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'Half a loaf is better than none': The framing of political and national identity in Welsh border newspapers in the aftermath of the Mold Riots, 1869-1870.

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Abstract

The Mold Riots of 1869 came at a time of social and cultural upheaval throughout Wales. Several distinct contexts intersect, and this paper will attempt to synthesize and interpret them by analyzing archival coverage of the events in the local press. The period was a dynamic one for local newspapers across the UK, with Benson arguing that the English provincial press at the time was 'less cautious, more calculating, and more sensationalist than much of the existing literature would lead one to suppose'. Welsh newspapers have, however, been hitherto largely ignored by that literature. This would seem to be something of an oversight, because Welsh identity became politicized for the first time in the 1860s. In the particular context of North-East Wales, where - as in many border regions - identity is contested, the coverage of the Mold Riots in the local press offers an instructive opportunity to examine early attempts to negotiate identity politics in what was already a mixed, semi-anglicised region in which questions of religion, language, class and loyalty were emerging as potentially divisive political issues. The paper will examine local newspapers' rhetorical frames, in which audiences are encouraged to interpret events in ways sympathetic to the actions of the authorities. This paper sees the event as a pivotal example of changing interpretations of political and national identity in local newspapers with a cross-border remit.

The Mold Riots: Summary and methodology

The riot took place in Mold town centre, but was actually the culmination of a long-running industrial dispute between managers and miners at the nearby Leeswood colliery. The relationship between the colliers and manager John Young, who came from Durham to replace a Welsh mine owner in 1864, had deteriorated during the summer of 1869 with the miners angered by the decisions taken by Young and his 'arrogant' approach to management. There was a clear national dimension to this relationship, as Young banned the

miners from speaking Welsh underground and then cut their wages. He is said to have 'openly disliked the Welsh miners' (Clwyd Record Office 3). After a series of meetings between the miners, Young was attacked, his house was damaged and he was 'sent packing' (forcibly marched) to a local train station. Seven men were later arrested for this, and the two alleged ringleaders sentenced to prison. A large crowd, perhaps 1000 strong, subsequently gathered in Mold to hear the verdict on 2 June 1869. The Chief Constable of Flintshire, presumably anticipating trouble, ordered a detachment of 50 soldiers be brought in from Chester to complement his police force. At 5pm the sentences were passed: one month's hard labour for the two alleged ringleaders and fines for six other miners. As the two prisoners were taken from court to the train station, the crowd began to throw stones and other missiles at the guards, injuring about 35 soldiers, guards and policemen. When the rioters stormed the railway platform, the solders were ordered to fire into the crowd. Four people were killed, two young colliers and two women, and many more injured.

Accounts about the precise details of these events vary considerably, however, and the way in which the local newspapers interpreted both the riots and their causes was therefore key to the subsequent public response. The newspapers effectively had a monopoly over the information that later emerged and therefore had a defining role in the interpretation of the events. Their editorial approaches reveal a great deal about their politics, and their perceived influence on the wider political climate in the area at the time.

Two contemporary newspapers inform the research. Firstly, the still extant Chester Chronicle, which served communities in Chester, Cheshire and Flintshire and was broadly Conservative-supporting. Secondly, the Flintshire Observer, which was broadly Liberal in its editorial line, and was predominantly aimed at a Flintshire (Welsh) audience. All editions of both newspapers for the whole of 1869 were examined, using the microfilm archive at the Flintshire Record Office in Hawarden, Flintshire. The rationale for this, given that the riots took place in June, was that the political context leading up to the riots was likely to be instructive in terms of addressing the overarching themes of the study, and that the aftermath of the riots was also likely to contain revealing material about the newspaper's interpretations of events. In particular, the newspapers' editorials were analysed for their political content.

Three key contexts are explored in this article. Firstly, the national Welsh context, in which Welsh identity became politicized for the first time in modern history and the concept of Welsh nationhood articulated at the highest levels of British political life. This dynamic is lent additional significance in the region in question, as it is classic 'borderland' with mixed national affiliations and a blend of Welsh and English speakers. Secondly, the more general political context in which societal changes wrought by industrialization are negotiated by an increasingly opinionated and vibrant local press. Excerpts from the editorials suggest that the local press conceived its role as overtly political, and the newspapers interpreted and framed the events of the riot and its aftermath in distinctive and highly opinionated ways. The final context relates to this, and concerns the dynamism of local newspapers, which many historians argue were at their height of real value in the 1860s and 1870s.

National context: Welsh identity, class and culture

"With the striking exception of the Calvinistic Methodist denomination, there were virtually no specifically Welsh organisations in 1850, and few people would have defended the notion that Wales was an entity comparable with England, Ireland or Scotland. By 1914, Wales had a national university, library and museum; there was some degree of administrative devolution and a tentative tradition of specifically Welsh legislation had been established. Although it was still considered that the United Kingdom represented the union of three kingdoms, it was increasingly acknowledged that it contained four nations." (Davies 398)

Wales in the 1860s and 1870s was undergoing a period of unprecedented change, largely as a result of the industrial revolution, which had a fundamental and profound impact on the country. A significant relocation of population saw large numbers of workers migrating to Wales from parts of England, and this led to considerable social unrest in some areas. The industrial unrest in the North-East Wales coalfields, of which the Mold Riots was simply the most dramatic example, is one example of the consequences of these social and economic trends, although there was a simultaneous, and considerably larger, in-migration of non-Welsh speakers to South Wales at the same time. In general terms, the influx of non-Welsh populations to South Wales and parts of North Wales also resulted in a relative decline of the

Welsh language and was a key, and arguably inevitable, contributor to the rise of Welsh nationalism in certain quarters during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Although the Mold Riots were relatively insignificant in historical terms, this article argues that contemporary newspaper coverage reveals a more significant wider context, in which Victorian newspapers attempted to use their considerable influence to negotiate a newly emerging political dynamic in which issues of national and class-based political identity came to the fore. Moreover, in North-East Wales, these issues are lent more significance by geography, in the sense that the coalfields of Flintshire are much closer to the English border than their counterparts in South and North-West Wales and both newspapers studied were tasked with negotiating that geographical reality in terms of how they appealed to readers that were far from being a monocultural or monolingual bloc.

The riots took place at a pivotal moment in the history of the development of Welsh political identity, as the 1868 General Election saw the Liberals win the majority of Welsh seats for the first time and this was followed by the highly controversial eviction of many Liberal-voting farmers by Conservative-supporting landlords. Thomas Gee's newspaper *Y Faner* described how 'a powerful wind of change had blown across the political world: there was no chance of standing in the centre, one had to choose one's side', adding that the 'political habits of two centuries had been thrown off' (Dodd 146). One of the most important events in the formation of modern Welsh identity resulted from this upheaval, after an 1869 parliamentary motion introduced by Watkin Williams (Liberal MP for Denbigh), which argued for the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. The Church of England had become a foreign entity in Wales, which was by now dominated by non-conformism. This domination was in part provoked by the refusal of the Anglican Church to accommodate the needs of Welsh speakers. Yet, as an example of the editorial politics that prevailed at the time, the stance of the Anglican Church was supported by much of the Conservative local press in North East Wales. In 1857, for example, the Conservative supporting Wrexham Telegraph said it saw no reason why the Bishop of Bangor should be able to speak Welsh, despite the fact that most people in the diocese were monoglot Welsh speakers. At the time, the CoE had not appointed a Welsh speaker to a Welsh see for 150 years (Peters)

The development of Welsh political identity in the 1860s did not happen in isolation, despite these distinctive links with non-conformism. Rather, ideas about self-expression, identity and class politics took their cue from the European revolutions of 1848. Wales was influenced by the most advanced intellectual currents of contemporary Europe - idealism, nationalism, liberalism – and, crucially, these were disseminated by a vigorous and radical new press of which the previously mentioned *Y Faner* was a prime example (Jenkins) As Benedict Anderson argues, the media is vital to the process of identity formation (as it moves away from Latin towards the venacular). In this sense Welsh and Wales was no different to any other nation and, it could be argued, had a better case than many for 'nationhood' based on the amount of literature and media produced in the indigenous tongue at the time. Davies (415) points to similarities between Wales and other 'non-historic' European nations, in that they experienced similar patterns of development following a scholarly revival of interest in the nation's traditions, which led to cultural rebirth among the general population followed by a mass nationalism which was progressive and linked to democratic ideals.

One of the most striking consequences for the period saw the emergence in Wales of a nascent form of identity politics in which Welsh identity became politicized. The strong links between nationalism and other cultural values, particularly non-conformism, became increasingly apparent, and these links reached their apotheosis in the concept of 'y Wladfa', an overseas Welsh colony, which was intended from the outset to counteract the general assimilative experience of most immigrants to the New World. The small group of nationalists who eventually settled in Patagonia illustrate the reality of the climate of ideas current at the time and, for Davies (415) the concept is evidence of the existence, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, 'of aspirations to Welshness'. The intention was to establish an isolated unit of Welsh culture whose values would hinge on religion and language (Williams Wladfa).

These often overtly nationalist values were also present in the mainstream press, although with significant differences between Welsh and English language newspapers. Cragoe cites an example of Welsh nationalist rhetoric from December 1868, carried in the *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, six months prior to the Mold Riots, which illustrates the extent to which

Welsh language newspapers in particular were prepared to push the politicization of Welsh identity during this period. The editorial followed the General Election in which the Liberals won 23 of 33 seats in Wales. The most famous Welsh language journalist of the day, John Griffith, better known by his pen name 'Y Gohebydd' hailed the result as destined to demonstrate to English public opinion 'that there is such a nation on the face of the earth as Wales: that this nation has its notables, has its views on politics - in a word, that we are here and we are determined to live'.

Liberalism became closely linked with Welsh political identity. As a result, certain Liberal MPs, notably the controversial and quotable George Osborne Morgan, became major local newspaper celebrities. For instance, a vigorous defence of the Welsh language, extraordinary for the era, delivered by Morgan at a local Eisteddfod was carried uncut in the *Flintshire Observer* (3 September 1860), shortly after the Mold Riots. The riots are crucial to the context of the speech, as Morgan was responding to the suggestion he claimed had been made in Parliament that there was somehow a link between the Leeswood miners' use of the Welsh language and their tendency towards violent revolt. The Chester Chronicle refers to miners using many expressions in Welsh which (the reporter) could not understand, and mine owner John Young's 'open dislike' of the Welsh miners and bans on spoken Welsh were said to be well known facts (Clwyd Record Office). However, Morgan's response remains a startling illustration of his willingness to express views that were rarely, if ever, heard in the English-language press at the time. The eagerness of the local press to print those views is equally noteworthy.

> The time has now come for the cessation of these stupid and blundering attacks. How can you turn a stream that has flowed so long? How can you transplant the feelings and impressions of one people into the language of another entirely a stranger to those impressions? Language is but the reflections of thought and you can no more dry up or write down every old language such as this than you could level the mountain or turn back the stream. It would be as impossible to destroy a language rooted so deeply as it would be to tear up Snowdon itself. There is a great fault in the English character and which it

has been the secret of their want of success in attempting to rule all colonies subject to them.

Morgan generates a great deal of coverage in both of the analysed newspapers throughout 1869, before and after the Mold Riots. Walker points to the increasing coverage of local politicians in local newspapers during this period, arguing that increasing numbers of newly enfranchised working-class men wished to follow their actions and the columns of the local paper allowed them to do this easily. Clearly, there was also a new democratic imperative for local politicians to get coverage and court popularity in the press. Benson argues that the late nineteenth century saw provincial papers, like their metropolitan counterparts, inclined to 'personalise and denounce'. That tendency led to the enthusiastic coverage of colourful and quotable local politicians such as Osborne Morgan, who provided a great deal of what journalists would now call 'good copy'. Edwards argues that Morgan acted as a 'mould breaker' in Welsh politics at the time, consistently supporting movements to introduce democratic reforms into areas like education, as well as advocating the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, arguably the key 'Welsh issue' of the day, intrinsically linked to the politicization of Welsh identity. In a later speech, Morgan is recorded as saying that Wales had its own nationality, rights to which it had been entitled, and that he could not see why Wales' loyalty was denied what had been granted to Irish terrorism (Edwards, 1997). These were radical sentiments at the time, not necessarily 'vote winners', and the coverage of Morgan in the local press is not surprising, although it should be noted that he was far from the only local politician to receive coverage. The Flintshire Observer contains numerous references and commentary on other notable political figures during the aftermath of, and fallout from, the Mold Riots.

In the period studied, however, Morgan acts as a kind of lightning rod for the *Flintshire Observer* and *Chester Chronicle*, with both newspapers frequently referring to his pronouncements even when they are not directly related to the issues being discussed. The *Chester Chronicle* (4 November 1868) cited Morgan's return to politics as 'the dawn of a new era for the political life of the county': this from a newspaper that frequently disagreed with his stance on a range of important issues, arguably an acknowledgement of the importance of

this controversial and quotable figure for their circulation statistics. Cragoe argues that Morgan 'spoke in terms which offered a glimpse of the way in which the dynamics of politics in the principality had changed since the 1868 election, and become decidedly more 'Welsh''. He refers to Morgan's habit of offering 'stirring rhetorical pronouncements that had hitherto been lacking in Welsh politics (and) their application to the issue of education reflected the head of steam that had been built up by the new Welsh members in the wake of the 1868 election, and which infused discussion of parallel interest to nonconformists, such as burials and sites for public worship.'

It should also be noted, however, that there is a considerable contrast between the nationalist-leaning rhetoric pursued by some Welsh-language newspapers in north-west Wales and the English language newspapers in the north-east examined for this article. While contemporary Welsh language newspapers pushed the politicization of Welsh identity, the more reactionary English-language press tended to demonize those involved in anything that could be interpreted as unrest. For example, the *Flintshire Observer*, having carried Osborne Morgan's extraordinary defence of the Welsh language highlighted above, clearly felt a more cautious response was commercially astute and delivered this a week later, on 10 September 1860.

> Mr Osborne Morgan in his eloquent address at our recent meeting we cannot but think allowed his patriotism some little to rule predominant. He drew an unfair comparison between the literary tastes of ourselves and our Saxon neighbours and would have us believe that while we in Wales indulged our literary congresses our English friends found pleasure in Punch and Judy and donkey races forgetful that such exhibitions take place to the no small amusement of our friends at home!

In contrast, Cragoe cites the *Baner Ac Amserau Cymru's* (The Banner and Times of Wales: a Liberal-supporting Welsh-language weekly newspaper) reception of various approved MPs, 'those that had Welsh interests at heart', greeting Morgan's appearance as Denbighshire candidate as 'a Liberal of the right sort, of Welsh blood and Welsh feeling'. He concludes that this reflects the fact that national identity formed a major part of the 1868 election, albeit couched in terms of noncomformity.

The extent to which Welsh identity became genuinely politicised during this period is much disputed among historians. The contemporary resonance of comments like those of Osborne Morgan has been questioned by historians like Kenneth O Morgan, who argue that such rhetoric merely pointed to a British-wide assault on privilege that characterized the era politically. However, many other historians (Davies 1993, Williams 1985) argue that the 1860s did mark the beginning of the politicization of Welsh identity. Indeed Cragoe argues that Welsh interests began to be championed, following the Liberal victory of 1868, in a way unknown before this parliament and that the self-conscious effort discernible in the speeches of key members such as Morgan and Henry Richard to make a reality of Welsh representation, mark the years between 1868 and 1874 as a turning point in the history of Wales in parliament. In particular, Morgan and Richards brought into parliament a determination to represent the interests of Welsh noncomformity, and ideas about representation articulated during the 1868 election campaign marked a real shift away from the established norm (Cragoe). The image of Wales as a nation of noncomformists had become familiar. This is one of the most important contexts behind any reading of contemporary local newspapers in the Welsh borders of the 1860s. It gave the Welsh a collective identity, and the resultant tension is clear in many of the responses to the Mold Riots and other contemporary political issues.

For example, the Conservative supporting *Chester Chronicle*, tasked with appealing to a cross-border audience, provides some interesting passages illustrative of how these tensions were dealt with by a largely conservative, and often reactionary, local press when dealing with overtly political unrest. On 5 June 1869, it carried the following editorial in response to the Mold Riots in which the national dimension is made clear, as is an implicit link with Irish republicanism as if in acknowledgement of the potential political consequences of industrial unrest in Wales. It should also be noted that this editorial was published in the immediate aftermath of the riots, before the facts were known. This might have been expected to induce caution on the part of the newspaper in terms of its conclusions about those responsible, yet the opposite is the case. The implications of this highly politicized content, in terms of public opinion, are clear.

Unhappily for the good name of the little neighbouring town of Mold and to the disgrace of the Welsh colliers concerned, the proceedings were followed by scenes of almost unparalleled violence and bloodshed. Great as the concession was on the part of the prosecution the Welsh colliers seem to have been unfuriated with the thought of two of their comrades being carried to prison. They were blinded by passion.

As the day advanced, rumours of the wildest nature were prevalent, one, to which considerable prominence was given, being that the colliers would march to Flint and attack the prison with picks to release the prisoners. Rather improbably, seeing that they were in safe keeping in Chester gaol and that Chester would be prepared to give the riotous colliers as warm a reception as they did the fenians.

We read with horror of the agrarian outrages in Ireland and they are bad enough: but here, instead of single persons being cut down by a band of assassins, a set conflict goes on between two hostile bodies and the killed and wounded are as numerous as after a skirmish in a regular campaign.

This Mr Young [the mine manager], against whom the complaints which ended in these riots were made, was one of the persons who had to endure the savage treatment. The most cursory perusal of the evidence offered at the examination on Weds will show the sort of rude dictation and open violence to which he had to submit. The provocation all along was on their side

Political and industrial context

Although the miners in North-East Wales were acting in a context of industrial disquiet which had a clear national dimension, their experience during the 1860s and 1870s has received little academic attention when compared to the more obviously radical quarrymen of North-West Wales, among whom had arisen a more clearly defined set of national and linguistic tensions in the 1860s. The emergence and persistence of a tradition of political radicalism in Wales, and the importance of cultural factors in that tradition, are subjects that have attracted

considerable attention, with Jones (49) arguing that Liberal-dominated Gwynedd in particular illustrated this trend.

The quarrymen of North-West Wales had the advantage of greater numbers relative to the overall population and formed a more coherent community, which allowed them to gain greater rights at an earlier stage than many of their counterparts in the rest of Wales. For example, a society called Cymdeithas Undebol Chwarelwyr Cymru (United Society of Welsh Quarrymen) was formed above Bethesda in November 1865. There had been several earlier revolts of quarrymen but this was the first recorded attempt to organise a trade union. Jones (1) argues that these attempts at representation formed part of a "battle for survival fought in very distinctive communities", adding that the subsequent struggle "witnessed some of the most bitter and dramatic disputes in the history of the British working class".

The conflicts in the slate quarries of north-west Wales helped to shape the area's history: they also explain much about the pre-industrial history of that area. However, Jones also concedes that 'no amount of propaganda could hide the economic impotence of Conservatism's radical adversaries when faced with the wealth and economic control of landlordism', which refers to the pan-Welsh phenomenon of Tory landholders expelling Liberal-voting tenants in the aftermath of the 1869 election. However, it should also be noted that there was a degree of subservience among the quarrymen, which generated criticism in the local Welsh language press, further illustrating its relative radicalism, and highlighting the contrast between it and the English language press serving those communities affected by the Mold Riots at the same time.

For example, Jones quotes an editorial carried by Y Herald Cymraeg in 1870. "Does Wales know, I wonder, that the workers of Chwarel y Cae are slaves, perfect slaves? Ever since the election of 1868 they slip further every year into the hold of servility, until most of them have by now lost the last grain of independence...they will have to be squeezed almost to death before they will shout."

This was a response to a notorious action by quarry owner Lord Penrhyn who sacked and intimidated many prominent Liberals and, in 1870, less than a year after the Mold Riots, purged his quarries of agitators, dismissing over 80 quarrymen. However, it also revealed

frustration about the degree of docility among the quarrymen, who were far from the united and radical workforce they are sometimes portrayed as in contemporary accounts. The ferocious editorials in the Welsh press tended to strengthen this subservience rather than weaken it, as the words of the columnists were frequently resented. There was also a religious dimension. Hernon (70) points to the influence of the Calvinistic Methodists who urged all church members to avoid such 'devilish' activity as union-forming and public protest. This had powerful echoes in North-East Wales and had frequently dampened radical tendencies among the miners of Flintshire, with Dodd pointing out that Methodist preachers continually counseled 'patience' in industrial disputes throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century and that their preaching was not without effect. Indeed, Calvinistic Methodists placed a veto on Union membership in Mold as early as 1832 and crime statistics for the period suggest that North Wales experienced less violent crime than similarly industrial Welsh counties like Glamorgan and Monmouthshire (Dodd 415).

It is in this context that the emollient tone of editorials contemporary with the Mold Riots should be viewed. Consider this editorial in the Liberal supporting *Flintshire Observer*, a wholly Welsh paper, on 11 June 1860 in the immediate aftermath of the Mold Riots, which makes an extraordinary direct appeal to miners in another Flintshire colliery.

> Independently of the breach of the peace at Mold we regret to say that for some time past a rising of the Mostyn colliers has been dreaded. Men of Mostyn, let us entreat you to listen to reason. To imitate the mad example of your brothers at Leeswood would be the most suicidal policy you could adopt and we have too great a faith in your common sense for a moment to believe you would do so. Your interests are those of your employers and vice versa. If trade were brisk and the demand for coal great no reduction or alteration in your wages would take place, but as the contrary is the case how can you expect to be prosperous when the times to your rulers are ruinous? Meet your masters like men and under the unfortunate circumstances make the best bargain you can, remembering that half a loaf is better than none.

The hectoring, patriarchal tone clearly acknowledges what the paper perceives as being the danger of the situation, and demonstrates the contextual similarities between the situation of

the quarrymen in Gwynedd and the miners in Flintshire. Despite the pressure from Calvinist ministers and the reactionary press, as Dodd argues it was hardly likely that the Welsh labourer would always suffer in silence, "especially when to the ordinary causes of friction between employer and employed were added those of racial and sectarian bitterness. For English employers liked to have English foremen, who were often no more kindly disposed towards strange tongues and 'fancy religions' than the proverbial Sergeant-Major. It was sometimes alleged that when there was a need to discharge hands, an Anglican foreman would see that Dissenters went first.' (Dodd 399)

Indeed, the colliers had – presumably as a result of this sort of treatment - long been known for their resentment of the intrusion of strangers. As early as 1776 there were riots against the employment of Englishmen in the collieries round Wrexham. Fifty years later the Welsh Iron Company provoked controversy by bringing in Northumbrian colliers to work the new pits at Coed Talon, and the Mold Yeomanry and the Royal Maelor Cavalry had to be called out to restore order. In 1855 a seven week strike at nearby Treuddyn left a considerable bitterness amongst the colliers, and in 1863 there were further disturbances at Leeswood when the new (English) manager evicted local families in favour of his fellow Lancashire miners. In 1868, unpopular managers in nearby Wrexham collieries had been marched to railway stations and forced to leave. This was the practice of 'packing off' employed by the Leeswood miners, and it seemed a popular way of solving industrial disputes in north-east Wales at this time (Clwyd Record Office). The Mold Riots similarly revolved around the Welsh miners' resentment of an incoming mine owner, John Young from Durham, his habit of appointing men from his home area to senior positions, his alleged ban on the Welsh language underground, and his alleged 'favouring' of certain (English) workers.

Furthermore, there was also a history of more formally organized radicalism and union activity in the area, despite the influence of the Calvinists and the reactionary local press. For example, the Friendly Associated Coalminers union, founded in Lancashire in 1830 was soon adopted by Flintshire miners and led to a great deal of militant action, but the parent union 'probably exhausted itself with strikes in the course of the next few years'. Chartism made less of an impact in the region, compared to its heartland in Montgomery, and the later Union

of Miners which attained a membership of nearly 1000 in 1844 collapsed as quickly as it predecessor after ill timed strikes (Dodd 415) Miners then had to content themselves with ephemeral local clubs in Flintshire until at least the 1860s. However, it is worth noting that the brother-in-law of William Gladstone, Sir Stephen Glynne, reported to the Home Office that he had a bad opinion of Welsh colliers 'who were more ferocious, more unreasoning and more unmanageable than other similar bodies of men' (Clwyd Record Office, 9).

This, then, is the context in terms of industrial relations underpinning the violence of 1869. The local miners had a certain reputation for militancy, yet that reputation had frequently been undermined over the previous decades. Overall, the picture from contemporary accounts is unclear. For each account arguing the region's miners were unusually prone to rebellion and strikes, there are others that stress the worker's docility. Again, it could be argued that a close analysis of local newspaper coverage of a single, small-scale event like the Mold Riots casts a clearer light on the reception, and public perception, of industrial relations and political identity in contemporary working class communities. If the editorials suggest anything, it is that a real fear of widespread industrial unrest underpins the rhetoric. The following chapter will look at those editorials in more detail, in the context of a UK-wide provincial press which was at the height of its political power and influence.

Welsh and British Newspapers in the 1860s

Newspapers in the UK reached what can be viewed from certain perspectives as a zenith in the 1860s and 1870s. This brief window, after the removal of stamp duty and concomitant market liberalization of the press, but before the widespread commercialization of the industry, is sometimes referred to as the 'golden age' of journalism, and is frequently cited as an idealized form of public sphere echoing Habermasian reading of the development of public space. Lee, for instance, stresses contemporary perceptions of the educational value of the newspaper, which became the main credo of this 'golden age'. He quotes a liberal journalist writing from the perspective of 1887, by way of illustration: 'Newspapers were, perhaps, at their highest level of real value, though not of influence or circulation, in 1870 and the few years ensuing...The competition between rival producers was keen enough to force them to

use all their wits in seeking and winning public favour, but not yet so keen as to drive them to often unworthy ways of attracting and amusing readers.' (Lee 63)

Chalaby (2) argues for a more nuanced interpretation, however, suggesting that during this period it is also possible to observe 'a transition from a discourse that was political at heart and public in character to a new discursive genre which displayed entirely new philological characteristics'. As Conboy (2005, 2) argues, popular newspapers began to maximize their appeal by echoing the language of their audience, increasingly lower socio-economic groups, by writing in a 'stylised communal idiom'. Chapman (73) similarly suggests that transformations in editorial practice were a product of the drive to reach new audiences.

Inevitably, then, there were political implications in the sort of popular journalism which began to emerge during this period. Newspapers in the late 1860s and early 1870s, whether London-based or 'provincial', were a blend of advertising, information and politicized content. It was a commercially successful and politically powerful combination that acted as a harbinger of future trends. If we accept the assertion that newspapers were at their highest level of 'real value', whilst also accepting the hypotheses of Chalaby, Conboy and Chapman that popular newspapers were simultaneously coming to terms with an understanding of commercial realities, and beginning to attempt to maximize their appeal by popularizing their style of address, we must acknowledge the obvious political power that such a combination of factors represents. The period when the tension between commerce and idealism remained briefly in balance is clearly a pivotal one for the long-term relationship between journalism and politics.

The era in question was indeed a tipping point in British journalism, but moves towards the commercialization of the press were gradual, and the overarching ethos of the press during the period of this study emphasized information and guidance, and in the case of the 'local press' placed an emphasis on the erosion of parochialism (Lee). This latter assertion is of considerable interest, particularly in the light of more recent research, which has focused on the English provincial press. Several authors have argued that newspapers outside London had notable political power in the 1860s and 1870s and have been unjustly neglected by academics (Walker, Benson). It was not merely the national press which attained a zenith of

informative value and political power at this time. It also represents a highpoint in the political influence, and informative value, of the local press: 'The period from repeal (of stamp duty) to 1914 may be regarded as the great provincial newspaper. Whatever their political complexion, they were set on providing as full a service to their readers as possible. The thoroughness and depth of their coverage, particularly of local news, was greater that it had ever been or would be again.' (Manders)

Benson is particularly critical of the tendency of media historians in this period to concentrate on metropolitan developments, with the provincial press merely a 'casualty' of new ideas emerging from London. His study of local newspapers in Wolverhampton suggests that the provincial press was 'less cautious, more calculating, and more sensationalist, than much of the existing literature would lead one to suppose'.

In the aftermath of the Mold Riots, the editorials of local newspapers along the English-Welsh border illustrates this willingness to express opinion in a way that was relatively new, and would arguably be less acceptable in the national, London-based press at that time which was only gradually shedding its reputation for conservatism. An editorial in the Chester Chronicle, later than the immediate reaction highlighted in previous chapters, and following the trial of the Mold rioters on 14 August 1869, further illustrates the highly political nature of the newspaper's coverage. There are strong populist overtones to the coverage, and more than a hint of Conboy's assertion that newspapers had begun to echo the language of their audience, early signs that journalists were prepared to use the drama of the situation for commercial advantage.

> The trial was plain and simple. Grievous injuries were caused by the attacking mob. Indeed the deaths of the four unfortunate persons killed were due indirectly to this violence. We can easily understand that there is a feeling among the miners of having been aggrieved. They are men of extremely limited education, who have a strong esprits du corps, if such a name can be given to the habit of moving in gangs. However mistaken, they have got the notion into their heads that their cause is the right one and that Young and his masters are tyrants and the mode they have adopted to carry this belief into effect only results from the persuasion of their own power. The thing is altogether wrong-headed

and stupid of course. They remind one of the machine breakers of past years. Of course they must be put down, as all revolutionaries and law breakers have to be.

There is a clear sense here of newspapers transcending their role as simple purveyors of information. Chapman's suggestion that editorial practice changed in a deliberate attempt to reach new audiences is apparent, with the passage designed to appeal to an aspirational working class audience as well as a traditional middle class audience by attempting to articulate the views of the people through its rhetoric. The language is clear and concise, and the opinions (from a Conservative-supporting newspaper) clear, if brutal in their expression. At root, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this newspaper was deliberately intending to court controversy for commercial reasons. By pandering to their readers' prejudices about the Leeswood miners and their tendency towards rebellion it positions itself somewhere to the right of its competitor the Flintshire Observer, which is considerably more controlled in its reactions. Again, there is a national dimension to this, in the sense that the Observer was distributed largely within Wales while the Chronicle had readers on both sides of the border but was essentially aimed at an English audience. As Peters and Skinner argue in their study of the late nineteenth-century distribution of local newspapers in nearby Wrexham, it seems likely that the geographical circulation of each newspaper was limited by both its own editorial politics and that of its rivals. It was not the distribution network that limited the circulation of newspapers in north-east Wales, but the political complexion of rival newspapers which represented neighbouring areas. The debate then becomes one about representation and the legitimacy of that representation. The ability of the press to successfully articulate the voice of the people depends on its perfecting a form which is liked by the people and is deemed authentic by them (Conboy 36)

The extent to which this politicized language was commercially successful is hard to gauge from this distance. However, it is certainly true that provincial newspapers across the UK experienced a significant growth in circulation at this time, and the evidence suggests that they expanded at the expense of London-based newspapers. Williams (116) adds statistical weight to this, citing a 300% increase in newspapers across the UK in 1855 alone, compared to a comparatively modest 60% improvement in London. Newspapers, no longer dependent

on London newspapers for their content, grew disproportionately outside London following 1855 (Williams). Indeed, Walker argues that the heyday of the 19th century provincial press in terms of both content and circulation can be located in the 30-year period after 1855. He also highlights one of the reasons for its neglect by academics: the sheer enormity of 19th century press output is 'a deterrent to its critical digestion by scholars'.

However, if the result is that provincial England has suffered from an overwhelming academic emphasis on metropolitan journalism and an assumption that English journalism is principally characterised by the output of the London press, Wales, perhaps predictably, has been almost entirely ignored in studies both of the national (UK) press and the British provincial press. For example, Lee's seminal study begins by saying 'it will be noted, by some with exasperation, that the study is limited to England, although reference is occasionally made to the other countries of the UK'. (Lee 20) Justifying this approach, he argues that 'Wales was economically poorly developed, and for the most part sparsely populated, and proved a far less fruitful source of journalistic talent than either Scotland or Ireland. Some papers of importance took root in the larger urban areas, but these were few. A Welsh-language press flourished, but by its very nature it remained limited and introverted'. He does concede, however that 'things began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the political value of Wales became more apparent to English politicians, and then more interest was taken in the development of its press.' Indeed, by the 1880s over 70 English weekly papers and 25 Welsh weekly papers were being published in Wales, causing Vincent to remark in the *Times* in 1889 that 'the growth of journalism, and of vernacular journalism in particular, in the Principality has of late years been little short of phenomenal. My impression, indeed, is that Wales supports more journals in proportion to its population than any other part of the civilised world.' (Vincent, 1889).

In this context, the newspapers of north-east Wales offer a valuable opportunity to reflect on the political vibrancy of local newspapers during this period. As outlined in the previous chapter, Wales in the 1860s was undergoing a series of profound social, cultural and political changes. Those changes were arguably more intense than those experienced at the same time in other parts of the UK, and they were complicated by the additional tension presented

in previously Welsh-speaking areas by incoming English-speaking migrants. Further, the politicization of Welsh identity at the time, which could be argued to have had at least some role in the disturbances at Mold, presented the local press with something of a conundrum, as many of them were cross-border in scope and audience and remain so today.

There is an obvious value in focusing on 19th century provincial papers in order to examine how local politics was organized and represented. A framework of sorts is provided by Anderson's examination (1983) of the links between national identity and the national press, with social historians conducting related work into identity as represented in a provincial press that was increasingly inclined to attempt to shape local and regional public opinion through its editorials rather than merely providing uncontroversial local news stories (Walker).

An editorial passage from 11 June 1860 edition of the *Flintshire Observer*, in which the newspaper gives its verdict on the implications of the Mold Riots, illustrates the willingness of the local press to emphasise localism and its credentials as the only Flintshire-specific newspaper, to express its views on the unrest.

> Alas! for Flintshire. Hitherto quiet and peaceable. Law and order, if we may make use of a homely phrase, are now 'turned upside down'. The Mold tragedy for the present is over, seven rioters have been committed for trial. The verdict of the jury has been recorded as 'justifiable homicide', the press of England approves of the verdict and Mr Bruce the Hon Sec endorses it.

Echoes, here too, of Pearson, who outlines the long history of 'successive waves of anxiety about sudden upsurges in crime and violence', while the former era of tranquility frequently cited by the press remains 'stubbornly elusive'. Later editorials in the *Flintshire Observer*, however, become more specifically political as the 'fallout' from the riots becomes more apparent. In this context, it is instructive to note Lee's (27) earlier study in which he stresses that, because the newspaper was such an important channel of information it was also recognized as a means of social control, a point echoed by Walker who argues that the political influence of the local press was much remarked upon by the middle part of the 19th century. While this is perhaps clearest in the August 16 passage from the *Chester Chronicle*

highlighted previously, the *Flintshire Observer* also indulged in overt attempts to shape public opinion (13 August 1860).

> The sentence is a heavy one (10 yrs penal servitude) but the offences were also grave. Law and order must be upheld and our working men must be taught that they are not law makers nor will they be allowed to be law breakers. Five men only have thus been sentenced for the acts of 100s. Thousands of stones were hurled by probably as many hands and the sins of the many have been visited on the few and probably not the men who were hotly engaged in the riot and perhaps in some instances threw no stones at all.

In general, however, a pattern emerges. The liberal-supporting and Welsh-based *Flintshire Observer* tends towards a more even-handed interpretation of events. Although always careful to condemn the rioters, the *Observer* also outlines the case against John Young, the mine owner, and to a small extent gives the perspective of the miners although their voice is never directly heard. In contrast, the *Chester Chronicle*, a Conservative newspaper, was considerably more strident in its criticism.

On 5 June 1860, in the immediate aftermath of the riots, the *Chronicle* ran the following editorial, which sought to excuse and explain the actions of the troops in opening fire on unarmed civilians. It is worth quoting in its entirety, again remembering that two of those killed were women, one of whom was merely a bystander.

> Penned up in that little corner as the defensive force were, it would be absurd to expect that regularity of method which discipline would require if they were on horseback, say, and had the command of a street or square. There was only a mere handful of men, as the bulk were in the other part of the station, and they were obliged to make the best of the opportunities of defence still left to them. If there has been any rashness in retaliating it should clearly be bought to light at the inquest; but the testimony of all from whom we have been able to get reports would seem to far to put the opposite conclusion.'

> The small body of men engaged here were fulfilling a simple though very necessary duty and those who ventures such a murderous attempt to frustrate their purpose had to take the risk of the consequences. Our chief regret is for the soldiery and police who got so

roughly handled and for the doubly unfortunate persons who lost their lives while idly gazing at the fray. The soldiery and police were very roughly handled - things not in themselves to be desired. But we have to ask who were primarily in fault for these calamities and what will be their probable effect? The answer is one of a painful kind. We are met at the outset with the patent fact that for a considerable time the miners of this half governed district have been in a state, as far as the rule of law is concerned, of semi-civilisation.

If newspapers were innovating by introducing 'sensationalism' as a means of gaining competitive advantage as the market intensified in the 1860s, Benson (2009) is critical of the fact that writers like Chalaby (2000) have ignored the provincial press in their analyses of these trends. Passages like this emphasise this point. It strongly suggests that the *Chester Chronicle* was aware of journalistic innovations that were increasingly used by London-based newspapers at this time, and was using them to gain a commercial advantage in a local newspaper scene that was crowded and highly competitive. Lee (1976) asserts that newspapers were seen as agents of social control at the time, partly because of high circulation, but also because of their willingness to attempt to shape public opinion. In a climate of political tension, such as Wales in the 1860s, it is hardly surprising that local newspapers would take the opportunity to attempt to preach to their audience by using those 'new' journalistic techniques of sensation and therefore persuasion.

Marx felt that British industry at the time was characterised by unprecedented levels of exploitation between employers and workers, the product of radically altered working methods and technologies. The result was unionisation and the politicisation of labour issues. It was precisely these issues, and their wider implications, that troubled the Chester Chronicle, and presumably many of its readers, with the Mold Riots symbolizing the worst of their fears about the radicalisation of the nearby Welsh miners. If, as Savage and Miles argue (57), class formation is a spatial process with rural areas just as likely as urban areas to be associated with particular social groups, then identity is built on a territorial base which affects the forms of collective action open to its residents. The Chronicle's final reference that 'miners of this half governed district have been in a state of semi-civilisation' must be seen in this

context: a journalistic technique to distance itself and its readers from the Welsh mining villages ten miles away that still has resonance today.

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