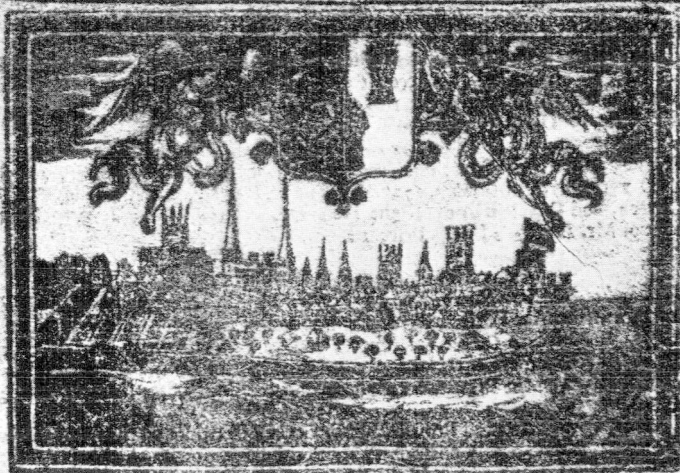




THE, CHESTER  
Weekly—Journal;

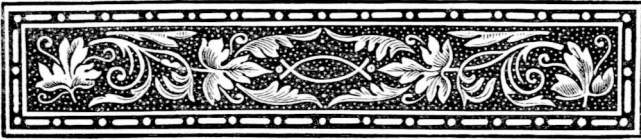
Being a COLLECTION  
OF  
The most Material *NEWS*  
Both Foreign and Domestic.

Numb. 174 Thursday September 3. 1794.



*Licenc'd and Enter'd in the Stamp-Office.*

CHESTER: Printed by Wm. Cooke, where may be had Collectors Warrants, Warrants for the High-ways, and Orders of removals &c. Note any Justices Clerks may be supply'd by the Men that carry this News.



## Chester's Oldest Newspaper

By HENRY TAYLOR, F.S.A.

(Read 18th November, 1913).



EXHIBIT this evening an early attempt at a Chester Newspaper. It consists of twelve pages of hand-made paper, each measuring eight inches by six inches. The title page (of which I give an illustration) bears the following inscription:

THE CHESTER  
Weekly---Journal;

Being a COLLECTION  
OF

The most Material NEWS  
Both *Foreign* and *Domestick*.

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Numb. 174. Thursday September 3. 1724.

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[Here a wood block impression of a view of the City of Chester, taken from the present site of Curzon Park, is given, bearing at the top an escutcheon with the City Arms supported by two angels each with one hand, and with the other holding post horns which they are blowing].

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*Licenc'd and Enter'd in the Stamp-Office.*  
CHESTER: Printed by Wm. Cooke, where may be had Collectors Warrants, Warrants for the High-ways, and Orders of removals, &c. Note any Justices Clerks may be supplied by the Men that carry this News.

It will be observed that it is numbered 174, so that the first issue of this little Paper probably appeared early in May, 1721, when George I. was King, perhaps in time for the Chester Races of that year.

Hemingway is the only local historian who refers to the Chester Newspaper Press, and he says that the *Chester Weekly Journal* is the earliest known of any Chester newspaper. The *Chester Courant* first appeared as *Adams's Chester Weekly Courant*, in 1730, at which time, according to Hemingway, the *Chester Weekly Journal* had ceased to exist. The *Chester Courant* still flourishes, as does also the *Chester Chronicle*, which was first issued on the 2nd May, 1775. We have the early files of both these newspapers here to-night, and it is very interesting to compare them with their issues of to-day. Both newspapers are of a very respectable age; in fact they are two of the oldest established in the country.

Strange as it may appear to us to-day, our *Chester Weekly Journal* of 1724 gives no Chester news beyond the prices of corn on the previous Saturday in Chester, which were as follows:—

Wheat	from 4/6 to 5/-	per measure.
Rye	from 3/- to 3/6	„
Barley	from 2/4 to 2/8	„
Oats	from 1/5 to 1/7	„

At that time local news was considered mere gossip which everyone was supposed to know. All the news given is foreign, or from London, or "From written Letters." The number of males christened in London during the previous week is given at 159, and of females 160, in all 319; and of males buried 208, and of females 188, in all 396. "Decrease in Burials this week 91." There is also some interesting information

as to vessels coming in and going out of the Thames. A great number of persons appear to have been condemned to be executed at Tyburn. One of these is named "John Shephard," and on referring to the *Dictionary of National Biography* I am able to identify him as the notorious Jack Sheppard, who, about the date of our newspaper, appears to have escaped from prison. His escapades have been described by Harrison Ainsworth in his novel. I will give two paragraphs from the paper, and will not weary you with more, thus:—

"Princess Anne and Princess Caroline came yesterday to St. Paul's Cathedral and heard the famous Mr. Handel (their Music Master) perform on the organ and the Revd. Dr. Hare one of the Residents waited on their Royal Highnesses during their stay there."

"The King had much Diversion last Monday in the great Park and Forrest of Windsor, his Majesty having killed 2 Brace and a half of Pheasants and one Brace and a half of Partridges."

There are no advertisements beyond a list of six new sermons taken out of the *Monthly Catalogue* published at London, July, 1724, at prices ranging from threepence to a shilling each, and of two *New Miscellaneous Pamphlets*, both on biblical subjects.

At the bottom of the last page appears the only public notice inserted, which shows that our newspaper circulated in Flintshire as well as in Cheshire. It runs as follows:—

"This is to give Notice, that all the lands belonging to the Lord of the Manor of Mold in the County of Flint, and lying in the Parish of Mold aforesaid, are to be set to such able and sufficient Tenants as are willing to take any Part or Parcels thereof: who may apply to the Agents of the said Lord of the Manor at the Town of Mold aforesaid upon or before the 31st October next."

The Printer of the newspaper, William Cooke, was well known in Chester and North Wales. He will be

referred to in Mr. Morys Parry's paper on "Chester Welsh Printers," to be read before this Society.

So far as I have been able to discover this is the earliest copy of a Chester newspaper now in existence. It is possible, however, that an earlier number of the *Chester Weekly-Journal* may be hidden in the Library of some old Chester or country house.

Before I close this paper, perhaps I should make some reference to the rise of the newspaper press in this country generally. Nathaniel Butter is said to have been our first journalist, by printing weekly extracts from foreign newsletters (1622-39). This was called the *Weekly News*. He also printed half-yearly volumes of foreign news (1630-40). He was the son of a London stationer, and himself a Freeman of the Stationers' Company in 1604. He began to print books in his own name, 1604-11, and issued pamphlets describing murders and plays, 1605-39.

The same year (1622) in which the *Weekly News* appeared saw the birth of the *London Weekly Courant*, while twenty years later came a small family of *Mercuries*,<sup>1</sup> followed in 1663 by Sir Robert L'Estrange's *Public Intelligence*. In the year of the great Plague, *The London Gazette* was first published at Oxford. Out of all this brood of seventeenth century newspapers, two only, namely, *The London Gazette* and *Berrow's Worcester Journal* have survived to this day.

<sup>1</sup> The chief Author of *Mercurius Aulicus*, which was both printed and published at Oxford once a week, and sometimes oftener, from 1642 to 1645, was John Birkenhead, a Cheshire man, who for this and similar services to the Royalist cause is said to have been knighted at St. Germain's in 1649. He was M.A., Oriel College, Oxford, 1639; Fellow of All Souls' College, 1640; in exile with Prince Charles, 1648; D.C.L., 1661; M.P. for Wilton; an early Member of the Royal Society, and one of the Masters of Requests.

The latter first saw the light as *The Worcester Postman* in 1690.

As to the daily press, *The Morning Post* was first issued November 2nd, 1772, sixteen years earlier than the date of any of the other London political dailies now existing. *The Times* dates from 1788. I have here a copy of that paper dated June 22nd, 1815, giving the official bulletin respecting the Battle of Waterloo from the Duke of Wellington, dated Waterloo, 19th June. It is printed on one sheet of paper. This dispatch it appears was brought to Downing Street by Major the Hon. H. Percy on the evening prior to the day of the publication of the paper. It took Major Percy two days to travel with all haste from the field of battle to London. There were no telegrams, wireless or otherwise, in those days.

