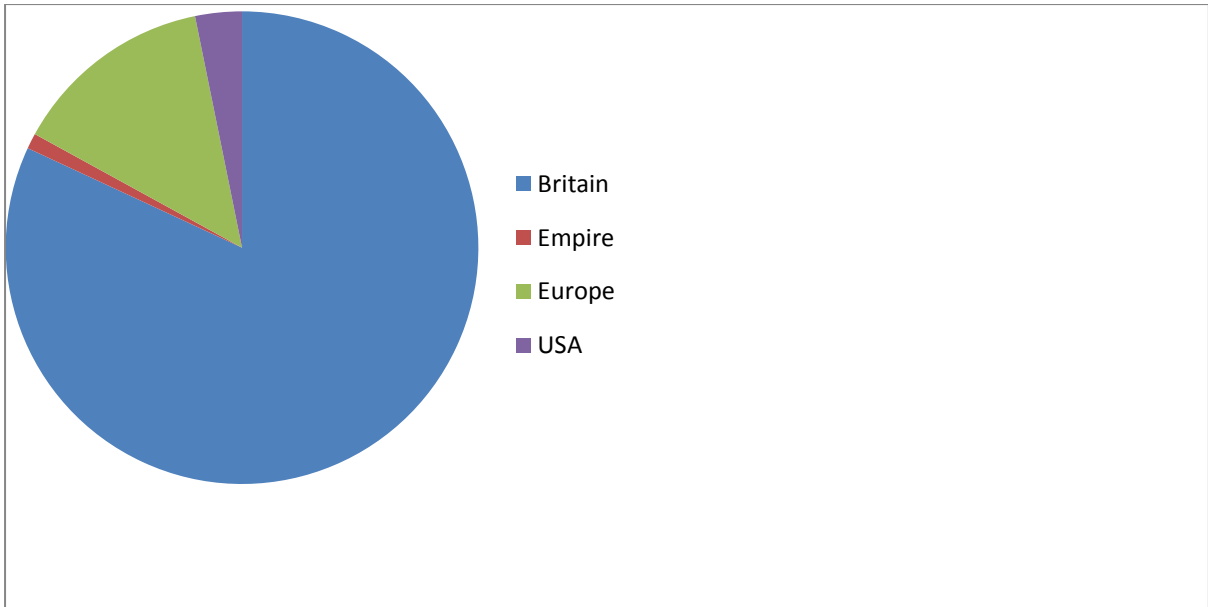


Fig 53. Geographical spread of the subjects, *Standard* (1922)<sup>691</sup>

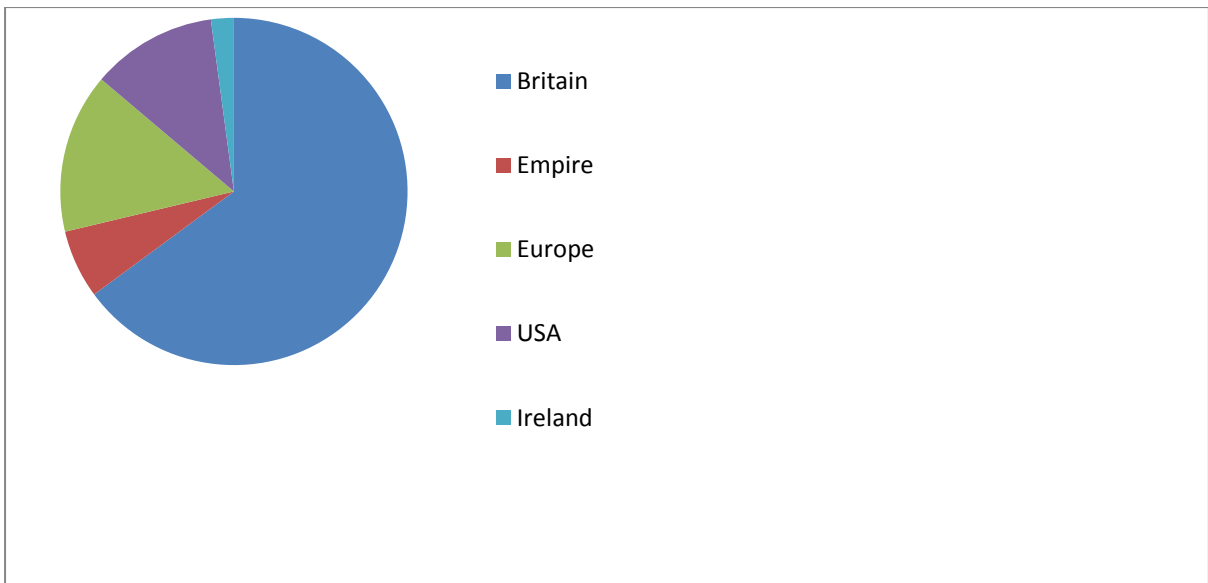


Fig 54. Geographical spread of subjects, *News of the World*, 1922.<sup>692</sup>

<sup>691</sup> *Evening Standard*, 2 January 1922, 13 June 1922, 2 August 1922, 28 November 1922.

<sup>692</sup> *News of the World*, 22 January 1922, 4 June 1922, 15 August 1922, 5 November 1922.

In 1922, the *Express's* gossip column 'Diary of To-Day' was predominantly set in Britain and as explained in chapter one, mainly discussed the lifestyle of British Society subjects.<sup>693</sup> The column also usually began with a description of the official public engagements of the British royal family.<sup>694</sup> On some occasions the column did look outwards beyond Mayfair, royal palaces, and the country estates of the upper-class; and this was usually towards Empire (4% of the content). If the column cultivated a sense of a sedate and glorious golden age for Society with its descriptions of lavish debutante balls, expensive Society dinners and attendance at annual Society events such as Cowes, then the column also did not disrupt the glorious imagery of imperial rule.<sup>695</sup> In fact, it seemed that upper-class Society and the gossip column became a symbol of defiance to political change in Empire. Egypt changed from a sultanate to a kingdom in 1922, and Ireland became a Free State, yet there was no mention of any heightened political tensions in these countries when British Society figures were there. In the column, Society seemed to carry on with their everyday lives and annual social routines, the political turmoil and nationalistic agitation in parts of Empire did not affect their lives. For example, on 20 November 1922 the column described 'keen Egyptologist' Lord Carnarvon's archaeological trip in Egypt with his daughter. As was the norm in the autumn and winter months, Society figures spent time on their country estates. When the Marchioness of Londonderry made her way from Londonderry House in London to her country estate in County Down, Ireland, there was no mention of the potential dangers or difficulties that may have impacted on her travels, even though Ireland was in the midst of civil war at this time. Instead, the commentary was only interested in the

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<sup>693</sup> Chapter One.

<sup>694</sup> *Express*, 2 January 1922, 15 August 1922, 20 November 1922.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*

personal affairs of the woman; Londonderry's father was 'feeling much better' after his recent bout of illness.<sup>696</sup>

The impression of Society's distance from the violence and civil disruption in Ireland in the late 1910s and early 1920s was also seen in 'Court and Society' of the *Mail*. On 1 July 1920 the gossip column reported Lady Aberdeen's visit to Dublin to assist with a charitable fair for child welfare in Ireland.<sup>697</sup> There was nothing unusual in a Lady's patronage of charities and organisation of charitable events, this was something reported in the *Mail's* gossip column on a very regular basis such as Lady Maud Warrender and the Duchess of Argyll's efforts at organising and hosting philanthropic events often for women and children.<sup>698</sup> Yet taken in the context of the Anglo-Irish war, and the violence in Dublin around this time, Lady Aberdeen's visit was surely quite extraordinary. On 18 June 1921, 'Court and Society' made one of its usual Society engagement announcements, but this was for a Miss Emily Brooke of Dublin, and the column of 27 June 1921 discussed Lady Winifred Gore's planned visit to Ireland. However, as in the *Express*, there was no mention of violence or political change affecting the everyday engagements of Society. This was the case even though the work of British forces in Ireland and evidence of the Anglo-Irish conflict was regularly presented elsewhere in the paper between 1920 and 1922. On Tuesday 15 June 1920 photographs on page twelve showed British troops in action in Ireland; on 3 June 1922 the picture page included an image titled 'fleeing from the Belfast terror'; on Friday 30 June 1922 there were images on page sixteen of the destruction of the Four Courts in Dublin, once an icon of

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<sup>696</sup> *Express*, 20 November 1922.

<sup>697</sup> *Daily Mail*, 1 July 1920.

<sup>698</sup> For private dances, see: *Mail*, 8 June 1920, 23 June 1920, 25 June 1920, 19 June 1922, 21 June 1922. For presentations at Court, see: *Mail*, 25 June 1920, 5 June 1922, 8 June 1922. For Ladies philanthropic events, see: *Mail*, 25 June 1920. Also see Lady Wavertree's charity work, 10 June 1920.

imperial rule.<sup>699</sup> The incoherence between peaceful, stable impressions of Ireland in the Society gossip column and the depiction of violence and disorder in the photographic pages perhaps help to pinpoint the kind of reactions challenges to Empire received in the British press. Such a disjuncture between different parts of the paper might have suggested press reactions of confusion and shock to events in Ireland. The differences between the content of the gossip columns and the photographs might also have implied the editorial remit for each feature at the time. The gossip column was a site of stability, of tasteful behaviour, of fashion, beauty, success and wealth, private parties and Society events. It was representative of the old order, British traditions and the well-established social structure of Britain and Empire. The photographic pages included photographs produced often by intrepid photojournalists directly on the scene, in this case in the streets of Dublin.<sup>700</sup> It seemed that photojournalism was allowed to present and reflect on the effects of violence and conflict, and threats to British power and control, even if the text of the newspaper gossip column was not.

Compared to the content of the *Daily Express* in 1922, there was slightly more evidence of Europe and Europeans in the content of the *Mail*. Discussion of the French Riviera became a repeated feature, as both European and British elites holidayed there in January and stayed throughout winter. On 3 January 1922, the French Riviera contained a cosmopolitan but wealthy mix of figures including Don Jaime, the son of the King and Queen of Spain and Marquis of Curzon was in Cannes.<sup>701</sup> Countries of the Mediterranean were also publicised as elite holiday and travel hotspots, it was reported that Lord and Lady Bland-Sutton had

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<sup>699</sup> *Mail*, 15 June 1920.

<sup>700</sup> P.H.F. Tovey, *Action with a Click* (London, 1940).

<sup>701</sup> *Mail*, 3 January 1922.

just returned to their London home from a holiday in Portugal.<sup>702</sup> As discussed in chapter one, the gossip column of ‘pictorial paper’ and ‘women’s paper’ the *Daily Mirror* had the greatest variety of subjects ranging from British actors, Society figures, politicians and religious leaders.<sup>703</sup> Unlike the *Express* and *Mail*, the content of the column included figures from outside the British social elite, and was also open to those from outside Britain as it discussed the work, achievement and lifestyles of figures from Empire, Ireland the United States and Europe. Unlike the *Mail* and *Express*’s celebration of Society social life, the *Mirror* presented the world as a place filled with innovators, reformers, champions and talented figures. Whereas the *Mail* and *Express* did not acknowledge change in the leadership and political structures of Ireland, on 2 January 1922, ‘The Rambler’ reported on the work and political beliefs of figures in Irish government. For example, he stated that the ‘IRA Chief of Staff, Richard Mulcahy’ supported ‘ratification of the Treaty’ for the Free State and Irish politician ‘Mrs O’ Gallagher’s’ refused to work as a ‘peacemaker’ and support the treaty.<sup>704</sup> On 9 June 1922 ‘The Rambler’ also reported on current affairs in the United States, mentioning the achievement of the aviator Edward Stinson and his world record-breaking flight. The Rambler also discussed the visit of the powerful US Solicitor-General to Gray’s Inn, London. Fashion and consumerism were not exempt from the column, but often took the form of amusing stories and talk of new inventions. Fashion paragraphs were often in a more global context, and unlike the *Express* and *Mail* in particular, there was rarely any celebration of the minute embellishments and materials of the British-designed gowns of Society women.<sup>705</sup> Instead, the columnist reported on a new type of alarm clock in the

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<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>704</sup> *Mirror*, 2 January 1922.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid., 2 January 1922, 9 June 1922, 30 August 1922, 14 November 1922.

Savoy Hotel in Paris that he had heard about, the story of the most expensive pair of 'pajamas' [sic] in Paris, and relayed to the readers some reports of the latest clothing trends in the US.<sup>706</sup> In the European context, the columnist discussed the recent achievements of a German scientist, treatment of women in Spain, the lack of employment in Belgrade and the plight of once wealthy and aristocratic Russian refugees in Serbia.<sup>707</sup> From Empire, there was a combined message of imperial figures' outstanding achievements and of Britain's current success in leading most of the Empire despite the losses in Ireland. Emphasising Britain's still powerful status in the world, in January 1922, 'Rambler' discussed the knighthood for the Governor of the 'Gold Coast Colony'.<sup>708</sup> He also suggested the existence of another more highbrow transatlantic star network aside that of the popular American film stars between Canada and Britain, as the 'next opera star' Canadian Maud Neilson was promoted through details of her life story.<sup>709</sup>

In contrast to the small, predominantly British community represented in the columns of the *Express* and *Mail*, the global context of the *Mirror's* gossip column made the world seem fast-paced and rapidly changing: it was a place where news and information of all types seemed to be exchanged quickly and freely regardless of national borders and oceans. The world that was brought into the homes of the *Mirror's* mainly middle-class readership was presented as a familiar and mostly friendly place, partly through the lively and often colloquial tone of the gossip columnist. As seen in chapter two and three's argument for the increasingly personalised tone of the gossip columnist in the interwar period, 'The Rambler's' language seemed gleeful when he laughed at the stories of expensive clothing in

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<sup>706</sup>Ibid., 30 August 1922, 14 November 1922.

<sup>707</sup>Ibid., 2 January 1922, 9 June 1922.

<sup>708</sup>Ibid., 9 June 1922.

<sup>709</sup>Ibid.

Paris, and he often provided his personal opinions on the figures that he discussed such as the Irish politician O’Gallaghan.<sup>710</sup> If the anonymous columnists of the *Mail* and *Express* wrote in very formal tones and detailed language, then the ‘Rambler’ was a helpful and down-to-earth guide eager to engage his readers with the wider world. Yet the *Mirror’s* columnist appeared to be intelligent and educated: the geographical range of subjects discussed suggested a worldly figure with knowledge of a range of topics including politics, economics and social welfare and the current affairs of a number of countries. In contrast, the columnists of the *Mail* and *Express* were specialists in high fashion, etiquette, Society and royal figures, Society’s social engagements and charity work. In modern day media terms, the gossip columnist of the *Mirror* had some qualities that could be linked to the professional status of a world affairs correspondent, and the *Mail’s* columnist the royal correspondent. However, ‘The Rambler’ was unlike the modern-day world affairs correspondent, or the foreign correspondent or the international news agency journalists of his own day: he was based in the newspaper offices of Fleet Street, and relied on gathering international stories from these correspondents and other news sources like magazines and newspapers.

As shown in chapters one and two, the *Daily Sketch* columnist was one of the first to write about his own social life and discuss those he met. Yet as is suggested in the *Sketch* pie chart, his experiences were only within Britain, and the content of the column reveals that this was mainly focused around the place where he worked and lived: London. In 1922, ‘Mr Gossip’ experienced a cosmopolitan leisure culture of international theatre and film within the metropolis, enjoying nights of European opera at the ‘Royal Albert Hall’ listening to

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<sup>710</sup>Ibid., 2 January 1922.

Australian opera singer 'Nellie Melba' sing.<sup>711</sup> He also reported that he went to the night haunt of the 'Criterion Roof Top Garden' where American 'jazz' music was played.<sup>712</sup> Unlike the *Sketch*, the 'Londoner's Diary' of the *Evening Standard* did not really devote a great deal of column space in creating the sense of a cosmopolitan leisure and artistic culture in the museums, theatres and cabarets of London. Neither was there a huge amount of space occupied by the promotion of individual achievement in sport, science or other disciplines, especially about figures from outside Britain. The column was also certainly not a space where the social lives and beauty of Society or royalty were celebrated. As stated in chapter two, the *Standard's* gossip column was mainly concerned with British political affairs, reporting on some of the day-to-day affairs of government, assessing debates in the House of Commons, profiling and criticising MPs and other political figures in Britain, and discussing the behind-the-scenes workings of the civil service.<sup>713</sup> Where Europe or Empire was discussed, it was usually in the context of their relationship with British political affairs. For example, on 13 June 1922 the columnist discussed the intrigue surrounding the French Prime Minister's visit to Lloyd George, stating that it was to thank Britain for the help in rebuilding Verdun and not to discuss reparations. The columnist also presented the rumours surrounding 'sympathisers with the Irish movement' in Britain, who it was thought were stealing explosives from British mines.<sup>714</sup> On 2 August 1922, the columnist commented on the number of women delegates at a League of Nations meeting in Geneva

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<sup>711</sup> *Sketch*, 13 November 1922.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>714</sup> *Standard*, 13 June 1922.

and believed that it would be a good thing for Britain's status and influence in the League of Nations if more British women delegates attended these summits.<sup>715</sup>

In 1922, the *News of the World's* gossip column usually began with several paragraphs on the public engagements of the royal family and the social world of Society. However, like the *Mirror* and the *Evening Standard*, it included paragraphs on political figures, church figures, legal figures and British business men.<sup>716</sup> In this sense the content of these three gossip columns were the most related to traditional news values of politics, economics and the church. Also like the *Mirror* and the *Standard*, British gossip paragraphs were often related to recent news stories, for example, the recent treaty settlement in Ireland, accompanied by short profiles of the public figures involved.<sup>717</sup> Like all of the other five newspapers sampled in 1922, paragraphs on foreign affairs were mainly focused on Europe. These were usually of a political and/or social theme. On 4 June 1922, for example, the columnist stated that unemployment had decreased in France because of the development and work of 'employment exchanges'. On 13 August paragraphs 24-27 discussed the political and social legacy of the Russian Revolution, in the context of exiled Grand Duke Cyril Vladimorovitch recent labelling himself the 'Guardian of the Throne of the Tsars.'<sup>718</sup> The extreme tensions and political divides between the new and old regimes in Russia were made clear, as the columnist quoted derogatory comments about Vladimorovitch from a 'revolutionary paper'.<sup>719</sup> As in all of the other gossip columns of 1922, Empire was the least discussed topic, and in the case of the *News of the World*, these were often anecdotal or sensational stories based on myth and hearsay. If gossip in Britain and Europe related to

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<sup>715</sup> Ibid., 2 August 1922.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid. See analysis of *News of World* (1922) in Chapter One.

<sup>717</sup> *News of the World*, 22 January 1922.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid., 13 August 1922.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

recent political developments or current affairs stories then stories of Empire were Victorian. For example, on 4 June 1922, the columnist recounted a story told by a Mr Chauncey Depew, of 'a native' who had once claimed 'blood relation' with Queen Victoria because 'he had eaten Captain Cook'. In the next two paragraphs, the columnist regaled another story Lord Justice Banks had supposedly heard from a 'gold mining commissioner'. A 'native chief' had supposedly claimed to own a piece of land because he had 'eaten' the previous owner. This discussion of Empire, particularly towards those who were not white and of a western origin, was racist, derogatory and primitive.

Out of the total number of sampled columns for 1922, the *News of the World* had the most number of paragraphs about American subjects. This links with the work of historians like Laura Mayhall who have argued for the growth of an Anglo-American celebrity culture in popular print culture in the inter-war period, but my evidence also demonstrates that the *News of the World* gossip column, a Sunday paper with a mainly working-class readership, was a key place where this Anglo-American celebrity culture was most developed by 1922.<sup>720</sup> An interest in American film stars and their Hollywood lifestyles certainly became an increasingly important aspect of the paper in the 1920s: publicity shots of stars and film scenes and 'Film News' were now regular features.<sup>721</sup> Yet in the gossip column of 1922, there were different types of figures discussed. On 22 January, paragraphs 20-22 discussed the work of President Wilson at the 'Paris Peace Conference' after the war, and how his memoirs of this event were about to be published in the *New York Times*. Paragraphs ten and eleven discussed the lavish lifestyle of the Dodges, a Detroit millionaire and his wife, who had purchased a Cartier necklace of Empress Catherine II after the Russian Revolution.

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<sup>720</sup> Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales', *Cultural and Social History* (2007), pp. 529-543.

<sup>721</sup> *News of the World*, 13 December 1931.

Paragraph fourteen discussed the success of British authoress E.M. Dell in America, whose 'novels' were in 'high demand' by American filmmakers. The columnist wrote that Dell had sold the rights to each novel for '£5000 each'.<sup>722</sup> The *News of the World* made the cultural, economic and political connections between Britain, Europe and the United States perhaps more explicit than any other gossip column, and even more unusual in the gossip columns of 1922 and indeed in the gossip columns throughout the interwar period, was a sense of the USA's emerging influence and wealth compared to the old world political and economic power-brokers of Britain and Europe.

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What is striking about the newspaper gossip columns of 1922 is the variety of geographical contexts in which gossip was set. The *Mail* and *Express's* columns, with their mainly middle-class audience, shared a fairy-tale like quality. The narrative was simplistic: fashion, wealth, beauty and leisure amongst the British upper classes, mainly in the stately homes, country houses, and country and coast venues of the Society calendar such as the Epsom Derby or Cowes Regatta. As I have discussed in the context of news reporting on the Anglo-Irish war and Irish Independence, the gulf between the content of the political and economic news and the Society gossip column was striking. In the elitist 'Londoner's Diary' of the *Standard*, and the *Mirror* and *News of the World* mainly read by a lower middle-class and working class audience, the columnist usually looked outwards towards current affairs and news stories in Britain and Europe as a basis for those who were discussed in the column. There was a sense of the impact of war on economic policy and living standards in the countries of Europe like France, Spain and Serbia, that political alliances, particularly between France

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

and Britain were important, that the League of Nations were creating new bonds between Britain and western Europe. In these papers there was also a tendency to include other elites of a number of nationalities aside from those within Society and the royal family. These included not only actors and sports figures, but academics, lawyers, judges, businessmen and scientists from Europe, the United States and, to a more limited extent, the Empire. In general terms, if the social strata of the gossip column were varied, so was the geographical context of the gossip column: the more inclusive and open it became to discussing the work of politicians, professionals, experts and other talented individuals, the more it was likely to look outwards beyond Mayfair and England's borders. Conversely, relative to discussion of Europe and the USA, paragraphs related to Empire were minimised. Empire seemed only to be important when it was close to home, especially in the context of Britain's neighbouring country, Ireland. Instead, I have shown that there was evidence of new political, social and cultural networks developing between a white and western culture of Britons, Europeans and to a certain extent North Americans; that through discussion of British politicians but also American and French politicians, British artists and French novelists, the gossip column reader's world was a different shape to what other historians of popular culture in interwar Britain have argued. This was particularly the case in papers labelled 'tabloid', 'pictorial' and 'working-class' like the lower middle-class and working-class *Mirror* and the mainly working-class *News of the World*. There was evidence of a new, elite, cultural and political international alliance developing in the gossip column that did not include Empire, which readers, especially through the welcoming and friendly language of columnists like the 'Rambler' of the *Mirror*, were invited.

**1930:**

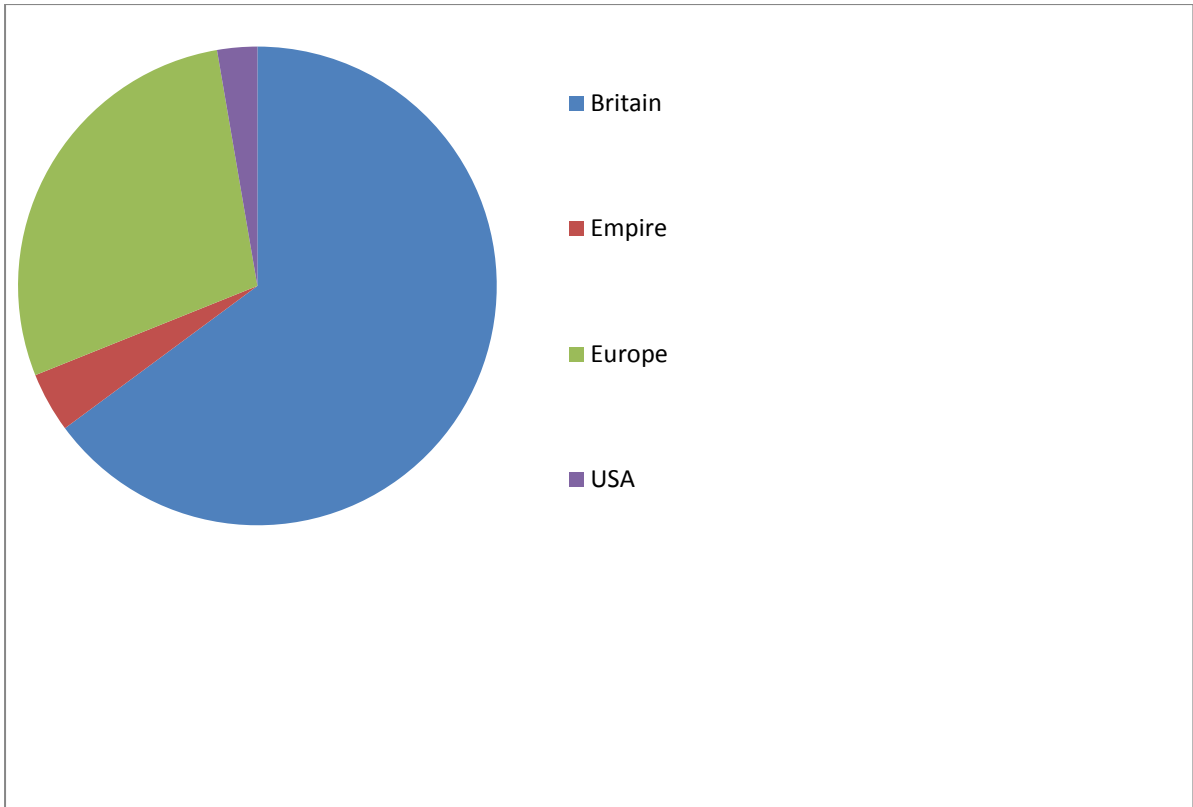


Fig 55. Geographical spread of subjects, *Express*, 1930.<sup>723</sup>

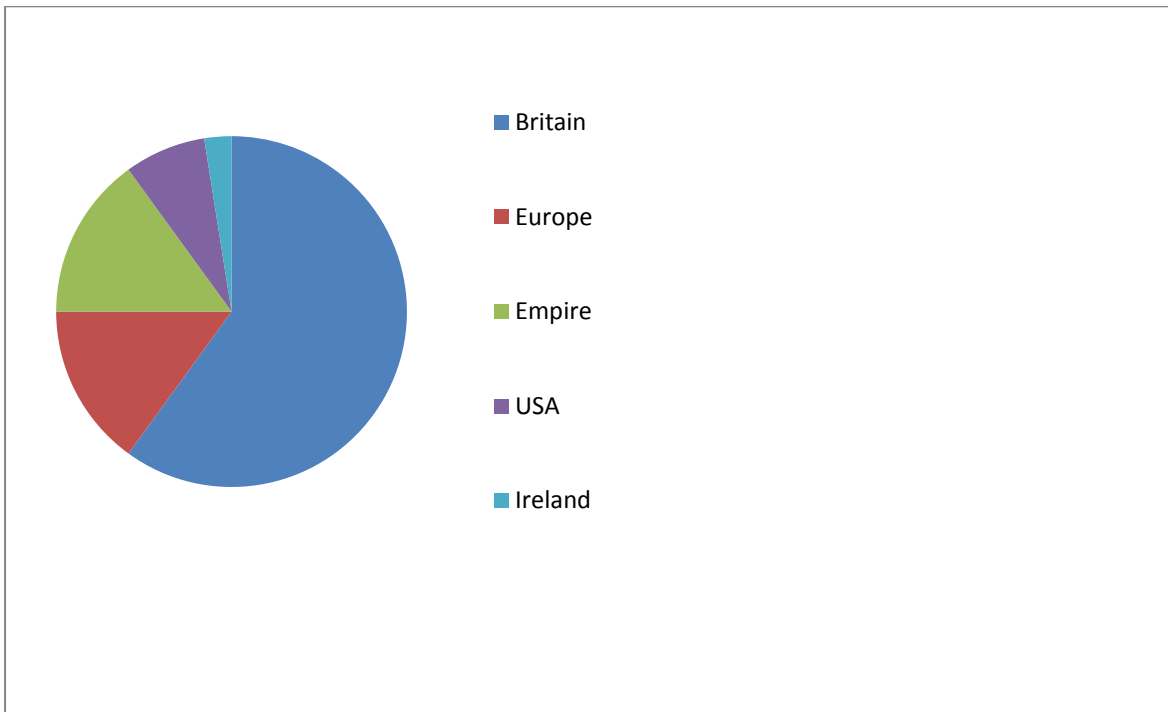


Fig 56. Geographical spread of subjects, *Mail* (1930).<sup>724</sup>

<sup>723</sup> *Express*, 28 January 1930, 30 June 1930, 15 August 1930, 8 November 1930.

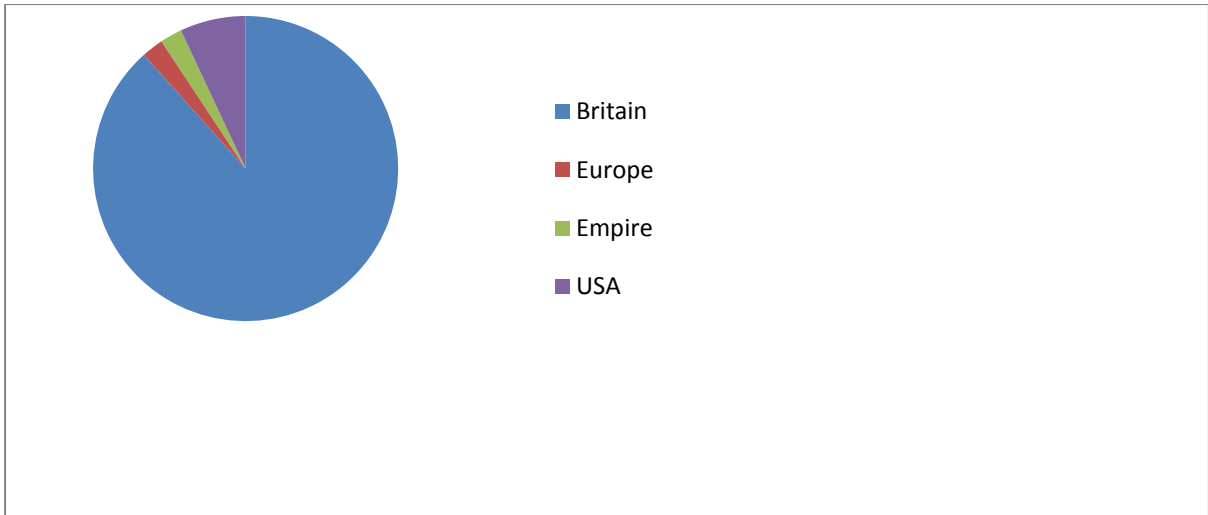


Fig 57. Geographical spread of subjects, *Mirror* (1930).<sup>725</sup>

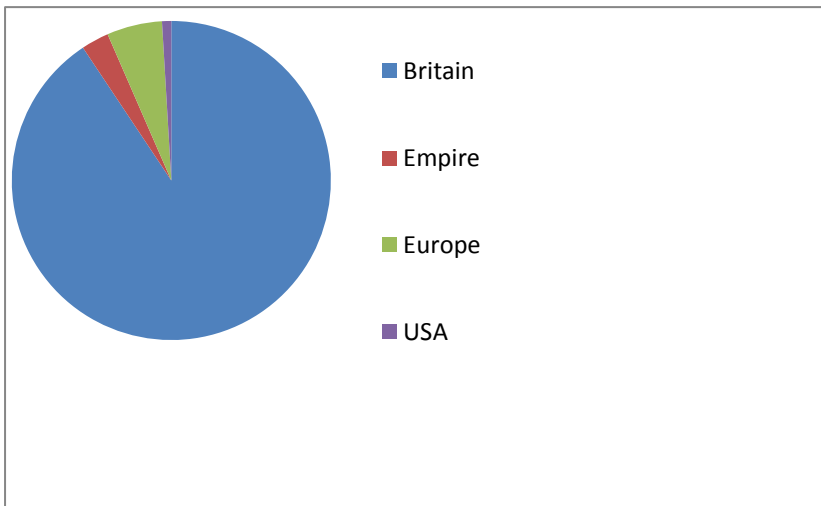


Fig 58. Geographical spread of the subjects, *Sketch* (1930).<sup>726</sup>

<sup>724</sup> *Mail*, 9 January 1930, 5 June 1930, 4 August 1930, 28 November 1930.

<sup>725</sup> *Mirror*, 24 January 1930, 20 June 1930, 25 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

<sup>726</sup> *Sketch*, 15 January 1930, 10 June 1930, 2 August 1930, 17 November 1930.

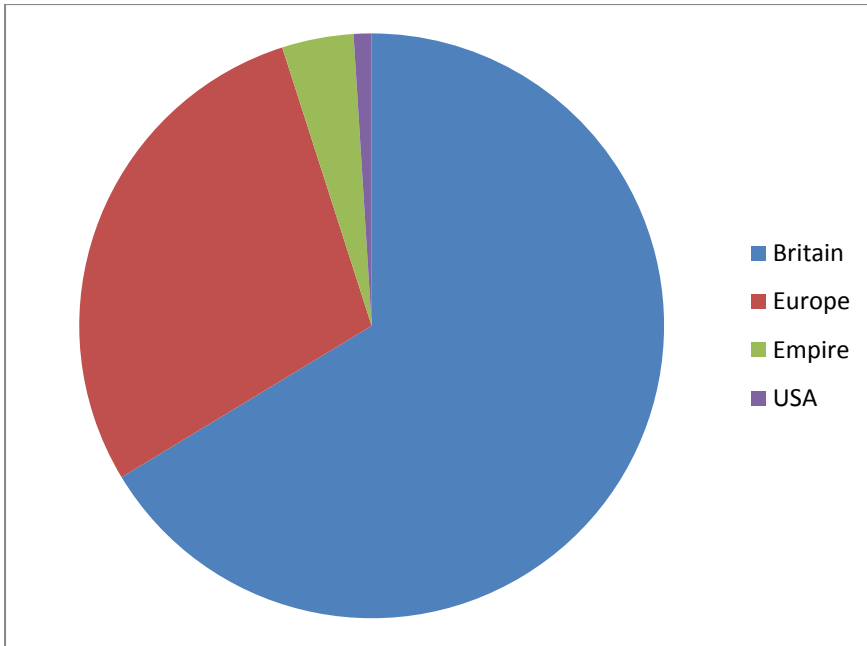


Fig 59. Geographical spread of subjects, *Standard* (1930).<sup>727</sup>

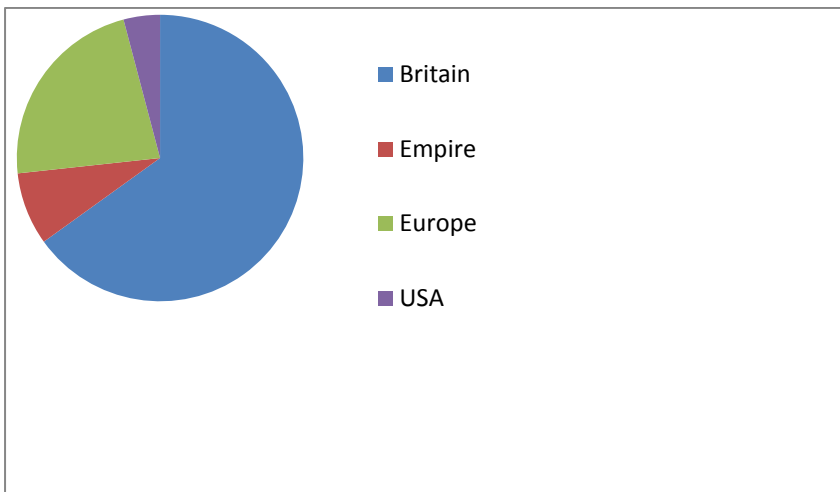


Fig 60. Geographical spread of subjects, *News of the World*, 1930.<sup>728</sup>

<sup>727</sup> *Evening Standard*, 8 January 1930, 13 June 1930, 18 August 1930, 3 November 1930.

<sup>728</sup> *News of the World*, 5 January 1930, 1 June 1930, 10 August 1930, 2 November 1930.

Where there were no examples in the sampled columns of 1922 of content related to Europe in the *Daily Express*, by 1930 28 % of the sample had some European context. After Britain (65%), subjects from the continent were the most discussed subject, followed by Empire (4%) and the United States (3%). As chapter three has discussed, the column, now entitled 'The Talk of London', had begun to be signed by 'The Dragoman' in the mid-1920s. Like 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch*, the columnist described his own social life in London in the elite nightspots of West End restaurants and cabarets and most of the column's content described 'the Dragoman's' encounters in these fashionable and expensive places with British Society figures.<sup>729</sup> As already explained, the title 'Dragoman' had foreign connotations, yet here, the 'Dragoman' was working only in London. It would seem that for many readers of the *Express* gossip column, London had become an enticing, exotic and glamorous location, mainly associated with a booming and varied nightlife and entertainment culture. Popular interest in the nightlife of London was also suggested by the many guides to London that appeared throughout the 1920s.<sup>730</sup> Like 'Mr Gossip's' discussion of London in the *Sketch*, London's cosmopolitanism was discussed mainly in terms of its nightlife. On 8 November 1930 the columnist discussed the difficulties of servants having to announce all of the 'foreign' names at parties.<sup>731</sup> On 30 June 1930 the Dragoman described King Alfonso of Spain's presentation of the winner's cup at the Greyhound Derby in White City.<sup>732</sup>

The 'Dragoman's' column normally only discussed the wealthy, regardless of the global context. This discussion was also usually connected to leisure culture. On 8 November

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<sup>729</sup> Chapter One. Chapter Two.

<sup>730</sup> Morton, *The Nights* (1926).

<sup>731</sup> *Express*, 8 November 1930.

<sup>732</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1930.

1930, the columnist described the party and guests at the 'outstandingly resplendent' Maharajah of Alwar's party at India House in London. In what now seems a deeply patronising and racist tone, the columnist wrote of the 'piquant contrast' between 'dark-skinned Indian ladies ... a few exquisite Burmese girls ... and the fresh English fairness of Lady Buxton and Miss Diane Chamberlain.'<sup>733</sup> Most of the European content of the column was focused on Paris and the Riviera, and these places seemed equally alluring to the wealthy and fashionable pleasure seeker. For example, on 15 August 1930, the final third of the fifteen paragraphs focused on France. The first two paragraphs described the wealth, personality and skills of 'Olivier' the head waiter at the Paris Ritz, and the last three paragraphs discussed recent gossip of the goings on at Monte Carlo Casino.<sup>734</sup> The Dragoman also described the popularity of the Paris Grand Prix amongst the British upper-class, listing the guests including, 'Lord Derby...Lord Wimborne, Lord Ellesmere...and Mr Selfridge'.<sup>735</sup> Like the columnists of 1922, Dragoman relied on a network of correspondents to send him news from Empire and Europe. The Dragoman revealed the collaborative nature of his work to the readers, and also a global network of paid journalists that worked on the gossip column, when he presented information on the social lives of titled British colonialists in Nairobi from his 'African correspondent'.<sup>736</sup> Dragoman wrote that he learnt the stories of Monte Carlo and the Riviera from 'a friend', insinuating his own, more personal and familiar links with the Riviera, and consequently his own place amongst a fashionable and cosmopolitan European leisure culture.

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<sup>733</sup>Ibid., 8 November 1930.

<sup>734</sup>Ibid., 15 August 1930.

<sup>735</sup>Ibid., 30 June 1930.

<sup>736</sup>Ibid., 28 January 1930.

By 1930, the *Daily Mail's* gossip column appeared to be looking increasingly outwards beyond British shores for its content. In 1922, the world outside Britain occupied 19% of the column's content. In 1930 this had doubled to 41%. This was clearly an important change in the gossip column's content and as I will explain, this had a great deal to do with changes in the public persona of the gossip columnist. By the mid-1920s gossip had been separated into two features: 'Court and Society' remained the site where the public life of the British royal family was discussed, announcements were made of births, deaths and marriages amongst the titled, and formal events in Society such as a Society wedding continued to be appraised for their ceremony, fashions and the gifts that were given. The column's tone remained sedate and traditional. The new feature 'People and their Doings', by contrast, had a more youthful and sharper tone. Like the *Express* and the *Sketch* there was a common culture of wealth and success amongst its subjects, yet unlike 'Mr Gossip' and 'Dragoman', 'Onlooker' of the *Mail* did not relate his own social life to the subjects he discussed. The columnist did not talk about his private life or leisure time and seemed less ingratiated in Society life; his narrative was not bound by his travels and own experiences around the night haunts of London. As a result, there was no need to explain where his information from Europe and Empire came from, as the working life or background of the columnist was never revealed to the reader. In the absence of the columnist's personal narrative of his working and social life, there was less of a logic to the way subjects were presented or an explanation of how they were all connected; paragraphs on Society, Imperial and European figures were mixed together in a common culture which celebrated individual success and expert skills. For example, on 5 June 1930, 'Onlooker' described the recent work of the famous French chef 'Mr Escoffier' at an event in Zurich. He also stated that 'young Canadian violinist Miss Audrey Cooke' was to play in a London concert venue

that night.<sup>737</sup> On 9 January, the columnist wrote that Australian cricketer Don Bradman had just gained a 'record cricket score', and that Alexander Moissi, a German actor, was about to take to the London stage.<sup>738</sup> On 4 August 1930, 'Onlooker' announced that there was 'a race in the cricket world between 'Bradman and Duleepsinhji to get the highest aggregate of the season'.<sup>739</sup> The discussion of figures ranging from imperial sporting stars to German actors suggested the varied nature of interwar celebrity.

Compared to 1922, the *Mirror* had reduced its discussion of figures, places and events from outside Britain by 1930. As explained in chapter two, the *Mirror's* column had increasingly become a space for jokes and anecdotes, particularly surrounding consumer culture, leisure and Society within Britain. For example, on 20 June paragraph four noted that the columnist had seen a dog in a pair of goggles 'whilst motoring' with his owner. In paragraph ten 'Rambler' quipped that Society women only knew which babies were theirs due to 'recognising the wet nurse'.<sup>740</sup> The comedic aspect made a sharp contrast with the more sombre-toned paragraphs on political developments, the church and the army within Britain.<sup>741</sup> For example, on 3 November 1930 'Rambler' opened his gossip column with a paragraph stating that the 'Conservatives were pleased with the results of the municipal elections'. However, Onlooker believed that these results would not necessarily correspond to the outcome in the future 'Parliamentary elections'.<sup>742</sup> Rambler's new guise as a political forecaster, and his increased fascination with current affairs in Britain could be interpreted as the gossip column's response to deteriorating political and economic affairs in Britain at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s, a result of the Wall Street Crash, the difficulties the

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<sup>737</sup> *Mail*, 5 June 1930.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 January 1930.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August 1930.

<sup>740</sup> *Mirror*, 20 June 1930.

<sup>741</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 November 1930.

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid.*

Labour government were facing in their economic policy, and a rise in unemployment levels. The gossip column's contradictory and confusing tone, which seemed to nervously shift from light-heartedness to sobriety, reflected this sense of crisis and instability. Rambler's satirical comments on both Society and the latest developments of consumer culture suggested that the content of the column were changing at this time, discussion of social life and leisure was dependent on economic and political stability. Within this new column there was no space to discuss the outside world.

In 1922, 'Mr Gossip's' narrative had been shaped by a preoccupation with his own social life and the Society and celebrity figures he met around London. The pace and variety of nightlife and leisure culture was emphasised, as was his wholehearted participation in this metropolitan lifestyle. As a result, Mr Gossip, had no time to reflect on broader issues affecting the country or foreign political affairs; this was not part of his persona. In 1930, Mr Gossip's leisured lifestyle and participation at both Society private events and in the theatre, night club, restaurant and cabaret scene of the West End, seemed gloriously unaffected by the national and international economic depression. On 15 January 1930, 'Mr Gossip' wrote of the previous evening's social activities, describing how he had 'supped and dined' with a collection of titled figures and 'all conversation' had been on the effects of the recent 'gale'. Mr Gossip described how he had commiserated with 'Lord Pembroke' who had lost a 'Californian tree' on his country estate.<sup>743</sup> One aspect of Mr Gossip's persona, was his fascination for interior design and the aesthetics of furniture, and he was always eager to describe the outcome of recent renovation projects in Society's homes. On 15 January 1930 he detailed the redecoration of the Duke and Duchess of York's home in Piccadilly and on 10 June 1930 described the result of the recent renovation project at

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<sup>743</sup> *Sketch*, 15 January 1930.

Princess Mary's country home. In the sampled columns of 1930 his interests abroad were focused on fashion and innovation in interior design.<sup>744</sup> On 2 August, he wrote of Sir Edwin Lutyens's current project designing a throne for a palace in New Delhi. Paragraph four provided an account of Mr Gossip's conversation with American furniture dealer 'Mr Lisman' about the latest fashions in interior design in the United States.<sup>745</sup> In the confined social world of Mr Gossip, Britain and the world beyond its shores was suffering no ill effects of economic depression or political crisis.

If by 1930 the *Mirror's* geographical remit was becoming increasingly focused on life in Britain, comments on Europe increased in the *Evening Standard* by 1930. As I will explain, the increasingly international outlook of the column had much to do with the political situation in Europe after the Wall Street Crash of 1929. In 1922, content related to Europe had been 14% and by 1930 this had doubled to 29%. As in 1922, the 'Londoner' was still primarily interested in national government, and the column's expanding, international focus suggested that Europe was becoming increasingly important in the political and economic climate. Whilst the political and economic affairs of France and Germany in particular were of interest to the Londoner, tones of suspicion and tension seemed to exude in his description on these two countries. This worked on two levels: political and cultural. In the political context, the columnist reported on the government's recent work at the League of Nations, writing that Britain had 'complained to Geneva' about 'Germany dumping cheap wheat' on the British economy.<sup>746</sup> Later in the column, the Londoner continued to comment on the economic and political crisis in Germany, writing that 'Dr Schacht, the President of the Reichsbank refused to attend the German delegation at the

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid., 15 January 1930, 10 June 1930.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 2 August 1930.

<sup>746</sup> *Standard*, 8 January 1930.

Hague' and in the next paragraph wrote that, 'there have been riots in Berlin and fighting between three groups, the Republicans, Communists and Nationalists'.<sup>747</sup> As chapter two explains, the Londoner's persona had developed into a cultural, as well as a political critic by 1930, and an underlying uneasiness and uncertainty with Germany's current economic and political situation might be seen in his praise for the recent biography 'of Dr Rosen, the one time German Minister for Foreign Affairs'.<sup>748</sup> The columnist's discussions of France also showed the increased connections and communications with that country and also increased interest in their political, economic and cultural life, but alongside this was a sense of British resentment and distrust. On 18 August, the columnist wrote that he did not know how resorts such as Le Touquet would continue with the number of 'rich' visitors running so low. On 3 November, he discussed his recent trip to Paris, writing that he found it 'particularly dreary'. Unlike the columns in the *Mirror* and *Express* from the 1920s, Paris and the French coast were not celebrated for their glamorous cosmopolitan culture. The Londoner's comments on France were also notable in that they provide evidence of the gossip columnist's travels and work outside Britain in 1930.

Comparing 1922 and 1930, the *News of the World* showed the most continuity in the column space provided to different regions of the world. In 1922 and 1930, 65% of the column was of a British context. Topics related to Empire had taken 6% of column space in 1922 and were now 8%, Europe 15% in 1922 and 23% in 1930, topics about the United States showing the greatest decrease from 12% in 1922 to 4% in 1930. A strong tradition of continuity in editorial policy can help to explain this striking change. As argued in chapter two, the column continued to offer a voice critical of the government in relation to political

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid., 8 January 1930.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid., 13 June 1930.

and economic policy. It also continued to begin with a discussion of the whereabouts and work of the Royal Family in its opening paragraphs. Whereas other newspapers had personalised their columns by introducing columnists who shaped the content of the column through a narrative of their own social lives in the column, this never happened in the *News of the World*. Through the anonymity of the author and the short two to five line paragraphs, the column's style remained that of a miscellany, bringing together disparate and diverse segments of news. The geographical or racial boundaries of this news had also still not changed. As in all of the other national newspaper gossip columns studied in this period, being white and of western origins were important qualifying categories for an individual's entry into the gossip column. Like the Londoner of the *Standard*, who had also been critical of European countries in 1930 and was protective of British interests, on 5 January 1930 the *News of the World's* anonymous columnist was critical of Belgium, stating that housing tiles being produced for Britain in Belgium factories was morally wrong, as there were 'millions unemployed' in Britain who could do this work.<sup>749</sup> Yet individual paragraphs in the same column could celebrate the lifestyles and fashionable consumer culture of wealthy individuals in Belgium. The columnist described European women's luxury fashion culture when he wrote that 'Princess Marie Jose of Belgium has had her wedding dress made in Italy ... The white velvet of the dress was specially woven in Como and that, 'All ladies attending the wedding will wear dresses with high necks and long skirts in accordance with Vatican guidelines'.<sup>750</sup> It seemed that within the gossip column of the *News of the World* there were conflicting and contradictory themes present: comments on the deteriorating economic situation in Britain and the need for Britain to stand its ground

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<sup>749</sup> *News of the World*, 5 January 1930.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1930.

in Europe sat next to paragraphs fascinated with the wealthy and exotic figures of the European social elite.

A similar attitude of romance and sensationalism was attached to discussions of wealthy individuals' lifestyles in Empire. The columnist provided a sense of a strong social network between British Society figures and those who were permanently based in parts of Empire, perhaps because as in the 'Happy Valley Set' of Kenya and Uganda, there were strong family networks between Britain and Empire.<sup>751</sup> On 5 January 1930 the columnist wrote, 'when the Prince of Wales's hunts in the Serengeti Plains he will use Baron von Blixen's farm in Tanganyika Territory as his headquarters.'<sup>752</sup> Describing the lifestyle of the Prince of Wales hunting companion 'Captain the Hon. Denys Finch-Hatton', the columnist wrote: 'the Captain is very brave having been in Africa since leaving Brasenose.' Emphasising the sense of a racial hierarchy in the newspaper gossip column, the columnist writes that the Captain, 'is brought back to Europe occasionally due to his love of advanced music, but England is not enough for him any longer'.<sup>753</sup> Whereas British Society and the cosmopolitan delights of London were more than enough to keep 'Mr Gossip' of the *Sketch* occupied in 1930, here the *News of the World* hinted at the restlessness of figures within Britain's social elite, that it was only travelling or living away from Britain that made them truly content. Whereas in most columns of the 1920s, Society's presence in Britain and loyalty to the traditional social calendar had been a marker of the stability of the British social order, was this evidence of their absence, and desire to retreat from Britain, a sign that the power structures of British society were changing at this time, that Society were no longer as central to notions of British national identity as they had been immediately after the war? The move of Society

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<sup>751</sup> E. Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>752</sup> *News of the World*, 5 January 1930.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*

figures to places in Empire had an important economic context, which helps to answer these questions about changing perceptions of the upper-class in interwar Britain. As discussed in chapter two, the changing social and financial position of many of the aristocracy and upper-class may have prompted the Captain's move to Kenya.<sup>754</sup> There were also suggestions that the aristocracy increasingly appreciated the lifestyle offered to them in other parts of the world outside Britain and Empire. On 5 June 1930 the columnist also discussed Society's enjoyment of trips to the United States, stating that Lord Derby had described his recent travels there as 'wonderful'.<sup>755</sup> Mayhall has suggested the celebrity status of the Prince of Wales in the United States in the interwar period, and Leonard Mosley, Viscount Castlerosse's biographer described a public fascination with Castlerosse when he visited New York in the 1930s.<sup>756</sup>

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By 1930, the Society gossip columns of the *Mail* and *Express* had become more open to Europe. With its new, seemingly demotic policy of diversifying its subjects to include 'People' from outside British Society and royalty, the *Mail* sometimes included paragraphs on a diverse set of talented individuals from Europe including chefs, musicians and authors. Individuals from Britain, Europe and Empire were increasingly celebrated for their talents, for example as an artist or a dancer, and skills as a novelist or scientist; this cultivated a sense of a cultural world rather than a social world. The difference was that this new cultural world relied less on discussion of a celebrity's birth and status, and moved the geography of the column increasingly outwards from the private Society homes of Mayfair

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<sup>754</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>755</sup> *News of the World*, 5 June 1930.

<sup>756</sup> Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales', *Cultural and Social History* (2007), pp. 529-543. Mosley, Castlerosse (1956).

to the sports field or hotels of Europe for example. As in the *Sketch*, the new author of the *Express* remained primarily interested in the social world of British Society, and this sometimes meant following their activities in Paris or on the Riviera, or charting their travels to parts of Empire or the United States. If wealthy individuals, entertainers or musicians from outside Britain entered London Society, including theatres and cabaret, then this might also be recorded in these gossip columns. As in 1922, Empire and the United States were not as newsworthy topics as Europe was to the Londoner of the *Evening Standard*. In 1930, there was a sense of the important role of France and Germany in influencing Britain's political and economic stability, and an increased interest in discussing 'gossip' from these countries, but such news was often bound up with resentment and distrust of their governments and aspects of their culture. In a period of national economic and political decline, the *Mirror* was the only newspaper to retreat from including topics of a European context. The evidence from 1930 challenges Light's argument that popular culture became increasingly insular and limited by national boundaries in interwar Britain, that national identity was becoming increasingly fortified by a recurring image of the sensible lifestyle of the middle-class housewife and her loyalty and protection towards her family. At this time of national crisis, readers of the *News of World's* gossip column read about socially and geographically diverse topics including the details of a Belgian princess's wedding dress. They read that Society figures were moving outwards from Britain to Empire and the United States because 'England was not enough'. In the same column the gossip columnist discussed the King and Queen's interest in Lord and Lady FitzAlan-Howard's subterranean garden at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park.<sup>757</sup> Just as the paragraphs of the *News of the World's* gossip column were geographically diverse, so the themes explored by gossip

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<sup>757</sup> *News of the World*, 1 June 1930.

columns of the national popular press were complex and multi-layered and cannot fit with historical ideas of a nationalistic and reactionary popular culture in interwar Britain.

1938:

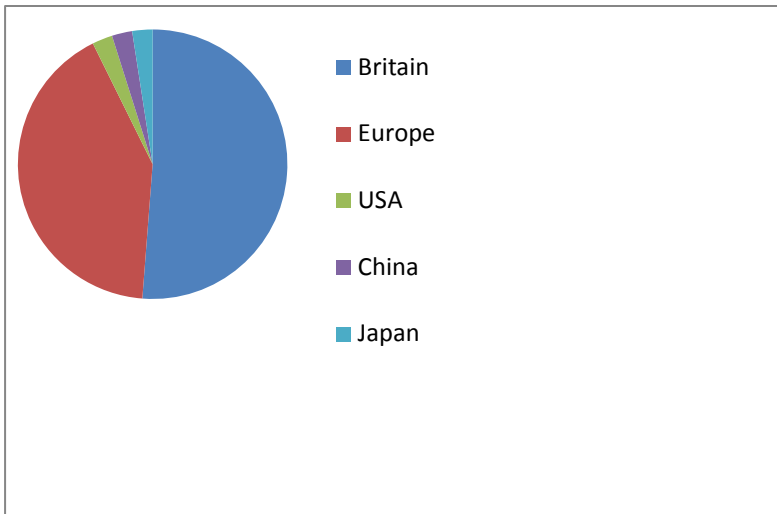


Fig 61. Geographical spread of subjects, *Express* (1938).<sup>758</sup>

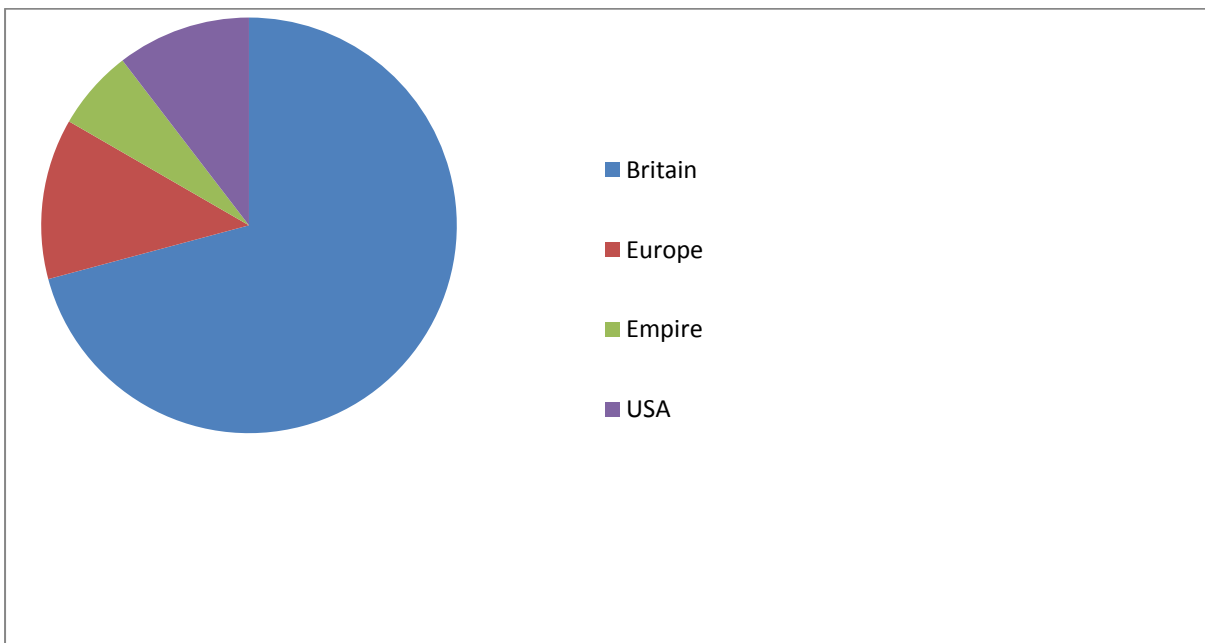


Fig 62. Geographical spread of subjects, *Mail* (1938).<sup>759</sup>

<sup>758</sup> *Daily Express*, 21 January 1938, 24 June 1938, 26 August 1938, 9 November 1938.

<sup>759</sup> *Daily Mail*, 11 January 1938, 21 June 1938, 3 August 1938, 9 November 1938.

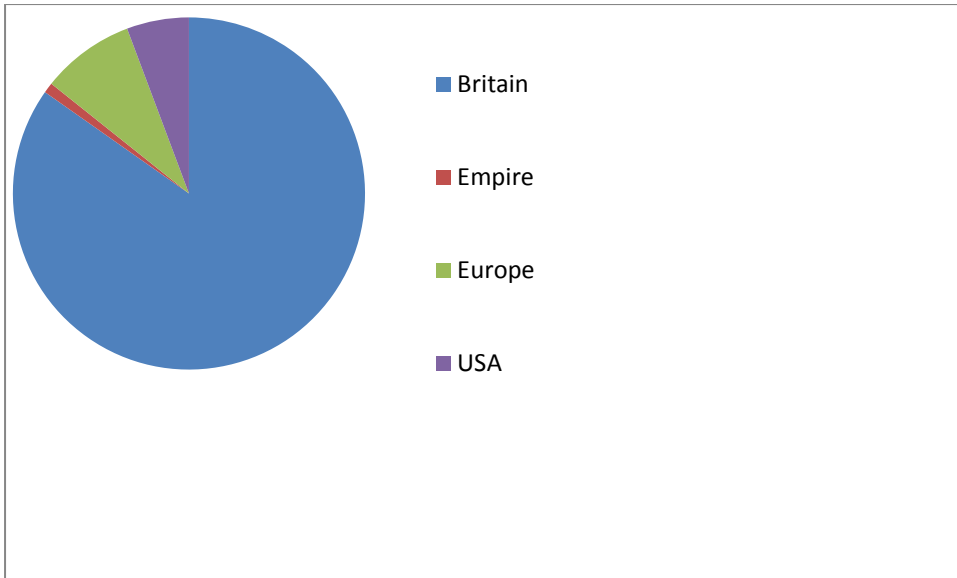


Fig 63. Geographical spread of subjects, *Sketch* (1938).<sup>760</sup>

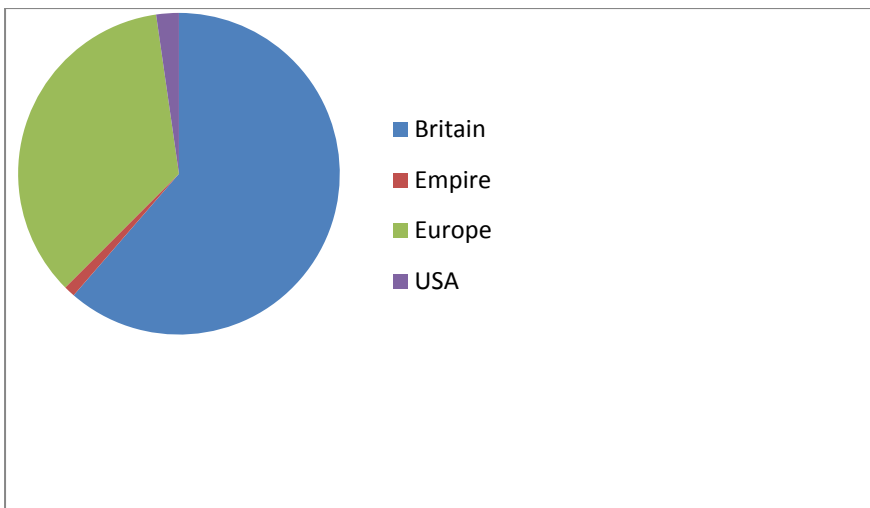


Fig 64. Geographical spread of subjects, *Standard* (1938)<sup>761</sup>

<sup>760</sup> *Daily Sketch*, 4 January 1938, 13 June 1938, 6 August 1938, 5 November 1938.

<sup>761</sup> *Evening Standard*, 3 January 1938, 22 June 1938, 15 August 1938, 18 November 1938.

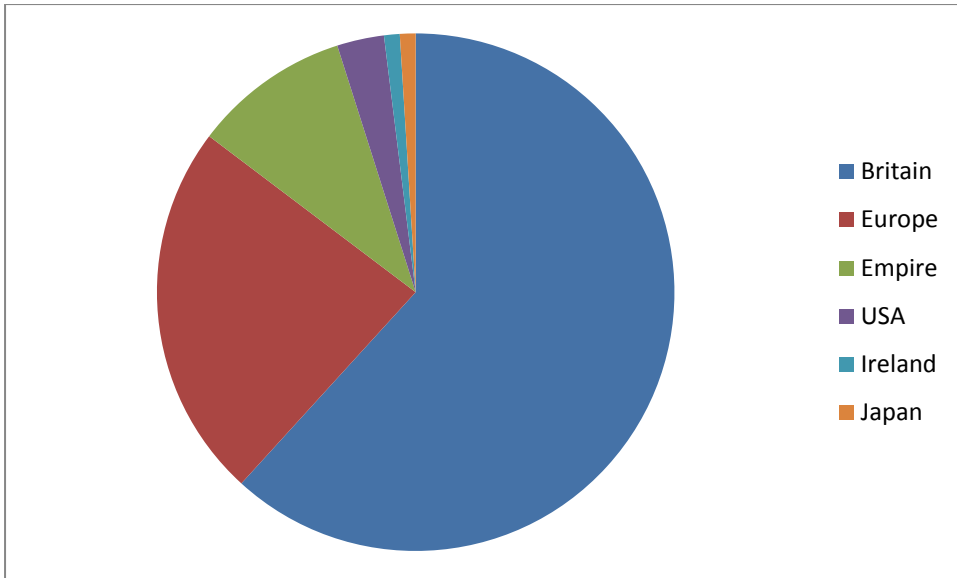


Fig 65. Geographical spread of subjects, *News of the World* (1938).<sup>762</sup>

<sup>762</sup> *News of the World*, 9 January 1938, 19 June 1938, 7 August 1938, 20 November 1938.

As chapters one, two, three and six have discussed, the early 1930s marked an important change in the tone and persona of many gossip columnists. Columnists known for their support of left-wing political causes like Tom Driberg and Beverley Nichols were employed to write new gossip columns in the conservative *Express* and 'liberal' *Sunday Chronicle*. I have shown that Driberg discussed a diverse selection of figures including union leaders and artists; Nichols turned his back on the cabarets and nightclubs that Society attended in London.<sup>763</sup> Described as a 'champagne socialist', almost half of the content of the sampled Driberg columns of 1938 discussed countries outside Britain. 41% of the columns' content was focused on Europe, reflective of the building political tensions between Germany and its neighbours and the question of what role Britain would play in any future conflict. For example, on 26 August 1938, Driberg, who wrote under the pseudonym 'William Hickey', sent his column from Prague.<sup>764</sup> He reported not only on the political situation in the city, but also continued to work in a traditional manner of the gossip columnist, describing what he saw and who he encountered in the city, and his sightseeing trips in museums, galleries and famous buildings. Hickey visited the Wallenstein palace, and interviewed some exhibitors about their art, asking if they were insured against 'war risk'.<sup>765</sup> He went on to describe forthcoming exhibitions at the palace over the next two years. Here, Hickey juxtaposed high culture and war: his comment on the 'relaxed tension' evident in Prague encapsulated the content and tone of his own column. Hickey combined his gallery visits with a new aspect of his role: interviewing two prominent political figures in Prague, the mayor and a leader of the regional Nazi party. However, his usual style of providing a caricature-like physical description of his normally British subjects was also applied to those

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<sup>763</sup> See Chapters one and Three.

<sup>764</sup> *News of the World*, 26 August 1938.

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 August 1938.

in Prague.<sup>766</sup> Hickey's response to the new international political situation was to apply his old techniques of gossip writing to figures and places within Europe. In one sense this was an inclusive approach, but the continuation of Hickey's satirical style and maintenance of his public persona as a cultured and leisured 'man of the world' could be seen to have not fully acknowledged or engaged with the changing international situation.

If the *Express's* gossip column of 1938 showed a somewhat mixed and ambiguous reaction to the international political situation in Europe, then in Charles Graves's column in the *Mail*, it was almost completely ignored. In 1930, 40% of the content column had looked outwards beyond Britain: by 1938 this had reduced to 29%. In 1930 15% of the column was focused on topics of a European context, by 1938 this was 13%. Just like the *Sketch* and *Express* had done much earlier, the *Mail's* column was now written by a Society figure who discussed his life amongst the metropolitan social elite.<sup>767</sup> This seemingly personal account of the wealthy Graves's daily life left little room for discussion of politics or the threat of war. Graves's approach should be viewed in the context of the *Mail's* editorial policy of appeasement in the late 1930s.<sup>768</sup> The overwhelming themes were of fashionable behaviour and consumer culture. For example, on 11 January 1938 Graves described the development of ski resorts for tourists in the Monte Carlo area, and the arrival in the principality of British tennis champion 'Mrs Satterthwaite' signalling the start of the tennis season.<sup>769</sup> The personality of the gossip columnist and his position in Society nearly blocked out any discussion of the world outside London, let alone Britain.

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<sup>766</sup> Ibid., 26 August 1938.

<sup>767</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>768</sup> Boyce, 'Harmsworth', *ODNB*, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2008.

[<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/33718>, last accessed 12 Jan 2009].

<sup>769</sup> *Mail*, 11 January 1938.

As had been the case throughout the interwar period, the *Sketch's* gossip column continued to focus on a British culture of leisure and entertainment. Now signed by Noel Thompson rather than 'Mr Gossip', the column combined discussion of Society lifestyle, often with comments and reviews of the latest Hollywood and British films and the latest theatre productions in the West End.<sup>770</sup> Just like Graves of the *Mail*, Thompson did not discuss the political situation in Europe. Instead he discussed British tourism there, excitedly describing the construction of a new airport in St Moritz, ideal for those who wished to take advantage of the developing ski resort.<sup>771</sup>

The effects of the European political 'crisis' and its impact on both British politics and culture were played out in the *Londoner's* gossip column of 1938.<sup>772</sup> 'The *Londoner's* Diary' had always commented upon developments and tensions within government and on 18 November reported that, 'Mr Vernon Bartlett enters Parliament as the opponent of appeasement'.<sup>773</sup> Four months before the *Londoner* profiled the Duke of Windsor: 'Mr Davidson, Clerk to the House of Lords, is to serve the Duke of Windsor as Equerry during the absence on holiday of Mr Dudley Forwood... The Duke of Windsor looks many years younger' than his age, 'he is an admirer of Neville Chamberlain, especially his foreign policy.'<sup>774</sup> Such comments suggested the British establishment's support for appeasement at this time, and also inferred the *Standard's* support for this policy. Commenting on the state of the British press and their response to Europe, the *Londoner* wrote 'there is a sharp division between newspapers as to whether there will be war or not.'<sup>775</sup> Political tensions with Germany appeared on 15 August in the report that 'there have been no official

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<sup>770</sup> See Introduction and Chapter One.

<sup>771</sup> *Sketch*, 4 January 1938.

<sup>772</sup> *Standard*, 18 November 1938.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 August 1938.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*

invitations to anyone in London to the Nazi congress in Nuremberg'.<sup>776</sup> There was also a new cultural theme within *Londoner's* column and his treatment of Europe. The columnist seemed to seek alliances with individuals from across Europe, by praising their intellectual abilities, support of freedom of speech and opposition to fascism. On 18 November 1938 he discussed the forthcoming trial of a French youth who had assassinated a Nazi official, writing that the employment of 'France's best orator ... M Moro-Gaffieri as counsel' would cause 'trouble' with Germany. The columnist went on to make connections between British and Italian intellectuals, writing 'Dr Jane Walker, who has died, was notable for her collection of pictures, including those of Gardini. Gardini was imprisoned by the Fascist authorities in Lake Como when he refused to take the oath ... Gardini wrote a novel during his incarceration. He has settled in London and has offered his services to the British government during the recent crisis'. The *Londoner* continued to demonstrate the academic and intellectual connections between Britain and Europe, and this case the shared appreciation of the law, when he stated that, 'Herr H J von Moltke, the heir to the historic German family, was admitted to the English bar'.<sup>777</sup> Europe was brought home to readers of the '*Londoner's Diary*' in both a political and cultural sense. The *Londoner* showed the commonalities, co-operation and communication across national borders, but it is interesting to note that this co-operation was mainly presented through international cultural networks rather than political networks. London was also presented as a safe haven for skilled and talented Europeans who opposed fascism.

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

<sup>777</sup> *Standard*, 18 November 1938.

Conflict and political change were common themes in the sampled gossip columns of the *News of the World* in 1938. On 9 January, the columnist described the ‘Japanese shells booming over Shanghai’; on 7 August he used two paragraphs to describe the political tensions between Germany and Czechoslovakia.<sup>778</sup> Later in the column there was a paragraph on the campaign in Switzerland for a new air force.<sup>779</sup> Yet in contrast to themes of danger and war were those of order and stability, particularly when the column discussed British Society at home and abroad. On the same day that the column discussed the rising potential for violence between Germany and Czechoslovakia, it announced that ‘Lord and Lady Runciman’ were staying at the luxurious ‘Hotel Alcron in Prague’ enjoying a holiday travelling in the region.<sup>780</sup> For the readers of the *News of the World’s* gossip column in 1938, the world was a complex and multi-layered place full of conflicting interests and lifestyles.

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In the national newspaper gossip columns of 1938, the freedom to travel abroad and enjoy leisure were important motifs of peace and stability which columnists drew attention to in order to find some kind of stability and security in a frightening world. Descriptions of the travels of Society figures remained most common, as they had been throughout the period. It seemed, as long as Society continued to have the ability to move across borders then Britain’s and Britons’ status was not compromised. Society’s avid participation in metropolitan forms of nightlife and entertainment was also still a very prominent symbol in the gossip column’s depictions of leisure and consumer culture: as long as Society continued

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid., 9 January 1938, 7 August 1938.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., 7 August 1938.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

to enjoy life, as long as they had the money and the venues to do this in, then Britain was as normal. Yet not all columns were about Society and leisure, and not all measured Britain's democracy, freedom and social order through the continuance of Society's social calendar. If the *Evening Standard* had been critical of the economic policy and governance of European countries during the economic crisis of the early 1930s, then the political threat of fascism was met with the suggestion of a highbrow cultural network that united Britain and the countries of Europe. Rather than look towards Empire to define the country's international status, the Londoner suggested the existence of this European network informed by friendships and working relationships and shared professional pursuits. This relationship existed between respectable figures in Britain and the continent including lawyers and political advisors, and through the evidence of his intimate knowledge of these individuals 'the Londoner' was himself part of this network.

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**Fig 66. *Evening Standard*, 24 June 1920.**

### **3) Gender, Cosmopolitanism and the Gossip Column.**

The transnational reach of the gossip column was always shaped by ideas of gender. The next section considers how representations of gender shaped the transnational networks of the gossip column by examining the changes in the women's gossip column of the *Evening Standard*. As I have shown, throughout the interwar period, 'The Londoner's Diary' of the *Standard* was a column chiefly focused on public life in its most traditional sense; the

government of the country. It was situated towards the front of the paper alongside the editorial.

'Woman's World and its Ways' was at the back of the paper, the traditional domain, as Adrian Bingham has shown, of the women's pages.<sup>781</sup> Whereas the 'Diary' was signed by the 'Londoner', the women's gossip column was signed by the mythical and fairytale-like sounding 'Corisande'. The name itself inferred a connection with France: Corisande was of old French origin, the romantic heroine in a number French medieval plays about French kings. However there was also an English literary connection: 'Lady Corisande' was the English heroine of Disraeli's novel *Lothair* (1870) who the main character returns home after his travels in Italy to marry.<sup>782</sup>

During the war a new column 'Notes from the Paris Front' had intermittently replaced 'Woman's World', written by, or so the reader is led to believe, by a young female correspondent who worked as a journalist in Paris.<sup>783</sup> The national and transnational focus of the column contrasted quite sharply between the First World War and the early 1920s. On the 1 July 1918 the columnist not only crossed national barriers because of her physical presence in Paris, but also traditional boundaries of gender, class and public space. Here a woman, who lived and worked independently, participated in the male-dominated world of journalism. Speed and novelty were characteristics of this cosmopolitanism. In this column, the author combined news of the war with descriptions of her movement around the cosmopolitan haunts of the city. The reader was taken on a journey around the streets and public leisure venues of Paris as 'she' whizzed in a taxi from the rose gardens at Bagatelle to

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<sup>781</sup> Bingham, *Gender* (2004). Wilkes, *Scandal* (2002), p. 160.

<sup>782</sup> 'Lothair', D. Birch (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>783</sup> *Standard*, 1 July 1918, 7 August 1918.

an American film gala.<sup>784</sup> Considering the dire reality of the wartime situation in Paris at this time, with German troops closing in on the city, it is clear that this mental picture held a deeper symbolism for the war effort. An unfettered female cosmopolitanism was utilised as a form of wartime propaganda for British audiences, particularly women. A stereotypical and established vision of Paris, its beauty, romance, pace and preoccupation with fashion was maintained for the morale of the women on the British home front. The columnist's ability to move around the city unhindered demonstrated that its infrastructure was still in place, and the value placed on leisurely pursuits signalled that things must not be that bad. The columnist's work in Paris also implied another woman's duty at home: to boost the British economy. 'Notes from the Paris Front' not only emphasised the wartime situation but also reminded readers that this was the frontline of fashion.<sup>785</sup> The column was surrounded by images of dress and consumerism, the accompanying daily account of 'To-Day's Fashion' discussed the latest trend in furs, millinery for holidays and the best stores in London to buy them from.<sup>786</sup> Underneath the column were adverts for the summer sales of London department stores including Harvey Nichols, Fenwick and Harrods, together with listings for theatre, opera, Variety, Picture Palaces and Art Exhibitions.<sup>787</sup> Keeping the home fires burning by helping to keep the economy stable was a mark of domestic stability during wartime. This image of the woman as an avid follower of fashion even in wartime, also suggested the continuation of newspaper business strategy to attract advertisers, an increasingly vital form of capital for the press in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>784</sup> Ibid., 1 July 1918.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid., 1 July 1918, 7 August 1918.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

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**Fig 67. Evening Standard, 1 July 1918.**

The national and transnational focus of the female columnist changed quite sharply between the First World War and the early 1920s. In the *Evening Standard*, peace brought the reinstatement of Corisande as full-time gossip columnist and the reinstatement of national parameters of sociability, which meant a return of focus towards the Society social calendar and Society-organised social events like charity balls and dinner parties. Corisande's musings on the war work of the 'Factory Girl' in January 1919 suggested that she was a woman in her middle-age, older than the young middle-class journalist that had been on the 'Paris Front'.<sup>788</sup> Instead of experiencing Paris, Europe or Empire first-hand, Corisande was rooted within British Society and the international war work of the youthful female correspondent of Paris became a peculiarity of wartime. Instead the columnist now drew upon a cosmopolitan correspondence network: Corisande had 'friends' all over Europe

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<sup>788</sup> *Standard*, 10 January 1919.

who informed her of fashionable Society. On 2 January she stated that her Irish friend 'Bridget writes me of the wonderful attendance at the Leopardstown Races on St Stephen's Day. It was a real "Victory" meeting, and "packed like sardines in a tin" is only a poor simile for the congested condition of the stands and paddock.'<sup>789</sup> This snippet of information from beyond Britain's shores was as much a political message to show a social stability between Britain and Ireland at a time of increased political and civil unrest, as it was a demonstration of networks of fashionable behaviours. The dual policies of connecting European elite women through networks of fashion and leisure, as well as influencing Corisande's personable writing style with the paper's conservative editorial policy seemed to be evident in this example. Corisande's confinement, her retreat into a network of letters, also suggests the limits of respectable forms of feminine behaviour in the immediate post-war years. Corisande's persona and style can be linked to the work of historians like Langhamer who have commented on respectable forms of behaviour for women in the interwar years, and have argued that criticism of women was often focused around how they should spend their leisure time.<sup>790</sup> Yet, there was tension here between Corisande's suggested behaviour and personality, as a domestic, sedate and wealthy Society figure who spent most of her time reading and writing letters within the confines of her home, and the realities of her working for a national newspaper. This representation of female journalists in the popular press can be linked to my earlier analysis of the limitations of 'Mrs Gossip' and gossip column illustrator Helen McKie's work in the national press.<sup>791</sup> Women journalists had an increasing presence in the popular press after the war, but their persona was heavily defined by their gender as well as the type of journalistic role they had. The fact that many

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid., 2 January 1919.

<sup>790</sup> Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*(Manchester, 2000).

<sup>791</sup> See Chapters Two, Three and Four.

worked in the gossip column suggested women's strong association with consumerism and fashion rather than political and economic reportage.

The mixed messages about Corisande's status and personality were seen throughout 1919. It was striking how much Corisande discussed political topics such as the removal of the marriage bar in the civil service, and this can be seen as partly due to the cultural atmosphere surrounding the recent enfranchisement of women in 1918.<sup>792</sup> Corisande had the power to speak her mind on current affairs and the wider world because she was now an enfranchised British citizen. On 4 January 1919 she demonstrated that she took her vote very seriously, using three paragraphs to analyse a 'Women's Freedom League' meeting, which discussed women's election experience.<sup>793</sup> Demonstrating her own self-confidence and belief in her influential status, Corisande also evoked a conservative morality in her concern for other women of different class backgrounds, nationalities or generation to herself-- a kind of moral cosmopolitanism. On 10 January, she was concerned for the reputations of young women who wore skirts above the knee or who smoked in a crowded restaurant; later she wrote of the improvement in the working conditions of 'factory girls'.<sup>794</sup> On 3 January Corisande's philanthropic interests were shown as she promoted children infant welfare centres, a disabled veterans dance and, a matinee to raise funds for the Serbian Red Cross.<sup>795</sup>

Corisande's cosmopolitanism also crystallised in her openness to experience new international fashions and sociability. On several occasions in 1919 Corisande's column

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<sup>792</sup> *Standard*, 7 January 1919, 10 January 1919, 3 June 1919, 5 June 1919, 11 June 1919, 21 June 1919.

<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 January 1919.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 January 1919.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 January 1919.

charted her speedy movements around the diverse venues of the city and its environs, visiting charitable concerts and fundraisers and the Y.W.C.A. garden party.<sup>796</sup> On 2 January, she hopped to a 'jolly New Year Party' at Kensington Town Hall, remarked on the chorus of flappers at the 'Ambassador's Theatre'; the next day she watched a 'dance innovation' of the American jazz roll at a private party.<sup>797</sup> Such examples showed her ability to network with a wide variety of figures of different generations and her openness to leisure innovations from the US, but also the effectiveness of modern transport and communication systems in London which she utilised so effectively and independently.

In contrast, 'A Londoner's Diary' of January 1919 suggested how the transnational cultures of the gossip column could be structured by gender stereotypes or traditional notions of masculine and feminine behaviours.<sup>798</sup> The anonymous author seemed old, bumbling, cold and severe in comparison to Corisande, his narrative of daily life looks inwards within Britain's borders and mostly within Westminster's and the West End's geographical and imaginary boundaries.<sup>799</sup> In contrast to the coverage of Europe in Corisande's 'Woman's World', the Londoner presented Europe as a feminised cultural space. For example, he looked backwards harking back to into the realms of British history, recalling male heroes of wartime like the airman Captain Leefe Robinson who 'saved women and children from the terror of Zeppelin raiders', and discussed the 'gallant' Seaforth Highlanders, drawing on romantic visions of masculinity and Britishness.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid., 27 June 1919, 8 August 1919, 22 August 1919, 1 November 1919, 4 November 1919, 6 November 1919, 11 November 1919, 14 November 1919.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid., 2 January 1919.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., 27 June 1919, 8 August 1919, 22 August 1919, 1 November 1919, 4 November 1919, 6 November 1919, 11 November 1919, 14 November 1919.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., 7 January 1919, 3 June 1919, 11 June 1919, 8 August 1919, 1 November 1919, 6 November 1919, 11 November 1919.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 8 August 1919, 3 November 1919, 11 November 1919.

While the male Londoner clearly had a cosmopolitan correspondence network, he waited for the news to come to him. His style was that of effortless upper-class superiority, and his confident tone suggested that there was no journalistic fervour to be roaming the city looking for news like *Corisande*.<sup>801</sup> His sense of power and control as a British male was summarised in January 1919 when he evoked historical imperial identities as a basis for his public persona:

From correspondence that reaches this country from Constantinople it is sufficiently apparent that an exceedingly strong and firm hand, such as both Lord Cromer and Lord Kitchener had in Egypt is required to put the Turks in their place...<sup>802</sup>

This gave the impression that London was at the centre of the universe. The columnist celebrated the manly figures of Empire Kitchener and Cromer, and suggested that contemporary leaders should learn from the past to deal with the present situation. Here, there was a definite sense of English superiority over other nations, white supremacy and a firm belief in the hierarchy and power of empire. Even the format and appearance of the 'Diary' was staid and monotonous compared to *Corisande's* gossip feature, which incorporated illustrations, new font styles and later photographs into the column.<sup>803</sup>

**Fig 66 and Fig 67:**

The images originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 1 January 1920, 24 January 1920, 11 June 1920.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 2 January 1919.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid., 3 August 1929.

The latest forms of printing culture and new typographical and pictorial innovations were incorporated into the women's gossip column rather than the 'Londoner's Diary'. Such shifts suggest a new type of collaborative journalistic work across gender lines, between a female

journalist and a range of other experts including fashion illustrators and sub-editors, that transformed the national press in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the reformatting and visual modernisation of 'woman's world' meant Corisande's written text was reduced. In the example from 25 June 1925, 'Woman's World and its Ways' was physically sidelined to the left hand side of the page, and fashion illustrations were the dominant feature on the page. The lavish train of the mannequin's gown cut across the text of the gossip column, suggesting a new domination of women's fashion, physical beauty and consumer culture within the 'woman's world'.<sup>804</sup> With fashion an increasing priority in the column, this suggested the increased elision of politics in the column, an important change in comparison to the political commentary found in 'Woman's World' at the end of the First World War.

As I have already discussed earlier in the thesis, the mid-1920s saw the appearance of the youthful male gossip columnist in most of the major national daily and Sunday newspapers. These included outspoken and confident figures such as the 'Dragoman' of the *Daily Express* and A.D.C of the *Daily Mail*, who discussed their own metropolitan social lives. The owner of the successful *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* Lord Beaverbrook had bought the *Standard* in 1923, and this marked a significant watershed in both columns' attitudes towards Europe, cosmopolitanism and celebrity. The women's column became increasingly focused on celebrating the beauty, glamour and consumerism of Society, encapsulated within the glamorous and glossy photographs of Society women in the example from 3 August 1929 above. The employment of Robert Bruce Lockhart, (the sociable, cosmopolitan, Foreign office figure who had spent much of his working life and leisure time

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<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 25 June 1925.

in Europe), as editor of the 'Diary' from 1926 throughout the 1930s, opened up the column to include a wider discussion of leisure, culture and politics in Britain and Europe.<sup>805</sup> Such an approach was evident in the examples from the *Evening Standard* in 1938, provided in section one of this chapter. In Lockhart's early contributions to the column in June 1926 his diverse interests and active lifestyle were evident: he was as much an expert on football and fly-fishing as he was commenting on the new ambassador to China, or the qualities of the best diplomats.<sup>806</sup> Lockhart's fascination with Europe was shown in his different paragraphs on 1 January 1927. These firstly discussed a Flemish art exhibition at Burlington House and went on to comment on the power struggles within Czecho-Slovakian politics and the ban on loud speakers in the streets of Paris.<sup>807</sup> Lockhart's personality and expertise meant that the cultural and political were integrated within the 'Diary'. His status amongst the wealthy and powerful of British Society, cultivated in part by his avid participation in elite social life, and as an experienced figure within international diplomacy, shaped this shift in the Diary's content from looking inwards and backwards to an increasingly outwards looking column.

By 1929 changes in the format and authorship of the *Evening Standard* gossip columns meant that Europe meant quite different things in the 'Londoner's Diary' and 'Woman's World'. Corisande's written descriptions of her cosmopolitanism had been marginalised by a magazine-like display of fashion illustration and photography. In the 'Londoner's Diary', paragraphs made connections in systems of government, cross-continental connections of the Royal Family, and the civilised classical traditions of forms of high art and culture were represented as signs of democratic stability and cultural interchange between Britain and

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<sup>805</sup> See Chapters Two and Three for Lockhart.

<sup>806</sup> *Standard*, 22-25 November 1926, part of the press cuttings of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, NLS, Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart Papers, Acc 9644/4, Acc 9644/5.

<sup>807</sup> *Standard*, 1 January 1927.

the continent. By the summer of 1929 it was the borders between the male and the female gossip columns of the *Evening Standard* that were firmly closed and guarded rather than those with Europe. At the opposite ends of the paper, the columns were poles apart in terms of content, style and form and presented very different visions of the world for the male and female readers of the *Evening Standard*. In the gossip column, gender was an important factor in shaping news of Britain's relationship with Europe. The final section analyses how the personality of the gossip columnists shaped the representations of Europe and wider world in the gossip columns of the *Sunday News*, *Weekly/Sunday Dispatch* and *Sunday Express*.

#### **4) Personality, Cosmopolitanism and the Gossip Column.**

In contrast to 'Corisande' and the 'Londoner's' very different lifestyles, Lady Eleanor Smith described her participation in a cosmopolitan leisure culture of Society shared by her male journalistic counterparts on the *Sketch* and *Express*. When Smith, the Marquess of Donegal (*Sunday News*) and Viscount Castlerosse (*Sunday Express*) became gossip columnists in the late 1920s, there was a new element to the cosmopolitan culture of the gossip column as these upper class figures presented themselves at the centre of national and transnational networks of celebrity. The columnists were as mobile as the Society that they described. Where many columns had previously been written anonymously, these new features emphasized the temperament and opinions of the authors and their relationships with a range of Society and celebrity figures. Told through the personal experiences and perspectives of one author, the gossip columnist gave a new coherence, or a narrative and a personalised tone to representations of celebrity culture. Vital to this was the columnist's elite lifestyle, his ability to travel as well as his enjoyment of travelling abroad, his wealth,

and skills of sociability. As I have shown in my analysis of the content of 'Woman's World' in the *Standard*, the variety of the columnist's lifestyle and his travels in both Britain and abroad was also reliant on the male gender of the columnist. In a broader cultural context, the improvements in transport and telegraphic and telephonic communications encouraged a cosmopolitan network of celebrity. On 30 December 1928, Lady Eleanor Smith wrote her column as she holidayed in Lisbon, writing: 'I may be far away. But I am in touch with the "goings on" in several parts of the world.'<sup>808</sup> Whether she, or in fact another member of the gossip column's staff, had gathered this information is another matter, but Smith certainly gave the impression that she had an international network of friends and informants keeping her up-to-date with an array of social events. As well as describing her experiences on a luxury cruise ship 'filled with dusky Argentine beauties', she described her friend's boredom in Monte Carlo, another friend's visit to Capri, the Countess of Seafield's recent departure to South Africa for two months, stories from the 'hunting and house-partying' in the English countryside, and a Christmas party in a restaurant in London.<sup>809</sup> Writing in the first-person, Smith's style dramatised the cosmopolitanism and easy mobility of interwar social elites.

Like Smith, Donegall also clearly demonstrated his familiarity with the cosmopolitan Society of London and his own experiences amongst the social elite in Europe. In his first column of 5 June 1927, Donegall described his friendship with the 'Rumanian Royal Family' and his experiences during 'an enjoyable holiday' at their royal residence, invited because he was friends with Prince Nicholas 'at Eton'.<sup>810</sup> Responding to a recent biography of 'Queen Marie

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<sup>808</sup> *Dispatch*, 30 December 1928.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>810</sup> *Sunday News*, 5 June 1927.

of Rumania [*sic*]’ which had put her back ‘in the news’, Donegall was keen to present himself as the expert when it came to knowing the queen’s personality and lifestyle writing, ‘I could have told the authoress one or two things.’<sup>811</sup> In the same column, Donegall displayed his international friendship network when he reminisced about his meeting with the ex-Shah of Persia at a hotel in Deauville, and described the dress and jewellery of ‘the Chilian [*sic*] Minister ... Mme Edwards ... wearing a remarkably fine diamond tiara and long diamond earrings’ at the ‘Argentine Minister’s dance at Brook House’.<sup>812</sup> On the one hand, Donegall’s writing style underlined national differences, consistently discussing the clothing and appearance of members of foreign social elites like the ‘ex-Shah’ and Mme Edwards in exotic and sensational terms. Yet in other ways he discussed his intimacy and easy manner with foreign celebrities, and this was particularly notable in his treatment of the white, wealthy and young American celebrities Tallulah Bankhead and Charles Lindbergh. On 7 June 1927, he provided details of his tete-a-tete with the actress Bankhead at a table in the exclusive West End Embassy Club, and his after dinner conversation at the Royal Aero Club with Lindbergh ‘the American Aviator’.<sup>813</sup> Sharing youth, and in Bankhead’s case an enjoyment of ‘modern’ forms of nightlife, this transatlantic network of celebrity links to Laura Mayhall’s conclusions about the interwar development of an Anglo-American elite with similar leisure interests, publicised in newspapers and magazines on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>814</sup> Yet these Anglo-American networks by no means stretched to all gossip columnists in the interwar period.

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<sup>811</sup> *Sunday News*, 5 June 1927.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>814</sup> Mayhall, ‘The Prince of Wales’, *Cultural and Social History* (2007), pp. 529-543, p. 533. McKibbin, *Classes* (1998), p. 29.

The geographical nature of the celebrity culture described in the gossip column was also influenced by a gossip columnist's age and life experience, and in Castlerosse's case, his Irishness. War veteran Viscount Castlerosse was thirty-five when he began his 'Londoner's Log' on the *Sunday Express* in 1926, but his tone seemed older and wiser than the frantic and frenetic twenty-four year-old Donegall. Castlerosse's geographical mobility and own cosmopolitanism were reflected in the activities he pursued and the circle of figures he described in print. Where the young Donegall seemed at ease in a 'night club', Castlerosse was less comfortable in such modern surroundings and stated that he visited one primarily for eating dinner and not socialising.<sup>815</sup> Whilst Donegall's companion was the glamorous and beautiful Tallulah Bankhead, Castlerosse sat with 'a hard-bitten, grey haired, red-faced hunting man' who suggested that he go to the hunt in Leicestershire where there were far more 'interesting people' than those at Cannes: 'If you are going for pleasure, you know perfectly well that you would enjoy hunting in Leicestershire much better than idling on the Riviera.'<sup>816</sup> Here, Castlerosse's column enabled a critical reflection and external perspective on cosmopolitanism and transnational movements. Nevertheless, Castlerosse followed the modern fashion of many other titled figures and visited Cannes in January 1927, describing who he saw in the casinos, such as 'Herr Weismann ... the sixty year old Secretary of state for Prussia' and his conversations with the Viennese 'Princess Hohenlohe' and author H.G. Wells.<sup>817</sup> Indeed, Castlerosse's column was unusual in its style in the late 1920s, in that he often discussed his anxieties and emotions and seemed to openly discuss the mistakes he had made in his life. This discussion was played out in relation to the two lifestyles of English gentleman-journalist and Irish landowner, a particularly conflicted position in the

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<sup>815</sup> *Sunday Express*, 2 January 1927.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.* 16 January 1927.

1920s, which he negotiated in his column. His feelings of guilt about his decadent or reckless behaviour were often associated with his hectic social life amongst the cosmopolitan social elite in modern, metropolitan London at dinners, dances and cabarets and 'gambling' at Cannes.<sup>818</sup> This was often compared to the peace and contentment he felt on his estate near Killarney, amongst the 'beautiful...places...of Ireland.'<sup>819</sup> His questioning of cosmopolitan sociability reflected the changing political and economic context of the 1920s. The distinctions Castlerosse made between his lifestyles in London and Ireland came a short time after the Irish War of Independence and formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Castlerosse's very public negotiation of a very modern tripartite identity as an Irishman, a Viscount of the British elite and a London based 'journalist', not only reflected Britain's recent loss of political control in Ireland, but also the economic measures which had resulted in the decline in the fortunes of many landed aristocracy and encouraged many to seek paid work outside family estates in the period around the First World War.<sup>820</sup> Castlerosse's appraisal of Society showed how their representation could be affected by political, social and economic circumstances in Britain and the wider world, and his reflections on his own life presented a practice of judging one's own circumstances and sense of self in relation to those within the celebrity culture of British Society.<sup>821</sup>

The personality and lifestyles of individual Society gossip columnists became an important way in which Europe and the wider world was related to readers of the popular press in the late 1920s. It was a literary style shared across the middle-class papers of the *Mail* and *Express* and the *Sunday News*, *Sunday Dispatch* and *Sunday Express*. Yet as chapters two

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<sup>818</sup> Ibid.

<sup>819</sup> *Sunday Express*, 1 August 1926.

<sup>820</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline* (1992).

<sup>821</sup> *Sunday Express*, 1 August 1926.

and three argue, there were challenges to the validity of the sociable, Society gossip columnist's presence in the national newspaper, after the publication of *Vile Bodies* in 1930. A combination of British academics and journalists in the early 1930s also publically criticised the columnists' focus on leisure and consumer culture (even though, as my content analysis shows, the columnists also focused on other topics in the 1930s such as the discussion of political figures and national and international political affairs), and their simplistic, colloquial writing style was damaging to national culture.<sup>822</sup> Chapter three traced the impact of *Vile Bodies* and the other criticisms of the columnist on the print persona of the gossip columnist in the 1930s. It argued that gossip columnists like Castlerosse had already begun to formulate a gentleman-journalist print persona in the late 1920s that sought to navigate both the social and cultural world of Society and the journalistic profession. After the publication of *Vile Bodies*, columnists like Beverley Nichols and Tom Driberg made their connections with Society even more obtuse and obscure and publically distanced themselves from the world of Society through a number of writing techniques that included emphasising their participation in a left-wing political culture.<sup>823</sup> Another method was to discuss their interactions with figures outside Society and celebrity culture. On 1 June 1939 Beverley Nichols discussed his friendship and social life with a working-class 'companion', drinking in a bar in London.<sup>824</sup> There is evidence to suggest that another way in which columnists distanced themselves from the social world of Society was by avoiding the discussion of holidays and travels within Europe. Increasingly claiming the persona of a journalist, a profession usually associated with the middle-class, was one way of doing this. Journalism was usually presented in this period as a life of regular, long hours and a full

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<sup>822</sup> See Introduction, Chapters One and Three.

<sup>823</sup> Chapter Three.

<sup>824</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 1 June 1939.

working week that kept an individual close to their newspaper offices in London.<sup>825</sup> Whilst other Society figures might be considering months of travels in Europe or the Empire after the London Season, Nichols spent his weekend rambling alone along the British coastline, returning on a Sunday for work the next day.<sup>826</sup> Whilst Society figures were enjoying the winter months in Cannes or Monte Carlo, Castlerosse, sat 'working' in his office, making preparations for a short golfing break to Rye on the south-coast.<sup>827</sup> By examining the public lives of British upper-class figures through the prisms of transnational social and celebrity networks, understandings of Europe, and popular print culture, we can see two versions of Society developing in the popular print culture of the 1920s and especially the 1930s. There were those who continued with their travels to Europe and Empire, and those, who as a result of the demands and expectations of their work were no longer part of this international social calendar.

## 5) Conclusion

This chapter has argued that European places and people featured more regularly in the newspaper gossip column than Empire and the United States throughout the interwar period. The evidence from my content analysis challenges historical arguments about the Americanisation of the newspaper gossip column and celebrity culture in Britain. It also challenges another common historical understanding that interwar popular culture was insular and inward-looking. The popular press has been described as obsessed with social and moral breakdown in Britain, and popular culture increasingly associated with a new national heroine of the sensible middle-class housewife. Historians have argued that

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<sup>825</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>826</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 2 October 1932.

<sup>827</sup> *Sunday Express*, 8 January 1933.

interwar popular culture was primarily shaped by the emasculating effect of the First World War on the national psyche, national economic decline and challenges to imperial systems of rule. The political, social and economic infrastructure of Britain was supposedly breaking down and forms of popular culture were determined to engage with this. I argue that we need to look outside Britain, especially to Europe, to discover other key influences on the content of the gossip column.

As my comparative analysis has shown, it is impossible to characterise the content of the interwar popular press and popular print culture as one large and homogeneous commodity. I have drawn attention to the diversity in the content of gossip columns that were in existence in the interwar period, their varying international focus over time, and how this focus reacted to political and economic change both within and outside Britain. Evidence from the gossip column suggests that popular culture and popular print were more complex, contradictory and open to change on a number of levels than previous accounts allow. I have analysed the content of a broad range of papers popular with working-class, middle-class and upper-class readerships. I define the *Mail* and *Express*, the newspapers with the highest sales figures which were mainly purchased by the middle-class, as the middlebrow press. In these columns, readers encountered Europe mainly through the actions of Society. A wealthy British social elite would regularly visit Paris and holiday on the Riviera, and go skiing in St Moritz; and the columnist would provide details of the restaurants, casinos, sporting events and the other aspects of Society leisure. However, I have argued that there was not a whole-hearted acceptance of Europe and its elitist leisure culture in all the newspapers purchased by a middle-class audience. Columnists like Donegall and Castlerosse turned their back on Society social life in Britain and Europe after

the economic crisis of the early 1930s. In this sense, it was Society gossip-columnists and not the middle-class protagonists of middlebrow novels that became more inward-looking in the 1930s. Both Castlerosse and Nichols would publically reflect on their morals and behaviour for the entertainment of a middle-class audience. Other columns in newspapers like the *Sketch* cultivated a vivid impression of a dynamic cosmopolitan leisure culture in the metropolis, a culture open to entertainers, artists and the social elite from Europe. This was a lifestyle in which at least some of the Society columnists were fully immersed throughout the period.

Gossip columns in working-class papers like the *News of the World* did not only learn of Europe through news of Society lifestyles. The column also included opinion paragraphs on political and economic affairs in Europe. Likewise, the elitist *Standard* developed two strands of comment on Europe by 1938, discussing its liberal intellectual and cultural elite and its political demise into violent extremism. Whilst I have argued that the gossip column provides evidence of a more outward-looking, globalised popular culture in interwar Britain, this always had certain limits. The people of this world were overwhelmingly white, westernised, in that they shared codes of manners, dress and public behaviour, and wealthy.

## Conclusion

This thesis has provided the social and cultural history of the newspaper gossip column between the wars analysing not only its written but also its visual content. As well as the content analysis of the newspaper gossip feature it has also analysed its production: exploring the changing authorship of the column between the wars and the editorial decisions influencing the new personable authorial style of the columnists from the mid-1920s onwards. As a result of this detailed, dual analysis of both the content and context of the newspaper gossip column between the wars this thesis has built upon the historiographical theme of the development of human-interest journalism in the national press after the First World War. Through my exploration of the 'generic conventions' of the gossip column in interwar Britain, I have argued that the celebrity gossip column represented a personalisation of the national press between the wars.<sup>828</sup> For example, chapter one has argued that borrowing from the styles of authorship found in the pictorial papers the *Sketch* and *Mirror* after the war, the columnists of the *Express* and *Mail* adopted a new personable style by 1930, describing their participation in an elite leisure culture focused on metropolitan nightlife and by signing the previously anonymous columns with a pseudonym. Chapter one also analysed fan letters to columnists like 'William Hickey' of the *Express* to argue that readers of Hickey's column were interested in the questions of lifestyle that Hickey discussed in his feature throughout the 1930s. Reader discussion of the column did not necessarily relate to an appreciation of the elite leisure culture of the metropolis that Hickey sometimes discussed however, it also involved readers expressing their political opinions and their hopes for developing their own personalities by using the

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<sup>828</sup> Mort, 'Intellectual Pluralism', *History Workshop Journal*, 72/1 (2011), pp. 212-221.

column's information on the arts, politics, economics and literature as a means of self-improvement to develop their knowledge of current affairs. In other words, readers treated Hickey as a celebrity because they felt that he was intelligent and highly educated and could convey often complex topics of national politics and developments in the arts and academia in a friendly, non-patronising and clear manner. This evidence provides a very different reading of celebrity culture in Britain between the wars to those found in the accounts of historians like Kohn and Taylor and their focus on newspaper reports of the scandalous behaviour of drug-taking flappers, the fashionable dress and nightlife of young Society men and women, the sex appeal of the 'oriental other' and the US film star, neatly encapsulated in Rudolph Valentino's starring role in the desert romance *The Sheik* (1921).<sup>829</sup> In contrast, I have shown that columnists like Hickey and Viscount Castlerosse's celebrity status relied partly on their persona as professional journalists and the public expression in print of their sensible, mature personalities. This thesis has therefore argued that the celebrity culture of the national press in interwar Britain was more complex and varied than the previous accounts of the 1920s popular press allow.

I have also argued that the personalisation of the press in the interwar newspaper gossip column was sometimes a contradictory process. For instance, this thesis has explored the tensions between the personal and professional by analysing the production of the gossip column. As the thesis introduction has shown, newspapers like the *Mail* sought to transform the visual and written content of the newspaper gossip column to attract more readers after the First World War, to make newspaper journalism and news convey more easily to the readers' minds. Yet this new theoretical basis of national newspaper journalism existed alongside a culture where proprietors like Beaverbrook employed their

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<sup>829</sup> Kohn, *Dope* (1992) and Taylor, *Bright* (2007).

Society friends as gossip columnists, or a celebrity's mention in the gossip column might depend on whether they were in favour with the proprietor. Likewise, as chapter three has shown, there were personal lines that the gossip columnist could not cross that were set out in editorial policies, such as limitations on the details of the private lives and romantic affairs of the royal family.

Chapter two has explored the popular audience's fascination with the persona and lifestyle of the celebrity gossip columnist between the wars, perhaps best interpreted through the best-selling success of Waugh's novel about the Society gossip column and gossip-writing, *Vile Bodies* (1930). Yet it has also emphasised how the gossip columnist's celebrity status influenced a culture of critique of the content and format of the press after the wars which not only the mass readership of *Vile Bodies* were part of but also novelists, intellectuals, journalists and even gossip columnists themselves. In other words, the celebrity status of the gossip columnist, and what critics regarded as key parts of his appeal, particularly his lively, humorous style and his focus on leisure and consumerism, formed a widespread reassessment across print culture of the possibilities and limits of the national newspaper gossip column in the early 1930s. Chapter three explored the influence of the content and production of the gossip column in more personal terms, analysing the diaries and letters of some gossip columnists to argue that their celebrity persona shaped their private understanding of themselves in terms of their class and gender. For instance I have argued that, Patrick Balfour, Third Earl of Kinross felt that he had the ideal 'personality' for gossip writing in the 1920s; he regarded himself as a highly sociable person who enjoyed parties and the nightlife of London, he stated that he had a highly charismatic writing style and found gossip writing about Society lifestyle easy and natural. On the other hand, I have

shown that Harold Nicolson felt that gossip writing for the *Evening Standard* did not match his skills as a writer or his intellect, and that he was embarrassed to be associated with the popular press. By exploring the tensions between the columnists' public and private personas, this thesis has argued that the modern celebrity culture of the gossip column was appreciated by some of its upper-class authors more than others, and that the analysis of these diaries and letters alongside the content of the gossip column has offered a new way of reassessing the complex notions of social class in a period of rapid social, economic, political and cultural change after the First World War. In short I have argued that the content of the national press and the gossip column had a direct impact on upper-class figures' understanding of themselves, significant when most historians and contemporary critics like Queenie Leavis focused on the influence of the content of the national press on middle-class audiences between the wars.

The final two chapters have exposed the complexity of the content of the newspaper gossip column of the popular press between the wars, exploring developments in both the visual culture of the gossip column and its written content. For instance, chapter five has analysed the content of six national newspapers to show not only the national but international nature of the celebrity culture of the gossip column between the wars; that celebrity networks across Europe, Empire and to a lesser extent the US were present in the newspaper gossip column throughout the interwar period. Also developing the argument about the cultural complexity of the newspaper gossip column and celebrity culture between the wars, chapter four has explored the sophisticated visual signifiers attached to different types of celebrity in the newspaper gossip column, tracking the differences between the photographic and illustrative representations of actresses and dancers in the

immediate post-war years with the visual representations of Society women. Yet it has also argued that by 1930, the codes of visual representation attached to different types of celebrities in the immediate post-war years became less clear: that in the *Mail* and *Express* the boundaries were blurred between the stage and film actress and the Society woman and there was a homogenisation of the visual culture of celebrity and particularly female celebrities in the national press by 1930. In short, women's representation, regardless of class and status was linked by themes of glamour, youth and sex appeal. Such an approach suggested that the celebrity culture of the newspaper gossip column focused around themes of entertainment and leisure by the end of the 1920s, and this was confirmed in chapter one's analysis of the written content of the gossip columns in the *Sketch*, *Mail*, *Mirror* and *Express* by 1930; Society men and women were presented as avid participants in the cabaret, theatre and night club culture of the West End of London. However, I have argued that the visual culture of celebrity changed again by the early 1930s in papers like the *Express*, as the persona of the sensible gentleman-journalist columnist, who was interested in national politics and international relations, began to dominate both the written and visual content of the column. As a result the gossip feature became less spectacular with much less photography and illustration. This thesis's analysis of the changing celebrity culture of the gossip column over the interwar period shows that the national press was at once dynamic and diverse in its treatment of celebrity, but that it was also a culture in which the representation of women was designed and constructed mainly by men, and that ideas of feminine beauty and women's appropriate roles and behaviour in the public sphere constrained their visual representation; even in the supposedly scandalous and subversive celebrity gossip column. This was a process in which new types

of journalist like the upper-class gossip columnist and relatively modern figures in newspaper journalism like the typographer, photographer and illustrator collaborated.

(99,866 words)

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