

The Irish Sunday newspaper: its role, character and history

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In his foreword to his 1967 edited volume, *Your Sunday Paper*, the British culture critic, Richard Hoggart, noted that 'though a great deal has been written on the press in general, there is relatively little on the Sunday press in itself'.¹ Many more words and volumes have addressed the general topic of newspapers since 1967, but, peculiarly, there remains something of a lacuna regarding study of the history of the Sunday press in Britain or in Ireland. Kevin Williams echoes that sentiment when he notes that the 'role of Sunday is often neglected in standard histories of the British press, where they appear in a secondary role to the exploits of the daily newspaper' while Brake, Kaul and Turner argue that the history of press scholarship privileges 'daily press above all else'.² This lack of critical scrutiny is all the more surprising when the Sundays have long lorded over their daily competitors in circulation and, some might argue, in influence. In Ireland, for instance, data at the Newsbrands website show that, for the period July to December 2017, daily newspapers in Ireland sold an average of 399,731 copies a day while Sundays recorded 567,600 sales.³

Williams notes that the earliest Sunday newspapers were serious publications and that it was 'the format of sex, gossip and crime developed by papers such as the *News of the World*, *Reynolds News* and *Lloyd's Weekly News* which enabled the Sundays to become Britain's best-selling newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century'.⁴ He also records that the *News of the World* reached its sales peak in 1950 when it was calculated that 8.44 million people bought the paper; the highest daily sale recorded was 5.27 million for the *Daily Mirror* in 1967.⁵ The oldest Sunday newspaper in these islands, and possibly in the world, is *The Observer* which was first published in London in December 1791 and was, 'in varying degrees a scurrilous gossip sheet, government propaganda rag and provocative thorn-in-the-side of the establishment. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, the paper's character

¹ Richard Hoggart (ed.), *Your Sunday paper* (London, 1967), p. 9.

² Kevin Williams, *Read all about it: a history of the British newspaper* (London, 2010), p.8; Laurel Brake, Chandrike Kaul & Mark W. Turner, (eds), *The News of the World and the British press 1843–2011: journalism for the rich, journalism for the poor* (London, 2016), p. 7. Other works include Cyril Bainbridge & Roy Stockdill, *The News of the World: 150 years of the world's bestselling newspaper* (London, 1993) & Harold Hobson et al., *The pearl of days: an intimate memoir of the Sunday Times 1822–1972* (London, 1972).

³ newsbrandsireland.ie/data-centre/circulation/

⁴ Williams, *Read all about it*, p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.

changed and came to reflect the more sober morality of the age'.⁶ It was founded by W.S. Bourne on the simple premise that, the establishment of a Sunday newspaper would obtain him a rapid fortune'. However, within three years Bourne found himself £1,600 in debt; he would not be the last person to find out the hard way that investing in Sunday newspapers was a dice with debt.

Sundays and weeklies

The history of Sunday newspapers in Ireland is, as subsequent chapters illustrate, more recent though no less colourful. This collection covers effectively three eras of Sundays in Ireland. The first, from 1905 (the launch of the *Sunday Independent*) to 1949 (the launch of the *Sunday Press*) is a quiet period in which the *Independent* essentially had the market to itself, apart from British imports and the short-lived *Sunday Freeman*. The second period, from 1949 to the launch of Telefís Éireann in 1961, is a more competitive environment in which the *Press* emerges as the biggest selling newspaper on the island. The final period runs from 1961 through to the end of the Aengus Fanning era at the *Sunday Independent* in 2010.⁷

The *Sunday Independent* was founded in 1905 and is the oldest surviving Sunday title in Ireland. But there were other Sunday publications before it such as the *Sunday Oracle* which enjoyed a short life in 1796 and the first iteration of the *Sunday Freeman* which was published from January to August in 1817. (It would be ninety-six years before the next *Sunday Freeman* would be published, as Felix Larkin recounts in his chapter on the newspaper). The picture is clouded by the number of weekly newspapers which were published on the island in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Maire-Louise Legg has pointed out 'an important feature of the 1880s was not just the increase in numbers of [weekly] provincial newspapers, but the increase in the number of newspapers which claimed to have nationalist politics. Their readers were an increasingly literate populace who had moved away from rural labouring and into serving in shops and clerking in offices'.⁸

Other weeklies were extensions of existing daily newspapers. For instance, the *Weekly Irish Times* was published from June 1875 to November 1941, when it was replaced by the *Times Pictorial*. Similarly, the *Irish Weekly Independent* appeared between April 1893 and August 1960 and the *Weekly Freeman's Journal* was published between January 1818 and December 1924. Typically such weeklies repurposed the best of the respective daily's

⁶ theguardian.com/gnm-archive/2002/jun/06/2

⁷ Aengus Fanning was editor of the *Sunday Independent* from 1984 to 2012.

⁸ Maire-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and nationalism: the Irish provincial press 1850–1892* (Dublin, 1999), p. 120

content from the previous week. They were a cheap and cheerful way to, in modern parlance, sweat your asset; the writing and setting of the texts had been done for the daily so the content just had to be repackaged. The weeklies were published mid-week (Wednesday in the case of the *Weekly Irish Times*; Thursday in the case of both the *Irish Weekly Independent* and the *Weekly Freeman's Journal*) and were aimed at those, particularly in rural areas, who visited the market or attended Mass at urban centres once a week. In addition, Dublin had three weekly sports papers, *Sport*, *Sports Mail*, and the *Irish Field* all of which published multiple editions throughout Saturday so as to carry cross-channel racing and football results.⁹

Sunday newspapers were (and are) different from their weekly competitors. In Britain, in the mid-nineteenth century, they were standalone operations and not offshoots of daily titles – that would come later. They were also publishing in a hostile religious environment. The sabbath was widely observed, particularly among non-conformist denominations, and newspapers, especially those that traded in sensationalism and stories arousing prurient interest, were considered unsuitable material. Williams notes that several attempts were made to close down such publications in the 1830s.¹⁰ But, having survived the 1830s, the Sunday press in Britain expanded rapidly in the next decade as they mixed politics and sensationalism – ‘a combination that was highly successful in attracting readers, particularly from a working class background’.¹¹ As time moved on their circulations increased and the content grew more and more racy – the newspapers had learned that entertainment in all its forms, from lurid court cases to sensationalist exclusives, was a magnet for readers. Williams argues that it was the Sundays that ‘laid the foundations for the formula that would drive the rise of the popular press, with their emphasis on murders, executions, elopements and a miscellany of small features’.¹²

In Ireland, however, there is little evidence of the newspaper industry expanding into Sunday titles in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, until William Martin Murphy decided to launch the *Sunday Independent* in 1905, the Sunday market was conspicuous by the absence of local titles. And even this title was essentially ‘a grand Sunday

⁹ *Sport* (1880–1931) was published by the *Freeman's Journal* and, from 1924, Independent Newspapers, which acquired the *Freeman* titles that year. *Sports Mail* (1921–39) was a re-invention of the *Irish Weekly Mail* which was published by the (Dublin) *Daily Express* (1851–1921). At some stage the Tivy family of Cork acquired the titles of the *Daily Express* and continued publication of the *Evening Mail* (which was purchased by the Irish Times Ltd in 1960). The *Irish Field* was sold by the *Irish Times* to the Agricultural Trust (publisher of the *Irish Farmers Journal*) in 2003 and today concentrates on the bloodstock industry.

¹⁰ Williams, *Read all about it*, p. 118.

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp 118–9.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 119.

edition' of the weekly, containing, as the paper promised, 'the very latest and fullest news' with special attention 'devoted to sport in all its forms'.¹³ The delay in Ireland spawning an indigenous Sunday newspaper market can, arguably, be attributed to a number of factors. Unlike Britain's booming industrialised economy, Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century was a predominantly agrarian society recovering from the devastation of the Great Famine (1846–9). In the space of sixty years the population on the island had fallen by almost half, from 8,175,124 in 1841 to 4,456,546 in 1901.¹⁴ And, although literacy levels rose from forty-seven to seventy-five per cent between 1841 and 1881 the strength of the local weekly press most likely obviated the need for a national Sunday press and the relatively primitive transport infrastructure inhibited circulation of newspapers from a Dublin base, or made it so costly as to make it uncompetitive.¹⁵

Certainly, there seems to have been no rush to create a native Irish Sunday press but as British Sundays, fuelled by the popular energy of the new journalism at the close of the nineteenth century, began to circulate in Ireland it must have dawned on Irish publishers that a Sunday publication might prove a valuable investment. But, as has been noted elsewhere, the idea of newspapers reporting gossip, scandal, crime, and conducting investigations was one far removed from Irish journalism at the turn of the century as such topics 'were taboo and the publication of such stories in imported British titles was viewed by the Catholic Church as contributing to moral degeneration of the local population'.¹⁶ However, judging by their sales, many Irish readers did not agree. By 1910 the popular British Sunday newspapers were reportedly selling between 80,000 and 120,000 copies a week.¹⁷ It was clearly a feverish atmosphere that would lead to actions such as the burning of newspapers, calls for import bans and actual bans. William Martin Murphy, however, saw that there was a gap in the market for an Irish Sunday; in time, the Irish Sunday newspaper would become distinctly Irish in character and, in some cases, very profitable, not least Murphy's own creation.

What is it about Sunday?

To understand the importance of Sunday newspapers it is essential to grasp the nature of Sunday life and the centrality of Sunday in the weekly calendar, particularly in Ireland. The day has been long observed by Christians worldwide as a day of rest and worship. Within that

¹³ *EH*, 18 Nov. 1905.

¹⁴ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900–2000* (London, 2004), p. 20.

¹⁵ L.M. Cullen, *Eason & son: a history* (Dublin, 1989), p. 5.

¹⁶ Mark O'Brien, *The fourth estate: journalism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Manchester, 2017), pp 6–7.

¹⁷ Kevin Rafter, 'The Irish edition: from "filthy scandal sheet" to "old friend" of the Taoiseach' in Brake et al., *The News of the World*, pp 179–94 at p. 180.

wide geographical and time-delineated arc there are extremes. While sabbatarianism – the belief that Sunday constitutes a day of strict religious observance and abstinence from work – carries little weight in the twenty-first century, pockets of it still exist. It was only in November 2007 that the Irish Football Association voted to allow matches in Northern Ireland take place on the sabbath, ending a sixty-year ban and ‘bringing the Irish league in line with the rest of the world’.¹⁸

Sabbatarianism was weak in Catholic countries as according to one scholar Catholics and other Christians preferred what was known as the ‘Continental sabbath’, which was considered both a holy day and a holiday. However, fears about the growing secularisation of Sunday also worried the Catholic Church. As recently as 1998, Pope John Paul II, in an apostolic letter, *In Dies Domini*, stated that many Christians no longer understood the significance of Sunday and he ‘exhorted the “disciples of Christ” . . . to avoid any confusion between the celebration of Sunday, which should truly be a way of keeping the Lord’s Day holy, and the “weekend”, understood as a simple time of rest and relaxation’.¹⁹

In the one hundred-plus years of Sunday newspapers in Ireland much has changed in society. In 1905 Ireland would have observed the day with religious fervour. Hearing weekly Mass was an obligation for Catholics who comprised the overwhelming majority in the twenty-six counties and, as the decades passed became as much a social and cultural habit as it was religious. It represented an opportunity for the community to gather together and, in many ways, represented a form of political communication – and not just from the clergy delivering the sermon or the latest Lenten Pastoral. Every major political party held an annual ‘church gate collection’ outside churches and at election time candidates would address congregations, often from the back of a lorry, as they dispersed after mass. And the array of newspapers outside the church – caught so well by Derek Speirs in the jacket cover photograph – is a reminder of the ties between the spiritual and secular in a previous time. Indeed, in the latter half of the twentieth century most Irish Sunday titles had priests as columnists – Fr Robert Nash in the *Sunday Press*, Fr Michael Cleary in the *Sunday Independent*, Fr Colm Kilcoyne in the *Sunday Journal*, and Fr Brian D’Arcy in the *Sunday World*. Though religious observance has declined dramatically in recent years – with weekly mass attendance falling from ninety to thirty-four per cent between 1973 and 2012 – Sunday

¹⁸ theguardian.com/uk/2007/nov/30/northernireland.ireland

¹⁹ Stephen Miller, *The peculiar life of Sundays* (London, 2008), pp 12 & 18.

retains cultural significance as a day of reflection on the six days preceding it.²⁰ Although that pulpit of reflection is now shared with television and radio programmes, the Sunday papers continue to generate debate and controversy, whether through loudly proclaimed exclusives or striking commentary. Marion Finucane's 'Sunday Show' on RTÉ Radio, for instance, uses the content of the various newspapers to generate and frame discussion on the topics of the week. The newspapers, and their commentary and stories, are positioned as integral to our understanding of the week, reinforcing their status as respected arbiters of cultural and political norms. It helps that most people do not work on Sunday leaving plenty of time to read their favourite titles – and frequently, though perhaps not as frequently as in the past, multiple newspapers are purchased.

Sunday's role as a day of reflection on what has passed and what was to come has been helped by the growth of the weekend concept. While a week is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as 'a period of seven days', there is a second definition: 'the five days from Monday to Friday, or the time spent working during this period'. The five-day week was a US gift to the twentieth century. According to one account it took decades for Saturday to change from a half-day to a full day's rest.²¹ In Ireland it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that a five-day week became the norm. Thus the weekend took root. This was an important development for newspapers published on Saturday and Sunday with the latter becoming more conscious of leisure-based features such as travel, gardening, wine and books. The demise of the national weeklies – the *Irish Times* ended its title in 1941 and the *Independent* in 1960 – allowed the dailies to publish more reflective and analytical content on Saturdays as well as more features. This was recognition that readership was increasingly more concerned with leisure, sport and entertainment. The Sundays also upped their game. In the dying days of the *Sunday Review* in late 1963, the newspaper published a separate 'Women's Review' supplement. It did not save the newspaper but in time supplements covering sport, business, property and culture would become part of the Sunday offering. The same would apply to Saturday titles where multiple section newspapers would become the norm.

²⁰ Research & Development Commission, *Survey of religious practice, attitudes and beliefs in the Republic of Ireland 1973–74* (Dublin 1975) & *IT*, 5 June 2012.

²¹ theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/08/where-the-five-day-workweek-came-from/378870/: In 1908, a New England mill became the first American factory to institute the five-day week. It did so to accommodate Jewish workers, whose observance of a Saturday sabbath forced them to make up their work on Sundays, offending some in the Christian majority. The mill granted these Jewish workers a two-day weekend, and other factories followed this example. The Great Depression cemented the two-day weekend into the economy, as shorter hours were considered a remedy to underemployment.

British imports and Irish sensitivities

The Sunday market in Ireland is particularly vulnerable, by dint of language and culture, to British imports much to the chagrin of the native industry which has long accused British competitors of ‘dumping’ and ‘predatory pricing’. Earlier objections centred on the perceived ‘gilded filth’ of the papers’ content. The history of antipathy to imported British newspapers is as old if not older than the indigenous Irish market. In 1899 the hierarchy called for action against the ‘printing presses in Great Britain [that] daily pour out a flood of infidel and immoral publications some of which overflows into this country’. There followed the establishment of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, the aim of which was to distribute ‘cheap publications of sound Catholic literature in popular form [to] remove the temptation of having recourse to filthy garbage’.²² By 1902, the society had 120 branches nationwide and had sold over 800,000 penny books.²³

It was an issue that inspired heated passions. In Limerick in October 1911 twenty-two newsagents, under pressure from the Holy Family sodality, signed a pledge not to sell copies of ‘undesirable publications’ and newsboys undertook not to sell the ‘objectionable prints’.²⁴ After this tactic failed, other methods were used, as when a large crowd gathered at Limerick train station and intercepted the delivery of Sunday newspapers. According to one account ‘the papers were solemnly burned, amidst a scene of great enthusiasm, the band playing hymns while the obnoxious journals burned, and then the Dead March (Saul) over their ashy remains’.²⁵ In February 1926 the minister for justice, Kevin O’Higgins, set up a Committee on Evil Literature to consider the possibility of the state taking action to prohibit the sale of certain publications. Various professional bodies, youth associations and other organisations were asked to submit evidence. These included the Catholic Truth Society, the Irish Vigilance Association, the Irish Christian Brothers, the Catholic Headmasters’ Association, the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, and Limerick-born Jesuit and social activist Rev. Richard S. Devane.²⁶ The Christian Brothers, represented by its superior general, Brother J.L. Craven, made a particularly strong submission by noting that, in terms of indecent literature, the Free State had:

²² *IT*, 4 Dec. 1899.

²³ *IT*, 28 June, 1902.

²⁴ *IT*, 26 Oct. 1911.

²⁵ *FJ*, 31 Oct. 1911.

²⁶ Michael Adams, *Censorship: the Irish experience* (Alabama, 1968), pp 24–5. Aidan Beatty provides a good summary of Fr Devane’s career at <https://aidanbeatty.com/2017/03/29/the-strange-career-of-r-s-devane/>

the vulgar and the coarse, the suggestive, the unsavoury, the offensive, the smutty, the ill-smelling; we have gilded filth, unvarnished filth, gross animalism, sex-knowledge series, sexual science . . . Is it any wonder that we should have so many houses of infamy – the resorts of night birds and wild cats? . . . At present the spiritualised Irishman is quickly passing away and all of the brute that is in him is being fed almost to the point of moral leprosy, to be followed by a tempest of fire from heaven.²⁷

While the Irish Vigilance Association told the committee that it objected to the publication of ‘revolting details of sexual crimes and of divorce cases’ the Catholic Truth Society listed the weekly circulation figures of the British Sunday newspapers to which it objected:

<i>News of the World</i>	132,444
<i>Empire News</i>	76,698
<i>Sunday Chronicle</i>	46,188
<i>The People</i>	30,660
<i>Reynold’s News</i>	28,772
<i>Sunday News</i>	22,198
<i>Sunday Herald</i>	15,842
Total	352,802 ²⁸

In relation to the *News of the World*, the Society noted that it was ‘devoted almost entirely to reports of murders, suicides, divorces, bigamy cases, indecent assault, incest, affiliation cases and crime in general, but particularly sexual crime’. There was no great surprise when, in spring 1927, the committee recommended that a censorship board be established. In addition, it wanted a clampdown on the availability of information relating to contraception.²⁹ The government’s decision to draft a censorship bill was welcomed by the archbishop of Dublin, Dr Edward Byrne, who noted ‘with most lively satisfaction that the State has initiated measures to provide a remedy against the traffic in vile literature’. He was not alone: referring to the ‘abundance of error and filth served up under cheap and attractive covers’ the archbishop of Tuam, Thomas Gilmartin, declared it the government’s duty ‘to pass with all

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 26–7.

²⁸ Ibid., pp 27–8.

²⁹ Section 16 of the 1929 Censorship Act made it unlawful for anyone to print, publish, sell or distribute any book or periodical that advocated ‘the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage or any method, treatment, or appliance to be used for the purpose of such prevention or such procurement’.

haste such legislation that will deliver our country from a dire evil'.³⁰ Lay groups also kept up the pressure. In May 1927 the *Irish Times* reported that masked men armed with revolvers had taken over Dundalk railway station, unloaded several thousand copies of British Sunday newspapers from a train, stacked them on the station platform, sprinkled them with petrol and set them alight.³¹ In the south, the Cork Angelic Warfare Association led the charge by seizing copies of the *News of the World*. When proceedings were taken against one of those involved, a priest called as a character witness declared that there was nothing wrong with seizing objectionable newspapers. He had even done it himself; while walking on the quays he had stopped a newsboy, seized his copies of the *News of the World* and thrown them into the river Lee – 'the only congenial place for such filth'.³²

To resolve the problem of imported newspapers that carried too much crime coverage Section 7 of the Censorship of Publications Act allowed the minister for justice to ban for three months any publication that 'devoted an unduly large proportion of space to the publication of matter relating to crime'. Once the Act became law this section was used vigorously: in November 1930, the minister indicated that he had used the section to ban six imported newspapers.³³ At this time the *News of the World* – the main target of the ban – was selling 130,000 copies in Ireland each Sunday. The ban was not accepted meekly – such healthy sales would have provided healthy revenues. The *News of the World* sent a delegation to meet the Censorship Board and the minister for justice but without reward. It would be 1961 before a variation of the order allowed a special Irish edition to be sold.³⁴

With the circulation of the *Sunday Independent*, the sole Irish Sunday newspaper, standing at a mere 83,399 copies per week in March 1930 it is fair to say that British imports had a firm grip on the Sunday market.³⁵ Interestingly, the opposite was the case in the daily market where British imports were about 170,000 per day but sales of Irish dailies totalled 280,000.³⁶ At a time of huge change in Ireland, the dominant news source on Sundays originated in the recently departed colonial power, with attempts to regulate the importation of papers via the imposition of duties adding to the confusion. While the 1932 finance act

³⁰ *WIT*, 5 Mar. 1927.

³¹ *IT*, 2 May 1927.

³² Cullen, *Eason*, p. 267.

³³ DED, vol. 36 (col. 719–20), 28 Nov. 1930. Initial bans lasted for three months with a second offence resulted in a perpetual ban. The periodicals were *World's Pictorial News and Competitor's Guide*, *News of the World*, *Empire News*, *The People*, *Thomson's Weekly News*, and *Weekly Record*. The *News of the World* was banned in perpetuity after it fell afoul of the provision a second time in Nov. 1930.

³⁴ Rafter, 'The Irish edition', pp 195 & 181–3.

³⁵ *II*, 30 Apr. 1930.

³⁶ Horgan and Flynn, *Irish media: a critical history* (Dublin 2017) p. 50.

imposed a duty on imported newspapers and periodicals it exempted daily papers and papers ‘of which the superficial area of page or front cover does not exceed three hundred and twenty square inches’.³⁷ This resulted in British Sunday titles ensuring they complied with the page measurements to avoid the duty. However, the following year’s finance act imposed a duty on *all* imported daily newspapers – but left the size exemption in place, to the benefit of British Sundays.³⁸ As noted by one commentator, the value of imported daily papers declined from £216,000 in 1932 to £99,000 in 1934.³⁹ By the early 1940s the situation was somewhat moot as wartime newsprint shortages and transport difficulties resulted in British newspapers temporarily side-lining the Irish market. Post-war, British titles returned, with the Revenue Commissioners reporting that the annual total number of imported Sunday newspaper had increased from 15,704,988 in 1947 to 20,268,360 in 1949.⁴⁰ In 1950 one Clann na Poblachta TD, Seán Ó Tiománuidhe, questioned whether the anomaly in duty arrangements that favoured British Sundays resulted from the fact that the only Irish Sunday was the Fine Gael supporting *Sunday Independent*. If, he asserted, the Fianna Fáil government had ‘put a tariff on British Sunday newspapers it would have the immediate effect of increasing the sales of the *Sunday Independent*’.⁴¹

In 1949, now in opposition, the attention of Fianna Fáil turned towards establishing a Sunday title to accompany its daily title. The *Sunday Press* exuded confidence from the beginning; its first editorial announced the newspaper as ‘an event of national importance, whether considered socially, culturally or politically’. It wore its nationalist politics on its sleeve – so much so that in 1954 the Northern Ireland nationalist MP Cahir Healy wrote to the department of external affairs to suggest that it reproduce one of the paper’s articles on partition as ‘an excellent leaflet for distribution at meetings outside Ireland’. The civil servant who replied, one Conor Cruise O’Brien, noted that that he had been directed by the minister (future Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave) to state that Cahir’s suggestion would ‘be borne in mind’, though in a note to his superior O’Brien stated that he did not think Healy’s suggestion was practical and his reply was ‘merely an acknowledgment for the sake of courtesy’.⁴²

The *Press* and the *Independent* seemed set to battle it out to be the leading Sunday title throughout the 1950s, but by the middle of 1955 the *Press* had become the first Irish

³⁷ Finance Act 1932, second schedule.

³⁸ Finance Act 1933, part II, section 8.

³⁹ Donat O’Donnell [Conor Cruise O’Brien] ‘The Irish Independent: a business idea’ in *The Bell*, 9:5 (1945), 386–94 at 392–3.

⁴⁰ DDE, vol. 121, col. 993 (31 May 1950).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, col. 994.

⁴² NAI, DFA/5/305/14/273 (memo dated 8 Nov. 1954).

newspaper to sell over 400,000 copies. The *Sunday Independent*, however, was not far behind. In 1957, a 'popular' tabloid, the *Sunday Review*, attempted to break into this challenging and fiercely competitive market. Published by the *Irish Times* with the aim of broadening the financially strapped company's revenue base, the *Review* lasted six years before the money ran out. When it closed the paper was selling 190,000 copies per week. Among its legacies was 'Inside Politics by Backbencher', editor John Healy's pseudo-anonymous column that would gain a second life in the *Irish Times* and help to change the nature of political journalism.

Meanwhile, the British Sundays had not gone away though their main circulation engine, the *News of the World*, remained banned.⁴³ Indeed, by the mid-1950s there was growing anxiety about the presence of British Sundays in the Irish market. At a meeting of the Prices Advisory Body in November 1955, John J. Dunne, director and general manager of Independent Newspapers stated that 'a matter of grave anxiety to the two Dublin offices publishing a Sunday newspaper was the vigorous drive by English Sunday newspapers'. He told the committee that some 435,000 of these Sunday newspapers arrived in Dublin every weekend and it looked as if some British newspaper companies were seeking to print a portion of their Sunday output in Dublin each Saturday night. The drive for Irish circulation was, Dunne concluded, 'an intense one' and Irish publishers could not compete in the matter of expenditure 'because of the vast disparity in profits' involved.⁴⁴ The figure presented by Dunne seems accurate: a government memorandum from around that time estimated the sales of British Sunday newspapers in Ireland in 1958 as being 430,000 per week.⁴⁵

Despite this influx there was occasional disruption to the distribution of British titles. In 1953 a newspaper distributor's van was held up by masked men as it left Dublin. Telling the driver that they 'objected to the circulation of filthy newspapers and in particular to *The People*', the men took the bundles of the *Sunday People* and, having failed to set fire to them, 'scattered all the papers on the roadway tearing up a number of them'. While the garda commissioner's office proffered the view that the holdup arose from the formation of a new group called 'Cosc ar Foillseacháin Gallda' (Ban on Foreign Publications), which 'contained members from Sinn Féin and Connradh na Gaedhilge' (sic), the secretary of the department of justice, Peter Berry, believed that there was 'no particular reason to believe that this

⁴³ The ban clearly irked the London paper's executives: in 1958, they leveraged their power to stop the *Sunday Review* being made available in Britain on the day of publication. Their action was noted in an official complaint to the Irish government; see NAI, DFA/5/379/127 (*Sunday Review*, 1958).

⁴⁴ *IT*, 19 Nov. 1955.

⁴⁵ NAI, DFA/5/379/127 (*Sunday Review*, 1958).

seizure of English newspapers was political – it is more likely “Catholic Action” at work’.⁴⁶ In 1956 *The Observer* published a series on sex and society, the third instalment of which was headed ‘Family Planning’. Since section sixteen of the Censorship of Publications Act 1929 made it an offence to print, publish, sell or distribute any publication that advocated the ‘unnatural prevention of conception’ the theme of the forthcoming instalment caught the eye Brian MacMahon, secretary of the censorship of publications board. Unbeknownst to the department of justice, the censorship board had an agreement with the Irish Retail Newsagents, Booksellers and Stationers Association whereby the board would warn the association ‘in cases where purely informal complaints indicated that periodicals (especially those with no previous case histories) were inclined to go off the rails’. Thus MacMahon telephoned the chair of the association who in turn contacted *The Observer’s* Irish distributor, a Mr Kirwan who, on contacting MacMahon declared ‘he had no intention of getting into trouble over “birth control stuff” for the *Observer* people and that he would telephone them not to send the copies’.⁴⁷ According to a Revenue Commissioners’ account of the incident, Kirwan then telephoned *The Observer’s* editor ‘requesting the omission of the offending article. The editor told him that this was impossible as they had only one edition and indicated, apparently, that what was good enough for English circulation was good enough for this country’. Having travelled to Dublin Airport to collect the consignment of newspapers, Kirwan and the customs officer on duty read the article in question and ‘both formed the conclusion that it was objectionable’ with Kirwan expressing the opinion that it was ‘particularly inappropriate that such an article should appear in a newspaper circulating on Easter Sunday morning’. Since the customs service could not seize the consignment as the paper had not been banned by the censorship board, Kirwan simply abandoned the goods to the state.⁴⁸ The date of this incident was 1 April 1956. But these interruptions aside, British Sunday newspapers circulated without hindrance.

Greater competition

The 1960s was a time of great change in Ireland. Telefís Éireann broadcast for the first time on New Year’s Eve, 1961. The print media was also undergoing major change. The *Irish Times*, having flirted with bankruptcy due to its failed attempts to be a major player with the *Sunday Review* and the *Evening Mail*, now suddenly prospered under the editorship of

⁴⁶ NAI, JUS/8/1013, memo dated 28 Sept. & 2 Oct 1953.

⁴⁷ NAI, 90/102/139, memo from MacMahon to Thomas Coyne, dept. of justice, 6 Apr. 1956.

⁴⁸ NAI, 90/102/139, memo dated 6 Apr. 1956.

Douglas Gageby, catching the liberal breeze blowing through Irish society. This breeze was resisted in some quarters with the two Irish Sunday titles often utilised by members of the hierarchy to denounce what they viewed as politicians interfering in the Church's sphere of influence and the pernicious influence of television. This relationship reached its zenith in February 1966 when hierarchical thundering dominated the front pages of the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Press* for two weeks running. In the first instance, Bishop Michael Browne addressed a Saturday night public meeting in Galway at which, in the presence of the minister for education, Fianna Fáil's Jim Ryan, he lambasted the government's plan to close a number of one and two-teacher schools. Browne then announced that, owing to the 'lateness of the hour' he needed to leave and could not remain to hear the minister's response. To ensure press coverage of his speech Browne had sent it in advance to the religiously sympathetic *Sunday Independent* – but not to the Fianna Fáil supporting *Sunday Press*. The *Sunday Independent* duly ran the story under the attention-grabbing page one banner headline 'Bishop Attacks Minister'.⁴⁹ The following week, both the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Press* carried Bishop Thomas Ryan's denunciation of the previous evening's *Late Late Show* in which its host, Gay Byrne, had, in the midst of a competition, asked an audience member about the nightie she had worn on her honeymoon and received the answer that no nightie had been worn. Such entertainment was, Ryan declared, 'immorally suggestive'. And to get his message across, Ryan circulated the thundering sermon that he intended to deliver at 8.00am mass the following morning to the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Press* – both of which carried the story on page one.⁵⁰

The arrival of Telefís Éireann in 1961 presented far reaching challenges for Irish Sunday papers. While the instantaneous news cycle was still a long way off and the station's news and current affairs programming impacted more on daily than Sunday titles the new arrival presented competition for the public's attention and for advertising revenue. The Irish took to television with gusto. As of December 1967 fifty-nine per cent of all private households had a television set with programmes being watched by sixty-seven per cent of all individuals and by seventy-two per cent of all those aged 15 to 34. And while Irish Sunday newspapers were estimated to be read by eighty-one per cent of all adults, television proved a strong competitor for advertising revenue.⁵¹ While total advertising expenditure through Irish advertising agencies rose from £2.9m in 1961 to £8.5m in 1968 (a rise of 192%), press

⁴⁹ *SI*, 6 Feb. 1966.

⁵⁰ *SI & SP*, 13 Feb. 1966.

⁵¹ *IT*, 6 Feb. 1968.

advertising rose only from £2.4m to £4.3m (a rise of eighty per cent). In 1961 Irish television had only two per cent of all advertising spend; by 1968 this had risen to thirty-two per cent. In the same period the share of total advertising spend acquired by newspapers fell from eighty-two to fifty-one per cent.⁵²

Both Irish Sundays continued their head-to-head competition through the 1960s. In his chapter on the *Sunday Press* Ray Burke recalls that circulation peaked at over 500,000 at the end of 1963 when the paper included a four-page, full-colour souvenir supplement on John Fitzgerald Kennedy. At the *Independent* Hector Legge's religiosity was beginning to look out of place. But shortly before he departed as editor in 1970 he declined to publish what would have been probably the biggest scoop of his career – the untold story of what became known as the Arms Crisis. Within a year he was succeeded by Conor O'Brien but the circulation gap between both Irish Sunday newspapers had widened: in 1969 sales for the *Sunday Press* hit 420,000 per week compared to 331,000 for the *Sunday Independent*.⁵³

The 1970s continued the sense of change in the republic, but it was also the decade when the Troubles in the North – and the spin-off impact in the South – dominated the front pages. Ten years after the demise of the first Irish tabloid, the *Sunday Review* in 1963, the *Sunday World* was launched. It would prove a remarkable success, colourful, brash, controversial and popular. It tested as many cultural shibboleths as possible, including taboos such as the mention of sex as typified by its provocative slogan 'Are you getting it every Sunday?'⁵⁴ As noted by Siún Ní Dhuinn and Regina Uí Chollatáin, the paper's content indicates clearly how it viewed itself as 'a backlash of the cultural force-feeding' that Ireland had experienced in previous decades. Within its first six months of publication it achieved weekly sales of 206,442.⁵⁵ One of those involved in the establishing the title, Gerry McGuinness, took exception to the way in 'British papers were being dumped on to the Irish market at a lower price purely to boost circulation figures for ABC audit purposes, which, in turn, would help them sell more advertising'. At this stage, all British newspapers circulated tariff-free as a result of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement of 1965, which had provided for the removal of the duty on imported newspapers. McGuinness also took issue with governmental concern about how British television channels were being picked up in the republic and the declared intention to establish a second Irish television channel to counter this trend. It was odd, McGuinness concluded 'that the government considers it would not be

⁵² *IT*, 13 Mar. 1971.

⁵³ *IT*, 13 Mar. 1971.

⁵⁴ This notable slogan was coined by newspaper executive John Thompson, see *IT*, 21 Oct. 2006.

⁵⁵ *IT*, 10 Jan. 1978.

in the national interest to have the influence of British television available nation-wide on the one hand, yet appears to have no feelings at all about the effect freely-available and cheaper UK newspapers have in the Irish market'.⁵⁶

Leaving aside the continuing presence of the British titles, it is important to note that the success of the *Sunday World* broke the Irish duopoly. During the first half of 1975 sales of the *Sunday Press* fell below 400,000 copies for the first time in a dozen years. And by 1977 the respective sales stood at 381,611 (*Press*), 272,359 (*Independent*) with the *Sunday World* reporting sales of 293,000 copies per week.⁵⁷ The figures imply a weak performance by the *Independent*, but Conor O'Brien's short period as editor before he was replaced in 1976 by Michael Hand resulted in much outstanding journalism not least by investigative reporter Joe MacAnthony. The most celebrated story was MacAnthony's three-page investigation, plus banner headline treatment on page one that exposed the Irish Hospital Sweepstakes as a grubby money-making exercise which benefitted, among others, Sweepstakes chief executive Joe McGrath. Although originally planned as a two-part series, O'Brien famously decided to run it all in one edition because he feared that he would be forced to drop the content planned for the second week. Michael Hand's term was also relatively short but eventful. In 1982 he refused to publish an investigation by *Independent* news editor Kevin O'Connor which detailed a range of suspect activities involving then minister for justice Sean Doherty. Many years later O'Connor established that Taoiseach Haughey had requested a government minister to ask Hand to spike the story.⁵⁸ There were other lighter moments but by November 1983 Hand's race was run. He was moved upstairs and later enjoyed a journalistic Indian summer when he penned features, some award-winning, for the *Sunday Tribune*.

The *Tribune* had earlier entered the Sunday market in October 1980. An unlikely partnership of Hugh McLoughlin – one of the figures behind the *Sunday World* – and former *Hibernia* magazine editor John Mulcahy identified a gap in the market for a quality Sunday. It was, note Pat Brennan and Brian Trench in their chapter on the newspaper, 'an attempt to continue by other means that magazine's dissenting journalism'. McLoughlin recruited rising *Irish Times* journalist Conor Brady as editor after a disillusioned Mulcahy left, selling his shares to the Smurfit Group and, state Brennan and Trench, in the process becoming the 'only man to make a capital gain from the *Sunday Tribune*'. Within a short time its audited

⁵⁶ *IT*, 9 Nov. 1976.

⁵⁷ *IT*, 25 May 1974 & 31 Aug. 1977.

⁵⁸ Kevin O'Connor, *Sweetie: how Haughey spent the money* (Dublin, 2009), pp 28–9.

circulation was 110,000, propelled by a stream of political exclusives written by political editor Geraldine Kennedy, another young former *Irish Times* journalist. Both would return to the *Irish Times* and both would record firsts there: Brady as the first Catholic editor; Kennedy as the first woman editor.

Having been acquired by Vincent Browne (with the backing of Tony Ryan who had built a fortune through aircraft leasing) *The Tribune* declared its position clearly on several current and controversial issues such as the bans on divorce and contraception. Brennan and Trench wonder if, perhaps, the paper's 'attention to these issues' led to an informant calling with news of a teenage girl, Ann Lovett, and her baby dying after childbirth at a grotto in Granard, Co. Longford. The resulting story, note Brennan and Trench, 'had ripple effects far greater than the size of the report might have suggested . . . as Ann Lovett became an instantly recognised symbol of something much greater than a single girl's experience'.⁵⁹ They also argue that the *Tribune's* openness to 'points of view beyond the spectrum generally covered in media was seen most clearly but also most controversially in relation to Northern Ireland and republicanism'. Indeed, an interview with INLA leader and fugitive Dominic McGlinchey prompted Tony Ryan to summon Browne and managing director John Kelleher to his home where the confrontation was physical as well as verbal. Within a year Ryan wanted out. Browne found friends to buy his shares. But the company's future remained on a knife-edge, as it would until its final edition on 30 January 2011.

The *Sunday Tribune* was not alone in making its debut in 1980. Earlier that year the first edition of the *Sunday Journal* rolled off the presses. While the *Tribune* spoke to a largely urban audience, the *Journal* was aimed at a rural readership in its first iteration. But, as Mary Muldowney recounts in her chapter, the paper was in trouble almost from the start, despite a claimed circulation of 50,000 copies. By July 1980 the original investors had pulled out and Joe Moore, of the PMPA insurance company, had agreed to step in. It was not the happiest of arrangements: Moore did not want the *Journal* to continue as a 'farming paper'; his intention, states Muldowney, was to change the paper's focus to general features, 'with some news but with a strong motoring emphasis'. It did not fare well. Sales continued to fall as did advertising revenue and the *Journal's* final edition was published in June 1982. A year later an administrator was appointed to PMPA, Joe Moore was sacked and the government was forced to bailout the company at the taxpayers' expense.

⁵⁹ *ST*, 5 Feb. 1984.

In the late 1970s / early 1980s the landscape changed again. A second television channel (RTÉ2) began broadcasting in November 1978, an economic recession hindered people's purchasing power and a change to Canon Law in 1983 removed the obligation for Catholics to attend Sunday mass, if they attended a Saturday evening mass instead. The Church's rationale for the change was that Sunday had lost its 'traditional rhythm and society had created difficulties in celebrating the Lord's Day'.⁶⁰ This change resulted in the transfer of nearly twenty per cent of church congregations from Sunday morning to Saturday evening mass with knock-on effects on Sunday newspaper deadlines and circulation. Sales of the *Sunday Press* dropped from 369,156 in 1981 to 281,992 in 1984; over the same period sales of the *Sunday Independent* fell from 267,109 to 227,003.⁶¹ In a similar vein, the move towards Sunday trading resulted in a slow and then rapid alteration of Sunday from a day in which only newsagents and small shops opened for a few hours to allow for the purchase of 'Sunday goods' to a day when almost every shop and restaurant is open from noon to 6.00 pm. By early 1985 trade unions were acknowledging that Sunday trading was 'a fact of life' in large urban areas. And, despite regular appeals from members of the Catholic hierarchy for people to 'make Sunday a day of joy and freedom from work' and to beware the dangers of turning their minds 'from God to mammon', by the early 1990s Sunday trading was endemic across all commercial sectors nationwide.⁶²

With an emphasis on the previously neglected 'mammon' The *Sunday Business Post* was launched in 1989. It was, as Ed Mulhall states in his chapter, 'a venture that would come close to collapse on several occasions, make millionaires of some of its journalist founders, have several significant changes in its ownership structure with the different foreign and domestic entities, yet still operate in 2018 under the banner of "Independent journalism on Sunday"'. Mulhall recounts the dramatic last-minute manoeuvres as the first publishing deadline approached, the newspaper's early difficulties as it struggled to find its feet and how Stephen Ryan's outstanding design 'gave it a distinctive look'. The four founders divided the responsibilities with Damien Kiberd, a former business editor of the *Irish Press*, taking the role of editor; Frank Fitzgibbon, formerly editor of *Irish Business* magazine, was named managing director; Aileen O'Toole, formerly editor of *Business and Finance* magazine, took the role of news editor; and James Morrissey, formerly deputy business editor of the *Irish Independent*, was named senior reporter. Mulhall's chapter focuses on the Kiberd era which

⁶⁰ *IT*, 14 Nov. 1983.

⁶¹ *Business & Finance*, 13 Sept. 1984.

⁶² *IT*, 9 Apr. 1985, 25 Dec. 1987, 12 Dec. 1988 & 11 July 1991.

ended in November 2001. Four year earlier, the *Post* was in its prime, in profit and circulation had climbed to near 42,000 copies per week. In August 1997 British regional press group Trinity International Holdings bought the paper for £5.55m.

As the new kids on the block made their presence felt, matters at the *Sunday Press* went from bad to disastrous with numbing speed. In 1984 circulation of the *Press* was put at 281,992, down 100,000 copies since 1981. This compared unfavourably with 227,003 for the *Sunday Independent* and 93,175 for the rising star, the *Tribune*. Michael Keane succeeded Vincent Jennings as editor in 1986 but the sales continued to southward. In 1989 circulation of the *Independent* passed out the *Press*. In his chapter Ray Burke details the end: ‘the decline was terminal, hastened by haemorrhaging sales, worsening management-staff relations and a disastrous partnership with a US newspaper publisher, Ralph Ingersoll III’. The last *Sunday Press* was published on 21 May 1995.

In contrast the *Sunday Independent* was going from strength to strength under the editorship of Aengus Fanning who, in one interview, stated his determination ‘to do something slightly different. What’s needed is a chemistry which makes a newspaper compulsive, that you can’t ignore it, you’ve got to buy the bloody thing’.⁶³ As Kevin Rafter outlines in his chapter, the re-invented title, as well as delivering headline grabbing exclusives and the views of controversial columnists, very often itself became the news.

The demise of the Press Group predictably disturbed the Irish market with British and Irish Sundays seeking to mop up *Press* readers. There was also room for entrepreneurs. On 28 July 1996 a novel new Sunday was launched. Building on reader interest in sport, *The Title* restricted its coverage to games of all hues though mostly soccer, GAA and rugby. It was edited by well-known sports journalist Cathal Dervan and the managing director was former Meath GAA footballer and *Sunday Press* journalist Liam Hayes. Described as a ‘brave and colourful effort, but a gamble that did not quite come off’ within a year it had morphed into *Ireland on Sunday*, a more general interest newspaper which, by the end of 1999, was selling more than 65,000 copies. Horgan and Flynn describe the editorial content as a ‘mixture designed to appeal at least in part to the slightly more conservative, more nationalist readers who had been left high and dry by the collapse of the *Sunday Press*’.⁶⁴ In June 2000 it was taken over by the rapidly expanding Scottish Radio Holdings which then,

⁶³ Ivor Kenny, ‘Aengus Fanning – *The Sunday Independent*’ in *Talking to ourselves: conversations with editors of the Irish news media* (Galway, 1994) pp 208–24 at p. 214.

⁶⁴ Horgan and Flynn, *Irish media*, p. 177.

six years later, sold on the paper to DMG, publishers of the *Daily Mail*. Thus it was rebranded for a second time, becoming the *Irish Mail on Sunday*.

As already noted, imports of British newspapers, particularly Sunday titles, have been a feature of the Irish market since the turn of the twentieth century. Our focus in this volume is on the Sunday press in the Irish republic. But given the long-held determination of British publishers to tap into the Irish market – and equally the desire of Irish readers to read British publications – there is a history of hybridity between core British Sunday newspapers and their Irish offspring. In the past this may have amounted to little more than inserting Irish sports reports and the occasional news story written by a ‘stringer’, an industry term for freelance or moonlighting journalists who regularly contribute to a title. These ‘stringers’ would augment staff journalists based in Ireland such as Chris Ryder at the *Sunday Times* with editorial control residing in London. However, in recent years the Irish editions of the *Sunday Times* and the *News of the World* (which published a distinct Irish edition from 1996 until that title’s demise in 2011) represented a more significant investment in content and staff while still adhering to the model of customising the core product for the local market. The same can be said in varying degrees of the other hybrid titles: the *Irish Mail on Sunday*, the *Irish Sun on Sunday* and the *Irish Sunday Mirror*. Together these three titles and the *Sunday Times* sold 225,712 copies per week in Ireland between July and December 2017.⁶⁵

This issue of hybridity, with its complex balancing of British and Irish interests and opinions, is explored in Michael Foley’s chapter with particular focus on the experience of the *Sunday Times* in Ireland. Foley argues that the development of the modern hybrid press was ‘made possible by a number of factors: the historic presence in Ireland of the British press, new technology that allowed a high degree of editorial change between Irish and UK editions, and the health of the Irish economy as it entered what would be called the Celtic Tiger era’. Cultural fluidity is another important factor; the popular culture stars in Britain are stars in Ireland too; football supporters share the same passions and the same teams; and radio and television know no borders. But there are important differences; while the launch slogan for the Irish edition of the *Sunday Times* was ‘The English just don’t get it’ the paper has always been, and remains, a British managed and controlled newspaper.

But just as British titles ‘editionised’ for the Irish market, Irish Sunday titles also ‘editionised’ with specific editions printed in the order of how far these needed to travel to reach readers. Generally, the production schedule took the order of British, Northern,

⁶⁵ newsbrandsireland.ie/data-centre/circulation/

country, Dublin, and [Dublin] city editions. The infrastructure needed to distribute these newspapers was substantial. In 1979 a government report noted that every Saturday night / Sunday morning over one million newspapers were printed in Dublin city before being dispatched by trucks and vans to focal point around the county, after which local distribution contractors took over.⁶⁶

While many of the titles examined in this volume produced Northern editions, for the very most part Northern Ireland readers gravitated towards British Sunday titles, with indigenous Sunday titles only emerging from the 1960s onwards. This may have been influenced by the widespread observance of the Sabbath in the North. However, in 1965 the *Belfast News Letter* entered the Sunday market with the *Sunday News* – an attempt by the unionist-oriented *News Letter* to engage with those not of that political persuasion. Its first editor, Pat Carville, was recruited from the nationalist leaning *Irish News*. As the only Sunday title published in Northern Ireland, with a 2.00 am deadline on Sunday mornings, the paper was well placed to build on the demand for news that accompanied the outbreak of the Troubles. Among those who worked on the paper in its early days was chief sub-editor, Andy Barclay, who later went on to work with, respectively, the *Sunday Tribune* and the *Irish Times*. Also there was Jim Campbell (later of the *Sunday World*) who, as news editor, was responsible for assigning a young reporter, Colin McClelland (later editor of the *Sunday World*) to Belfast's hot spots. Ironically, it was the huge success of the Northern edition of the *Sunday World* (with Campbell as its Northern editor) that helped bring about the demise of the *Sunday News*. The death-knell for the title came, however, when, in 1988, the *Belfast Telegraph* launched the tabloid *Sunday Life* to huge success. From sales of over 100,000 a week in the 1970s, the *Sunday News* dropped to less than 25,000 copies a week in 1993, the year it ceased publication.⁶⁷ *Sunday Life* was recorded as selling 32,892 copies per week for the six months between July and December 2017.⁶⁸ It is important to note too, that some short-lived recent Sunday titles – *Stars on Sunday* (March–May 2003) and the *Irish Daily Star Sunday* (2003–11) – are not examined in this volume for reasons of space. For the same reason we were unable to explore the recent history and impact of the *Irish Mail on Sunday*.

How Sunday newspapers work

⁶⁶ Report of enquiry into the supply and distribution of daily and Sunday newspapers published in Ireland, and of newspapers, periodicals and magazines distributed by wholesalers (Dublin, 1979), pp 12–14.

⁶⁷ Hugh Oram, *Paper tigers: stories of Irish newspapers by the people who make them* (Belfast, 1983), p. 74. See also *IT*, 25 Mar. 1993.

⁶⁸ Information courtesy of Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Sunday newspapers are different to their daily counterparts in appearance, content, attitude and pace. Some titles, such as the *Sunday Independent*, are part of an established stable of newspapers, while others, like the *Sunday Business Post*, are stand-alone publications. And while the current dramatic decline in the fortunes of print newspapers has resulted in many changes in journalistic work practices with smaller staffs and greater flexibility across company titles, Sundays remain a distinctly separate publication. This is different to the US, for example, where newspapers often operate a seven-day production cycle; the *Sunday New York Times* is still the *New York Times*. In Ireland, the *Sunday Independent* would never be viewed as the *Irish Independent* on Sunday, nor would the staff of either title wish it so, though in recent years rationalisation has resulted in some overlap of personnel and function.

This conscious creation of a visual identity is not new. British culture critic Raymond Williams recalled that ‘by the 1840s, when the Sunday papers had become even more successful, there was a distinctive “Sunday-paper look”, which we can still often recognise’.⁶⁹ Sundays have a recognisable visual identity and while the tone varies according to the title – from the ominously serious to the entertainingly flippant – the Sundays call out to readers in a loud voice, staking their claim to define the day, the week.

But, asks Paul Barker, ‘in what sense are the Sundays *newspapers*?’ How often do Sunday newspapers share a lead story? Really hard news, he states, ‘sometimes demands its own priorities’.⁷⁰ Of course Sundays will share a lead story when something happens of such import that they cannot avoid it, but generally a Sunday newspaper is seeking not to cover common ground but to be seen to be different, to stand out. In sport, however, it is different. Most games are still played over the weekend so a Sunday has the advantage of news reports on games or previews of same. Sunday titles also labour under the difficulty of rarely having a set news agenda to follow. While the daily diary of news events such as the courts, the Dáil, the stock exchange, financial announcements, political announcements and press conferences dictate, to a large degree, news coverage in the dailies, the Sundays generally have to generate their own stories. They can, for instance, produce a wrap-up on a running celebrity court case, but even here they have to find an angle that has not been exhausted in daily coverage.

As such, reporters have to unearth new stories or new angles on old stories. The former results in the high number of exclusives, often through investigative journalism, that Sundays generate while they achieve the latter by accentuating one or more of the five ‘Ws’

⁶⁹ Raymond Williams, ‘General profile’ in Hoggart, *Your Sunday paper*, pp 13–29 at p. 14.

⁷⁰ Paul Barker, ‘No news is good news’, *ibid.*, pp 30–42 at p. 30.

and ‘H’ often mentioned in journalism studies as the essential ingredients of a story: who?, what?, where?, when?, why? and how? In theory they have a week to do this but Sunday newspapers present significant production headaches. They demand discipline from journalists, both reporters and production staff, to pull together the disparate parts into a cohesive package, with deadlines running through the week so that page output can be managed efficiently. This is also why soft news, such as gossip (social diaries), celebrity profiles, general features and opinion/comment are so prominent. Generally they are not time-critical. Social diaries, defined by Stuart Hall as ‘often inconsequential stories about consequential people’ can sometimes be much sharper – as with socialite and journalist Terry Keane’s ‘The Keane Edge’ which ran in the *Sunday Independent* throughout the 1990s.⁷¹

Over the years Sunday newspapers have grown beyond the news and features paradigm to include magazines, sports supplements, property supplements, and any and every idea that might attract the all-important advertising. As a once-a-week publication, it must generate enough cash in a single edition to keep full-time and part-time staff employed and shareholders happy. And there are clear threats to the Sunday business model. In a declining market, as print increasingly gives way to digital, the distinctive look of the Sunday press is increasingly lost in generic home pages. However, one leading international editorial figure believes that the future for weekend print titles is brighter compared to that facing their daily counterparts. Former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger has stated that he did not believe there would be many daily print newspapers in ten years’ time: ‘I would have thought that many newspapers would produce a weekly edition and the weekend papers would be probably more long-lasting’.⁷²

In conclusion, it should be noted that a history of Sunday newspapers is also a history of Sunday newspaper readers, of power, culture, taste and morality, and, of difference as competition entered the indigenous Irish market in the shape of the *Sunday Press*, *Sunday Tribune* and the *Sunday Business Post*. The *Sunday Independent* of the 1990s was, it could be argued, a creature of the Celtic Tiger era, of expressions of wealth and loud annunciations of power, opinion, entitlement and privilege. But it could also be viewed as a newspaper that shook up a complacent establishment and challenged ‘official Ireland’s’ political power and cultural control. Equally, the earlier *Sunday Independent* of the Hector Legge era mirrored an Irish society under the yoke of a strict Catholic sensibility. However, generalisations about the role enjoyed by the Sunday press can, and should be, challenged by particular examples.

⁷¹ Stuart Hall, ‘The world of the gossip column’, *ibid.*, pp 68–80 at p. 69.

⁷² *IT*, 14 May 2018.

For instance, the *Independent* in the 1970s under editor Conor O'Brien, was also responsible for Joe MacAnthony's truly ground-breaking journalism about the Irish Hospital Sweepstakes.

Sunday newspapers were, up to recent times, by and large gendered publications, written by men for men with some minor roles for women. While this changed in the modern era when first Geraldine Kennedy and later Emily O'Reilly were appointed to frontline political positions – the former in the *Sunday Press* and the *Sunday Tribune*, the latter in the *Tribune* and the *Business Post* – it is still worth noting that there have been only three female editors of a Sunday newspaper, Fiona McHugh at the *Sunday Times* (2000–05), Noirin Hegarty at the *Sunday Tribune* from 2005 until its closure in 2011 and Anne Harris at the *Sunday Independent* (2012–14).

While this collection is a study of newspapers, not a socio-cultural analysis of Ireland in the twentieth century, understanding the socio-cultural backdrop and the social forces at play at any given time helps to better appreciate the work of journalism, particularly Sunday newspaper journalism. It also illustrates that, beyond simply using newspapers as sources, understanding the nature of newspapers – as shaped by their ownership structures, production routines, financing, journalistic ethos, editors and journalists – helps us construct a far deeper understanding of the processes of social change and stagnation and the role that print media played, and continues to play, in such processes.