

University of Chester

**This work has been submitted to ChesterRep – the University of Chester’s
online research repository**

<http://chesterrep.openrepository.com>

Author(s): Peters, Lisa; Skinner, Kath

Title: Selling the news: Distributing Wrexham's newspapers, 1850-1914

Date: 2009

Originally published in: Periodicals and publishers: The newspaper and journal trade 1740-1914

Example citation: Peters, L., & Skinner, K. (2009). Selling the news: Distributing Wrexham's newspapers, 1850-1914. In J. Hinks, C. Armstrong, & M. Day (Eds.), *Periodicals and publishers: The newspaper and journal trade 1740-1914* (pp. 203-233). Delaware; London: Oak Knoll Press & The British Library

Version of item: Author's post-print

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/77053>

Selling the news: distributing Wrexham's newspapers, 1850-1900

Lisa Peters & Kath Skinner

Lisa Peters is the law librarian at the University of Chester. Her main research interest is North Wales newspaper history. Kath Skinner is a learning resources assistant at the University of Chester. She is interested in Victorian literature, especially child-parent relationships.

Provincial press historians have stated that the success of a provincial newspaper depended to a significant extent upon the development of a reliable delivery service to its customers.¹ If a newspaper was unable to establish a strong distribution network this would severely restrict circulation and profits. The second half of the nineteenth century saw four weekly newspapers established in the north Wales town of Wrexham – the *Wrexham Advertiser* (1850-1936), the *Wrexham Telegraph* (1855-1863), the *Wrexham Guardian* (1869-1954), and the *Wrexham Free Press* (1870-1873). The methods used to distribute these newspapers across north Wales and the border area will be examined in this paper and how a newspaper's area of circulation can be ascertained from the location of its agents will be discussed. There will also be an examination of the variety of professions, some of which would not naturally be associated with the book trade, involved in distributing Wrexham's newspapers.

Newspaper distribution is intrinsically linked with geographical circulation, and newspapers used several methods to ensure that their issues reached a wide audience. Barker maintained that provincial newspapers were heavily reliant upon sales outside their town of publication² and consequently newspapers were always seeking to expand the limits of their area of circulation; but the larger and more rural the area, the greater the distribution difficulties. Wrexham's newspapers used five main methods of distribution:

1. Collection. Many copies, possibly the majority, were distributed within the town of publication. Consequently one of the most common methods of obtaining a newspaper would have been to purchase a copy at the newspaper office or from newsagents within the town itself. Most newspapers were published on market day when the town would be busier than usual with more potential customers in the locality. Ayerst estimated that

¹ Most notably, G.A. Cranfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper 1700-1760* (Oxford, 1964), p. 190 and C.Y. Ferdinand, 'Local Distribution Networks in 18th-century England', in Robin Meyers and Michael Harris (eds), *Spreading the Word: the distribution networks of 1550-1850* (Winchester, 1990), pp. 131-49 (p. 134).

² Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society* (Harlow, 2000), p. 41.

between 1830 and 1845 the number of copies of the *Manchester Guardian* sold ‘over the counter’ at the newspaper’s office declined, probably as a result of expanded geographical circulation³, and this phenomenon could have been repeated with Wrexham newspapers. Rural subscribers could either collect their copies from a local Post Office or, if they subscribed to either the *Advertiser* or the *Telegraph*, their copies would be sent to the nearest railway station for collection. Both the *Advertiser* and the *Telegraph* offered this service in conjunction with the Great Western Railway Company who issued half-penny labels to allow single copies to travel between two of their stations, with delivery by first train on Saturday.⁴

2. Post. Before the abolition of stamp duty in 1855, newspapers could be sent through the post to subscribers for no extra charge. This practice continued after 1855 in Wrexham though newspapers charged subscribers extra for postal delivery. As late as 1875, Wrexham newspapers were still posting out copies to subscribers in Liverpool and Manchester. Unsurprisingly, there were problems with late deliveries, in 1872 to Mold⁵, and again in 1875⁶ and 1876.⁷ The newspapers made clear that they accepted no responsibility for late or absent deliveries - they blamed the postal service.

3. Messengers. Messengers were similar to the paperboys and papergirls of today or the eighteenth century newsmen who travelled to neighbouring towns and villages to deliver copies to subscribers and to sell the newspaper in the streets. Some newsmen covered extremely large routes, for example, one delivered the *Manchester Mercury* to Bolton, Wigan, Preston and Kendal.⁸ In contrast, Wrexham’s messengers covered only nearby villages. Messengers were especially used by the *Telegraph*, possibly to deliver copies in areas where they had few subscribers and therefore where it was not worth having an agent.

4. “Hawkers.” “Hawkers” were used to sell copies in the street and were usually young boys. Sir John Gibson, proprietor and editor of the Aberystwyth-based *Cambrian News* sold newspapers on the streets of his hometown of Lancaster in this way in the 1850s⁹ and

³ David Ayerst, *Guardian, Biography of a Newspaper* (London, 1971), p. 83.

⁴ ‘Notice’, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 13 January 1866, p. 2 and *Wrexham Telegraph*, 3 January 1866, p. 2.

⁵ ‘Post Office Delays’, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 6 July 1872, p. 4.

⁶ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 23 January 1875, p. 4.

⁷ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 March 1876, p. 4.

⁸ Cranfield, p. 193.

⁹ Aled Jones, ‘Sir John Gibson and the *Cambrian News*’, *Ceredigion*, 12:2 (1994), 57-83 (p. 59).

Jones commented that hawking allowed young boys to combine employment and education.¹⁰ In 1896, the *Advertiser* advertised for boys to sell the Advertiser on Saturday mornings, probably in the streets of Wrexham.¹¹

5. Agents. The most popular method of distribution was establishing a network of agents in Wrexham and throughout the locality to sell the newspaper in their own shops and/or organise distribution to subscribers. Ferdinand described agents as other business people who gained an income from discounts on the newspapers and a commission on advertising or other goods they sold on behalf of the newspaper.¹² Agents allowed newspapers to establish a readership outside the local area without charging for delivery. As well as selling the newspaper in their place of business or home, agents might also have organised deliveries to nearby villages without an agent to local subscribers. As two leading newspaper historians have noted, the existence of an agent in a particular location did not necessarily mean that the newspaper sold many copies in that area.¹³ Wiles argued that lists of towns and counties with agents did not constitute convincing evidence of large circulation in the area as many newspapers indulged in bluffing and window-dressing.¹⁴ In addition if a newspaper attempted to circulate over a large area and acquire a large number of geographically dispersed agents this could have placed a large strain on the newspaper's resources. As with postal delivery, distribution problems could arise, leading to disgruntled customers switching to another newspaper. However, as a consequence of the rise of the urban and industrial society in Wales, commercial distribution through agents became the dominant newspaper distribution method in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵

The impetus behind the establishment of agents in areas some distance from the newspaper's publishing office was almost certainly the development of the railway network in north Wales from the late 1840s, an occurrence described by Jones as 'the single most important contribution to the growth of a mass newspaper market'.¹⁶ Preston pointed out that railways allowed a quicker and more efficient distribution network to be

¹⁰ Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: newspapers and the public in nineteenth-century England* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 139.

¹¹ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 19 September 1896, p. 8.

¹² Ferdinand, p. 135.

¹³ Cranfield, p. 203 and R. M. Wiles, *Freshest Advices: early provincial newspapers in England* (Columbus, 1965), p. 113.

¹⁴ Wiles, p. 113.

¹⁵ Aled Gruffydd Jones, *Press, Politics and Society: a history of journalism in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p. 105.

¹⁶ Jones, *Press, Politics and Society*, p. 106.

created, especially in rural areas, as newspapers could quickly be sent in bulk to agents in towns and villages with a railway station, including those some distance from the town of publication, and then be sent, probably by road, to agents in nearby settlements.¹⁷

Wrexham newspapers were especially fortunate in that Wrexham was an important nodal point on the north Wales railway network and the growth of railways gave Wrexham's newspapers the opportunity to expand outside the immediate locality and aspire to be regional, as opposed to local, newspapers.

However it does appear that trains were as unreliable in the late nineteenth century as they can be in the early twenty-first century. In March 1876, the *Advertiser* devoted an editorial to bemoaning the impact that late trains were having on its sales. Its Mold agent reported that his delivery of *Advertisers* was over two hours late one week and consequently he did not sell as many as usual, a complaint shared by the newspaper's Ruthin agent whose delivery was nearly three hours late. The *Advertiser* appealed to its agents to provide them with evidence of late deliveries so it could complain to the railway company.¹⁸ Another disadvantage of the railway system was that it allowed newspapers from other areas, both local and national, to seek new readers in Wrexham and its locality.

What can the location of these agents tell us about a newspaper's area of circulation?

As already stated, the existence of an agent in a certain location does not necessarily mean that the newspaper sold many copies in that area as newspapers did indulge in self-promotion and window dressing. However, if a newspaper did have an agent in a particular location, it must have been selling some copies there. From 1850 until 1900, Wrexham's newspaper regularly published lists of their agents, their addresses and professions on their pages. These agent listings can be used to plot each newspaper's area of circulation and show how this area altered over time.¹⁹

Wrexham's first two newspapers, the *Wrexham Registrar* and the *Wrexham Recorder* (both established in 1848) did not list any agents which suggests that their circulation was limited to Wrexham. The first agent listing appeared in the *Wrexham Advertiser* in

¹⁷ Michael Preston, 'The Newcastle journal 1832-1950' in Peter Isaac (ed), *Newspapers in the Northeast: the 'Fourth Estate' at work in Northumberland and Durham* (S.l., 1999), pp. 112-139 (p. 120).

¹⁸ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 18 March 1876, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ferdinand, p. 136.

December 1850. [insert Fig.1 here] Most of the agents were located close to Wrexham, so clearly the infant newspaper was focussing on developing its circulation in the Wrexham area. By 1854, the *Advertiser* had started to expand into the town of north Wales and beyond – Ruthin, Holywell, Chester. By 1870 the *Advertiser* had four and a half times more agents than 1854 and had established a strong distribution network in north-east Wales. [insert Fig. 2 here] The main impetus behind this was the development of railways. Railways allowed a quicker, more efficient and large distribution network to be established. Wrexham was an important nodal point on the north Wales railway system – the Wrexham, Mold & Connah’s Quay line to the north, the coastal line to Holyhead from Chester, and lines south to Llangollen and down to Dolgellau. This railway system was built to support the north Wales coalfield, a densely populated area of north Wales, and it meant that in 1870 the *Advertiser* had its widest geographical area of circulation, with agents located up to fifty miles away. By 1900 the vast majority of *Advertiser* agents were located within twenty miles of Wrexham and it appears that the newspaper’s area of circulation had been reduced to focusing upon its town of publication. [insert Fig. 3 here]

It is possible that the geographical circulation of the newspaper could have been limited by its politics and its rivals. The *Advertiser* supported the Liberal party, like most of Wales. To the west, the *Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald*, established in 1831 and with publishing offices in Caernarfon in the west and Denbigh in the east, had a wide circulation and also supported the Liberal party, as did the *Oswestry Advertiser* to the south, and over the border, Chester also had a number of long-established newspapers. Why should an English-speaking Liberal-supporting inhabitant of Caernarfon buy a Wrexham newspaper when he had a local newspaper that supported his political affiliations? It was its rivals rather than its distribution network that restricted the *Advertiser*’s circulation to the Wrexham area. It is possible that the *Advertiser* may not have wanted to spread into north-west Wales – to do so would have placed pressure on its distribution network as it would have needed to recruit extra agents in a predominantly Welsh-speaking area. If the *Advertiser* had sufficient subscribers in the fast growing towns and villages of north-east Wales to turn a sufficient profit its owner may not have wished to expand its circulation area further.

Despite existing from 1855 to 1867, the *Wrexham Telegraph* (originally published as *The Wrexhamite*) only published agent listings between 1857 and 1863. In 1857, the *Telegraph*

had a wide geographical distribution of agents for a newspaper that had only existed for two years and it appears that it was focusing on developing its readership in the larger settlements of north-east Wales - the towns of Denbigh, Ruthin, Holywell, and over the border in Chester. [insert Fig. 4 here] By 1863, the *Telegraph*'s number of agents had fallen to fourteen (compared to 55 for the *Advertiser* in 1866) and focused again on towns. [insert Fig. 5 here] The *Telegraph* did not have agents in the mining villages near Wrexham - this could be because the *Telegraph* was a Conservative newspaper and therefore unlikely to be purchased by working class miners, or just an acceptance that it was not likely to be successful in those areas so no effort was made to gain agents there. Instead it focused on gaining agents in the towns of north-east Wales and, as its editorial said, 'through agents and correspondents identifying ourselves as much with Mold, or Denbigh, or Ruthin and the other considerable places as with Wrexham'.²⁰ This identification was formally acknowledged in October 1863 when the newspaper changed its title from the *Wrexham Telegraph* to the *Denbighshire and Flintshire Telegraph*. Its geographical circulation may have been due largely to its Conservative politics – an issue further explored with the geographical circulation of the *Telegraph*'s Conservative successor – the *Wrexham Guardian*.

From its creation in 1869 as a Conservative response to the Liberal successes in Wales in the 1868 general election, the *Guardian* established a wide distribution network including the main towns of north Wales, and gained agents as far away as Abergele, Llanrwst, Bangor, and Dolgellau. [insert Fig. 6 here] The *Guardian*, it seems, was trying to establish a regional network across all of north Wales and the border area, from Holyhead to Chester and Shrewsbury. It also followed the *Advertiser* practice of establishing agents in the north Wales coalfield, along the railway lines. By 1875, the *Guardian*'s network of agents had continued to expand westwards into west Flint, and along the north Wales coast as far as Holyhead. [insert Fig. 7 here] However, by 1890 the agents in Holyhead, Caernarfon, Bangor, and Llandudno had disappeared and the *Guardian* had a distribution pattern similar to that of the *Advertiser* – namely focusing in on towns and villages near to Wrexham and the larger town of north-east Wales. The only area where it had agents that the *Advertiser* did not was along the north-east Wales coast, in Flint, Holywell, and Connah's Quay. [insert Fig. 8 here]

²⁰ 'To Our Readers and the Public', *Wrexham Telegraph*, 2 January 1864, p. 4.

There are two possible explanations for this expansion and then contraction in circulation areas, firstly that the *Guardian* sought to be a regional north Wales newspaper and therefore established agents throughout north Wales and then realised that it had over extended itself and scaled back, or secondly, politics. As a Conservative newspaper, the *Guardian* had fewer rivals with the same political beliefs than the *Liberal Advertiser*, (only the *North Wales Chronicle* in Bangor) and therefore its circulation was not so much hemmed in by rivals as was that of the *Advertiser*. Alternatively, with fewer Conservatives in north Wales to purchase the newspaper it needed to circulate over a wider area in order to gain sufficient buyers. Between 1869 and 1878, the *Guardian* was financially supported by some of north Wales's leading Conservatives, such as the Hon. George Kenyon and Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, as a political mouthpiece for their party and to spread the message of Toryism. In 1878, heavily in debt, the *Guardian* was sold and had to survive without a subsidy from its political masters. The realisation that it now had to survive on its own merits as a commercial enterprise could have forced the new owners to reorganise the distribution network. In addition, by 1887, the *Guardian's* owner was probably Sir Evan Morris, Wrexham's mayor, who is likely to have been more concerned with promoting Conservatism in Wrexham itself, rather than the whole of north Wales.

Wrexham had a fourth newspaper which used agents – the *Wrexham Free Press*. In 1870, *Free Press* agents were predominantly located near to Wrexham in eastern Denbighshire. Maybe the *Free Press* was deliberately limiting its circulation to Wrexham – unlike all the other Wrexham newspapers it did not have a long regional subtitle that tried to include every other north Wales county. Unfortunately, the newspaper only published agent listings for 1870 so it is unknown whether its agent network expanded or contracted in later years.

Both the *Advertiser* and the *Guardian* could be bought in London, the *Advertiser* from 1885 and the *Guardian* from 1890. Whilst only a small number of copies would have been sold in London, it does show that the Welsh community in London maintained an interest in the homeland.

What did these agents do when they were not selling newspapers?

Having examined the geographical locations of those who sold the newspapers, was selling newspapers or books their main profession or was selling newspapers merely an method of raising extra money for their main business? Cranfield commented that those involved in the book or communication trades such as booksellers, stationers, postmasters, and innkeepers were a popular choice to be newspaper agents, but also that newspapers did employ agents who had no obvious link either to the book, printing, or communication trade. He listed as examples of agents – writing masters, liverary lace weaver, snuff-maker, tobacconist, peruke-maker (wig maker), salter, engraver, bell-founder, attorney, surgeon, and governor of a workhouse.²¹ Wiles found a clockmaker and a barber amongst *Leeds Mercury* agents in 1725²² and Ferdinand discovered that a baker, a tallow chandler, and a dealer in rum sold the *Hampshire Chronicle* in the 1770s.²³ Could Wrexham's newspaper agent listings possibly contain any more unusual professions than these?

In the following statistics, the book trade is defined as including newsagents, booksellers, printers, reporters, stamp offices, and stationers and shopkeepers are defined as including grocers. In cases whereby agents were listed as having more than one profession, the first one has been used. The professions of some agents were not listed so trade directories and the census were used to attempt to discover them. Unfortunately, only a small number of agent professions were discovered this way and consequently, a category of 'unknown' profession has been used.

As expected, the dominant profession in the agent listing was the book trade, although not in the early years of the Wrexham press. Of the ten *Advertiser* agents in 1850, only two were involved in the book trade and five of them were shopkeepers. Four years later, 31% of *Advertiser* agents were involved in the book trade, fewer than the 38% of shopkeepers, and therefore it was shopkeepers not booksellers, printers, stationers, or newsagents who were primarily responsible for distributing Wrexham's newspapers in their early years. Upon closer analysis, this is to be expected. Villages would have usually had a shopkeeper but not necessarily a bookseller or news agent so shopkeepers were best placed to distribute and sell newspapers, particularly in smaller settlements. The number of shopkeepers engaged as agents fell as newspapers became established and increasingly turned to book trade professions as distributors.

²¹ Cranfield, p. 198.

²² Wiles, p. 117.

²³ Ferdinand, p. 142.

By 1866 the book trade professions made up over half of the *Advertiser's* agents, but from then on, this percentage fell, down to 30% by 1900. This is a pattern repeated with other newspapers. The *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* did not have the *Advertiser's* initial reliance on shopkeepers, with book trade professions initially making up half of *Telegraph* agents and over two-thirds of *Guardian* agents. After such a heavy reliance on book trade professions, there was a decline to less than half as the *Guardian* began to use W.H. Smith railway bookstalls as agents. From 1866, with the *Advertiser*, we can see the increasing importance of W.H. Smith, particularly the W.H. Smith railway bookstalls. First and second class rail travel opened up a new market for reading material. Although the first railway bookstall opened in 1841 in Fenchurch Street station was operated by Horace Marshall & Son, it was to be the name W.H. Smith & Son that was to become synonymous with railway bookstalls. W.H. Smith gained its first tender to operate a railway bookstall in 1861²⁴ and rapid expansion in the 1870s led to Altick to state 'as travellers [sic] passed through city stations and country transfer points, they never failed to see the familiar W.H. Smith stalls'.²⁵ W.H. Smith's railway bookstall business expanded nationally from 35 bookstalls in 1851 to 290 in 1870, 540 in 1880, and 615 in 1894.²⁶ As railway companies increased their rental charges for bookstalls. W.H. Smith began to move into towns and cities, marking the start of a presence on the high street – a presence it continues to have today. W.H. Smith's operation in Wales began in December 1861 when it opened a bookstall at Neath railway station. Two years later W.H. Smith acquired the contract to sell newspapers and books at GWR stations.²⁷ GWR lines in north Wales included the Ruabon-Llangollen, Corwen-Llangollen, Bala-Dolgellau, and the Chester-Shrewsbury lines. By 1890 W.H. Smith had railway bookstalls in Corwen, Denbigh, Dolgellau, Ruabon, Rhosllanerchrugog, and Rhyl. Both the *Advertiser* and the *Guardian* used W.H. Smith railway bookstalls as agents. The *Guardian* used railways bookstalls to distribute itself in towns far from Wrexham - Bangor, Caernarvon, Llandudno, and Holyhead - and we can see this rise in *Guardian* agents from a small percentage in 1871 and 1875 to 13% in 1890. By 1900, W.H. Smith agents made up 14% of *Advertiser* agents. The *Free Press* used mainly the book trade and an unusually high percentage of

²⁴ Charles Wilson, *First with the News: a history of W.H. Smith 1792-1972* (London, 1985), p. 112.

²⁵ Richard Altick, *The English Common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800-1900*, 2nd edn (Columbus, 1998), p. 301.

²⁶ Wilson, p. 182.

²⁷ Wilson, p. 120.

shopkeepers to distribute issues, possibly because the *Free Press* was established by Wrexham tradesmen to promote their goods.

Amongst other professions, the *Telegraph* was particularly reliant on messengers to distribute copies to the villages surrounding Wrexham between 1857 and 1861 and, although the *Guardian*'s agent listings never included any messengers, in 1891 the newspaper stated that it was distributed by 'numerous boys'.²⁸ As mentioned earlier, Wrexham newspapers used the Royal Mail to send copies to distant subscribers so it is not surprising to see Post Masters and Mistresses acting as agents, making up an average of 10% of agents, the *Advertiser* was especially reliant on these postal agents and they made up 13% of agents in 1870. Cranfield argued that Post Offices were unsuitable for newspaper distribution²⁹, but this appears not to have been true for Wrexham newspapers. Wrexham's newspapers used publicans as agents, but only in small numbers. The advertising agents, first appearing in 1866, were all located in Liverpool and London and their main involvement with Wrexham newspapers was probably collecting advertising and sold only a small number of copies to expatriots.

Finally, the 'others' category contains a wide range of professions, including a number that would not naturally be associated with newspaper selling and distribution. Wrexham's newspapers were sold by a clerk, a coachman, a waggoner, a painter and paperhanger, a Baptist Minister, a mortgage broker, an insurance agent, a tobacconist, a saddler, a basket maker, a toy dealer, a retailer of beer, a miller, an ink maker, a chemist, a draper, a brick manufacturer, a ship chandler and broker, a nail maker, a cheese factor, a joiner and carpenter, a retired farmer, an eleven year old boy, a fitter, and a coroner. Whilst a number of these professions seem unusual for a newspaper agent, perhaps it is Mr. Edwards, the coroner of Holt who would be considered the least likely person to be a seller of newspapers. Often these other categories of profession made up a significant percentage of agents, nearly a quarter of *Advertiser* agents in 1854. Most of them were located in villages without a book trade professional, such as Mr James Williams the basket maker in Cefn Mawr and Mr Scott the ink maker in Queensferry. These agents may only have been recruited because the village lacked a book trade professional and therefore the most obvious candidate to sell newspapers was not available. The newspaper proprietors may have been forced to settle for whoever was willing to sell the newspaper and collect

²⁸ *Wrexham Guardian*, 18 July 1891, p. 1.

²⁹ Cranfield, p. 201.

advertising to be their local agent. Some were located in the larger towns and villages that already had one or more book trade agents, like Mr Davies, the Wrexham hairdresser, and Mr Lloyd, the Ruthin chemist. Apart from being able to boast of an increasing number of agents, it is unclear why newspapers would have recruited agents from other professions when they already had a book trade agent or agents in town.

In addition, despite trawling through censuses and trade directories, it has not been possible to identify the professions of some agents. It is unlikely that these agents were involved in the book or shopkeeping trades as they would have been listed as such in the agent listings. Instead, were they engaged in these unusual professions? If so, these other professions played a more significant role in newspaper distribution than originally suspected, for example, in 1890 the unknown and other professions made up 16% of *Guardian* agents and a fifth of *Advertiser* agents in 1900.

Although the vast majority of these agents were men, Wrexham's newspapers had a total of 41 female agents, two of whom acted as agents for more than one newspaper. Only a quarter of these had their profession noted in the agents listings and the professions of a further quarter can be deduced from trade directories. Therefore over half of these female agents were in trade. Of the other half, it is difficult to discover their profession. However, the census does tell us that some of them were wives, for example Mrs Jackson, *Advertiser* agent, in Gwersyllt, was the wife of a rail labourer, and was replaced by Mrs Simpson, wife of a coal man; Mrs Evans, *Guardian* agent, was the wife of a carter. These wives probably sold odd copies and accepted advertisements as a way of bringing in small sums of money for their family. They were not professional agents, and therefore it is not surprising that the tenure of these wives as agents was usually short.

Little is known about the relationship between Wrexham newspapers and their agents. We do know that in 1890 the *Guardian* stated that it had received reports about its agents delivering rival newspapers instead of the *Guardian* when the *Guardian* was what had been ordered, and appealed to readers for further information. Some newspapers actually acted as agents for their rivals. This was not unusual: Cranfield commented 'one can only assume that their willingness to acted in this capacity stemmed less from a disinterested generosity than a desire to keep an eye upon one another's activities'³⁰. Charles Bayley,

³⁰ Cranfield, p. 198.

part-owner of the *Advertiser*, sold the *Guardian* in his Oswestry bookshop from 1875, and in Wrexham the *Advertiser* was sold by Railton Potter, owner of the *Telegraph* and by Hughes & Son, whose earlier newspaper had been effectively put out of business by the *Advertiser*'s owners' earlier newspaper; the *Guardian* was sold at the offices of the *Flintshire Observer* and the *Llangollen Advertiser*. Several booksellers acted as agents for more than one Wrexham newspaper. In fact, Mold booksellers Pring & Price acted as agents for all four – the *Advertiser*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, and *Free Press* - and were also a publishing office for both the *Advertiser* and the *Guardian*. It is unfortunate that the surviving small collection of Wrexham newspaper company records makes no reference to their relationship with their agents.

This paper has shown that there were two developments that changed the distribution system of Wrexham newspapers between 1850 and 1900. In 1850, the method of delivering each issue was relatively haphazard, but by the end of the century it had become a far more co-ordinated and cohesive system. The railway system was still in its infancy when the first Wrexham newspapers were produced but as the network expanded, so newspapers could be delivered to agents in towns far away from Wrexham. This was a great advance for the newspapers themselves especially as they could receive advertising and even local news from agents beyond the Wrexham area. Added to this expansion of the railway system, the introduction of bookstalls on railway stations which became agents for selling newspapers, can be seen as a development that bring us right up to the modern day.

Of all the methods of distribution, it was the use of agents which vouchsafed the widest coverage and almost certainly the most cost effective. Messengers and hawkers could only provide a local service and subscription collection was purely on an individual basis. Posting single copies was expensive and, as we have seen, unreliable. By using agents, newspapers were able to reach readers far away from its publications centres.

Expansion and contraction of the network was caused by different factors, such as the political bias of each newspaper. The Tory supporting *Guardian* was able to spread into towns far away from Wrexham, whilst its Liberal rival concentrated its agents around the industrial heartlands of Wrexham and north east Wales. This paper has also demonstrated the eclectic mix of agents, particularly in the later years, used by newspapers to distribute

each issue. Important and as seemingly obvious as the book trade was in the dissemination of news, it was never the sole, and often not even the main, outlet. In towns, the book trade was an obvious agency for selling newspapers, but in the rural areas where there were no such outlets, the newspapers turned to shopkeepers or others whose jobs brought them into daily contact with villagers to provide the service – the miller and the tobacconist would certainly have come into this category – but possibly not the nail maker and the coroner!

Figure 1 : Geographical Distribution of Advertiser Agents in December 1850

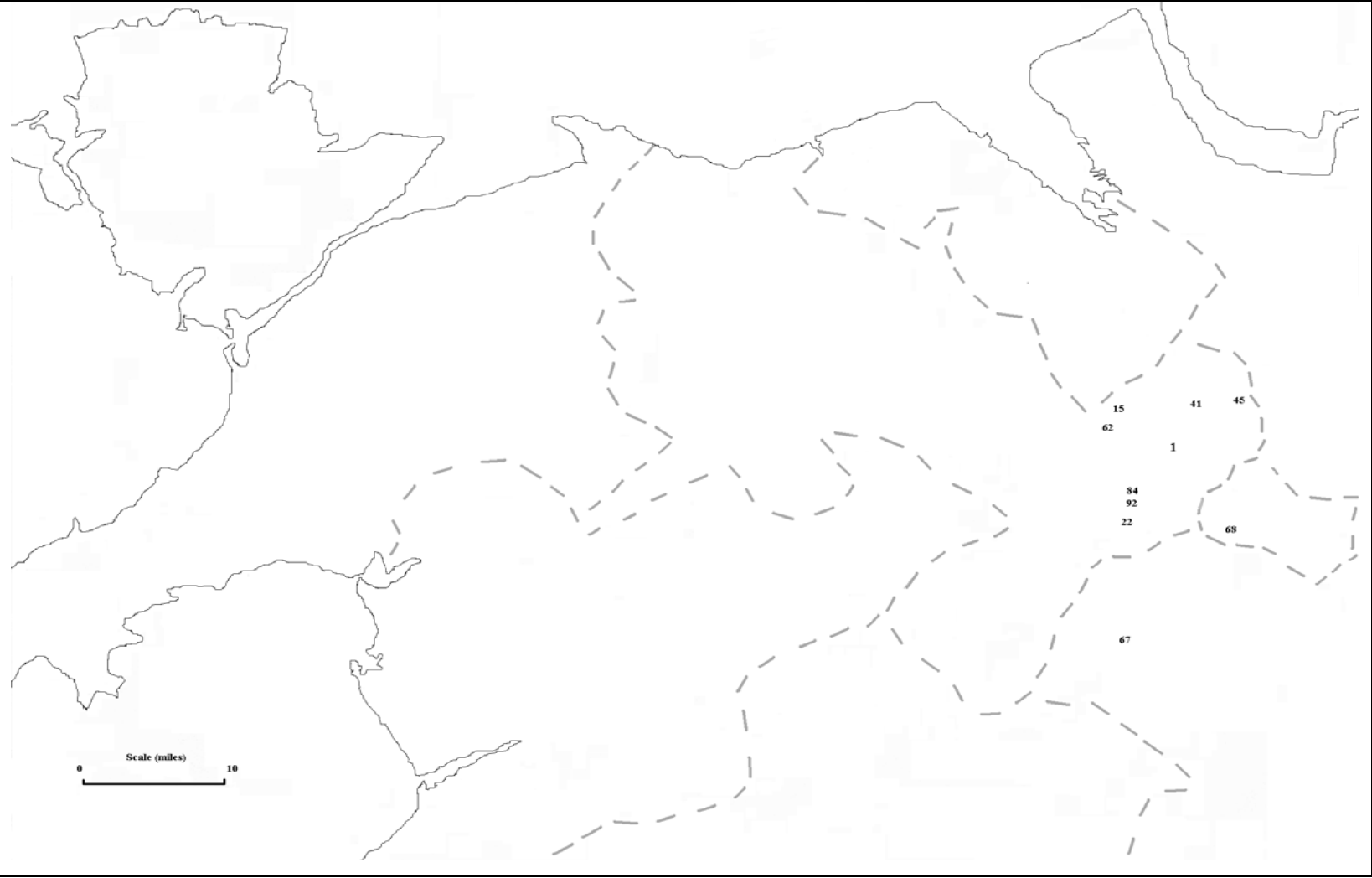


Figure 2 : Geographical Distribution of Advertiser Agents in 1870



Figure 3 : Geographical Distribution of Advertiser Agents in 1900

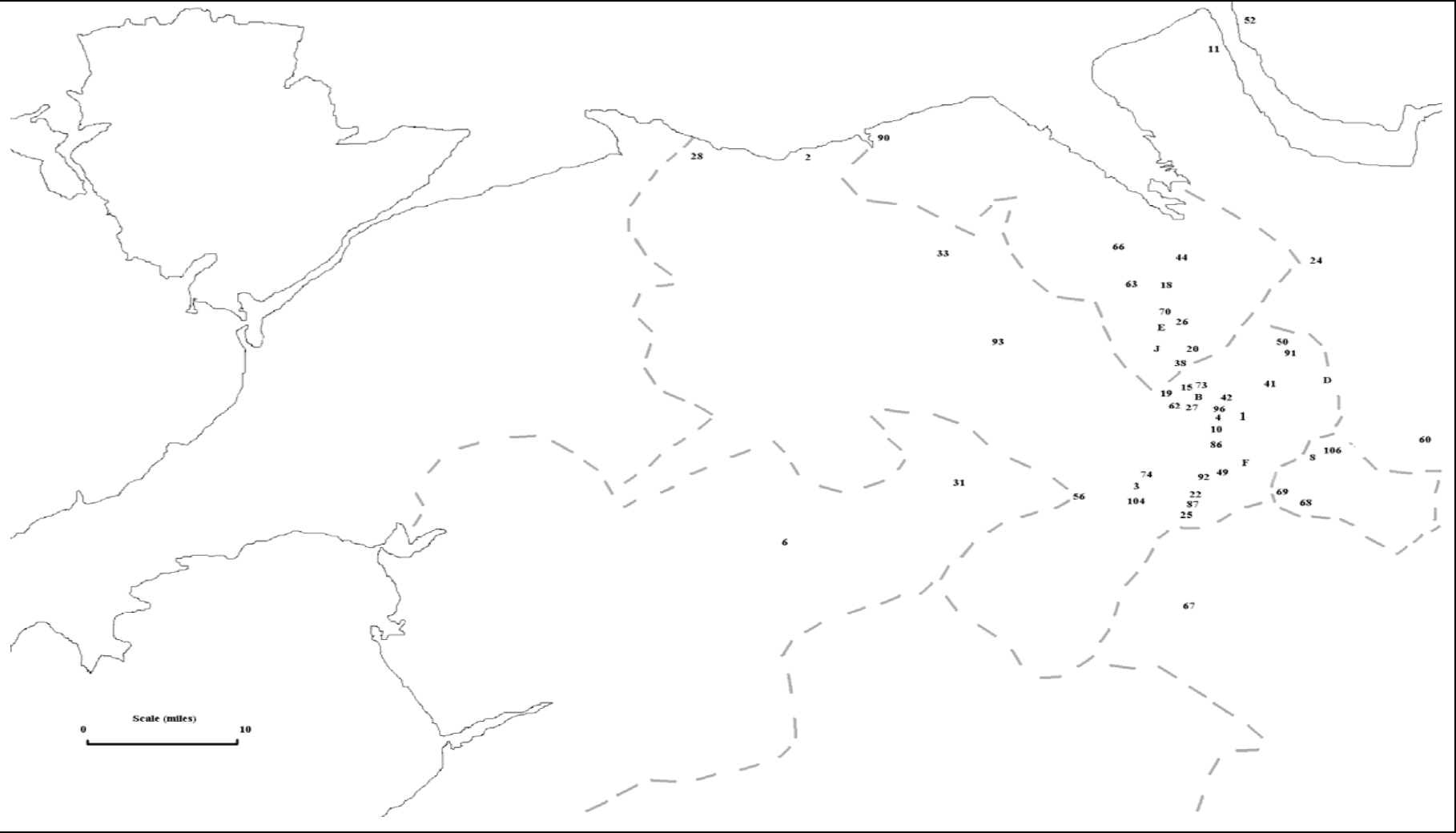


Figure 4 : Geographical Distribution of Telegraph Agents in 1857

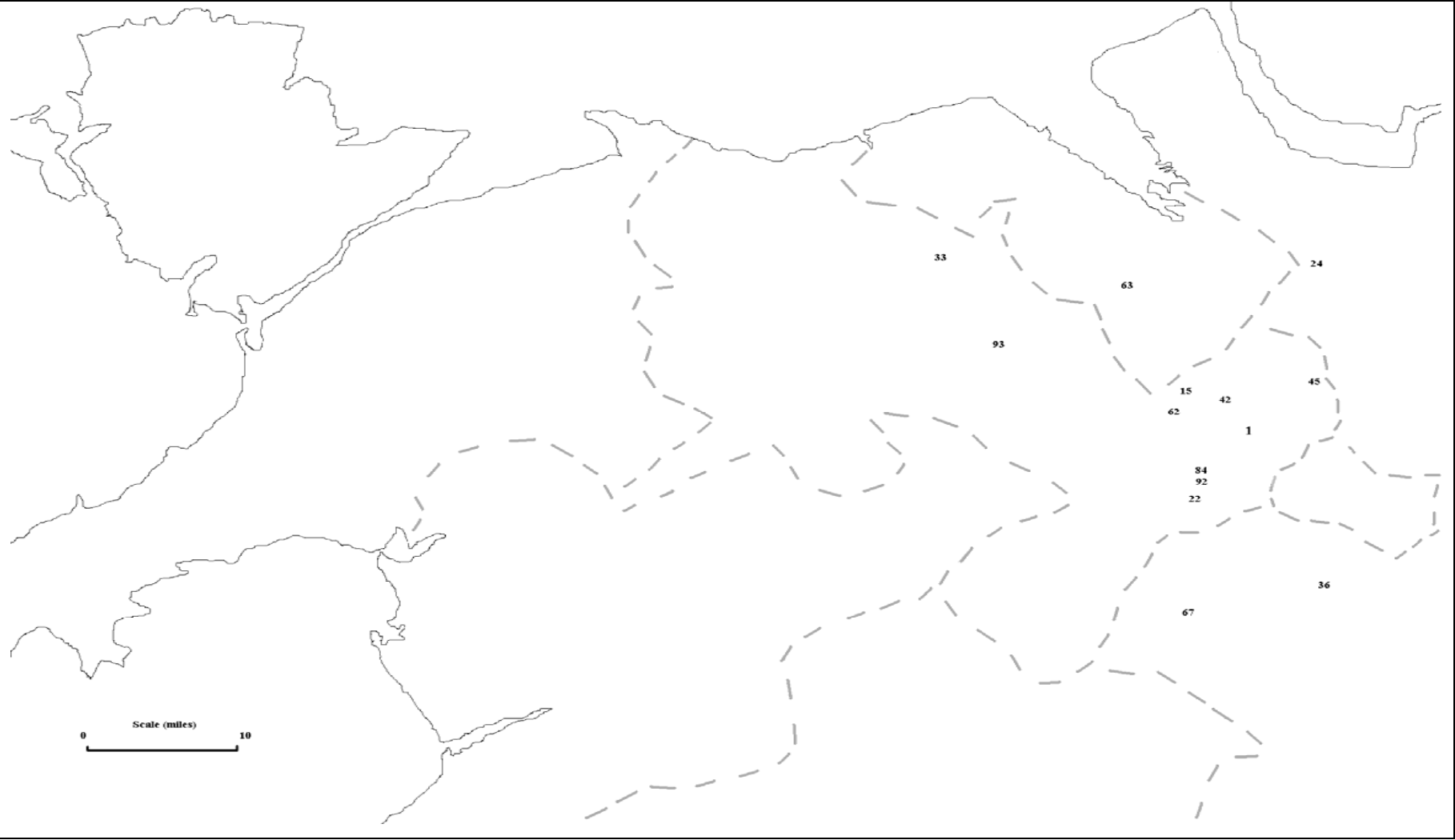


Figure 5 : Geographical Distribution of Telegraph Agents in 1863

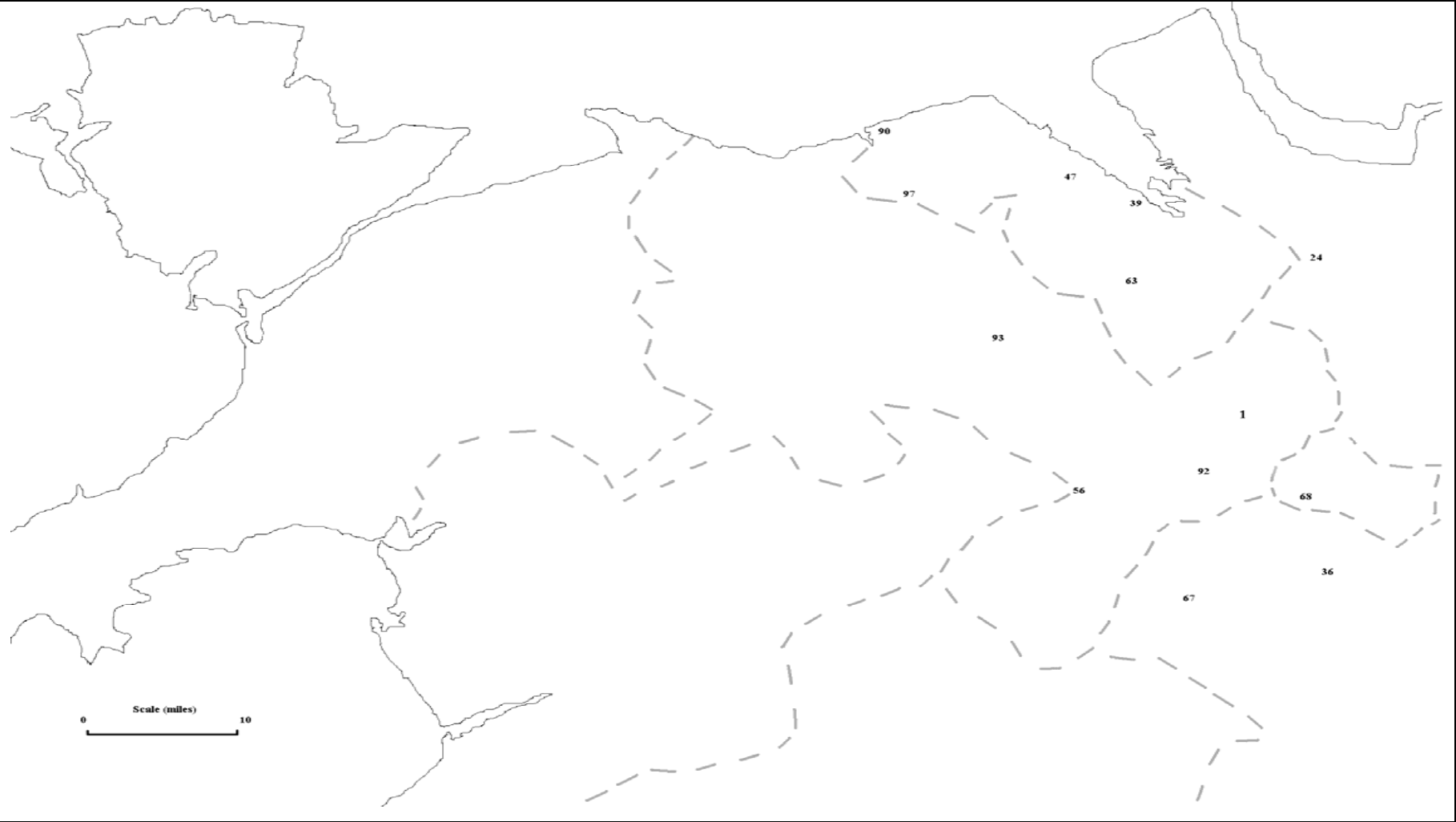


Figure 6 : Geographical Distribution of Guardian Agents in 1869

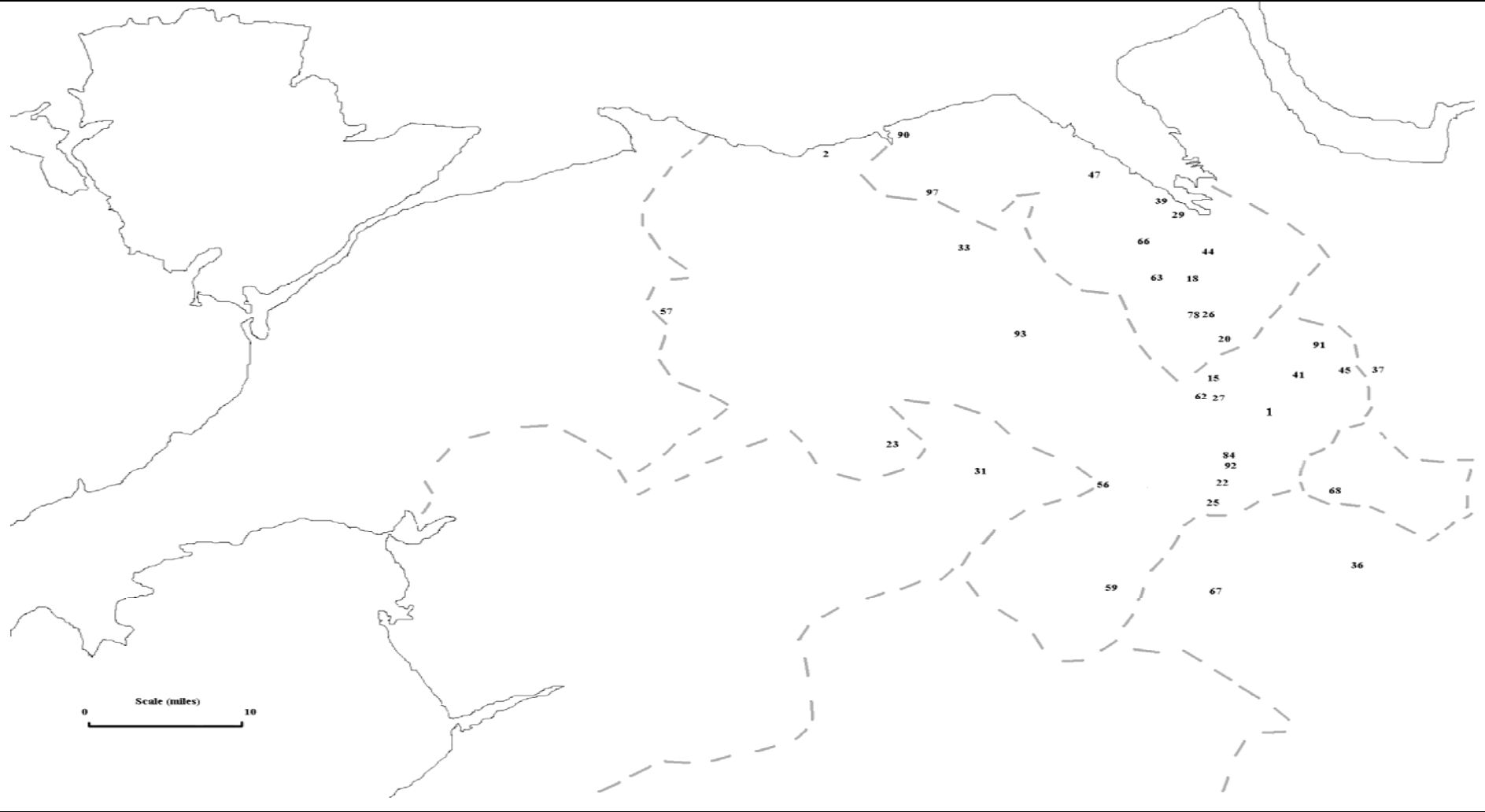


Figure 7 : Geographical Distribution of Guardian Agents in 1875

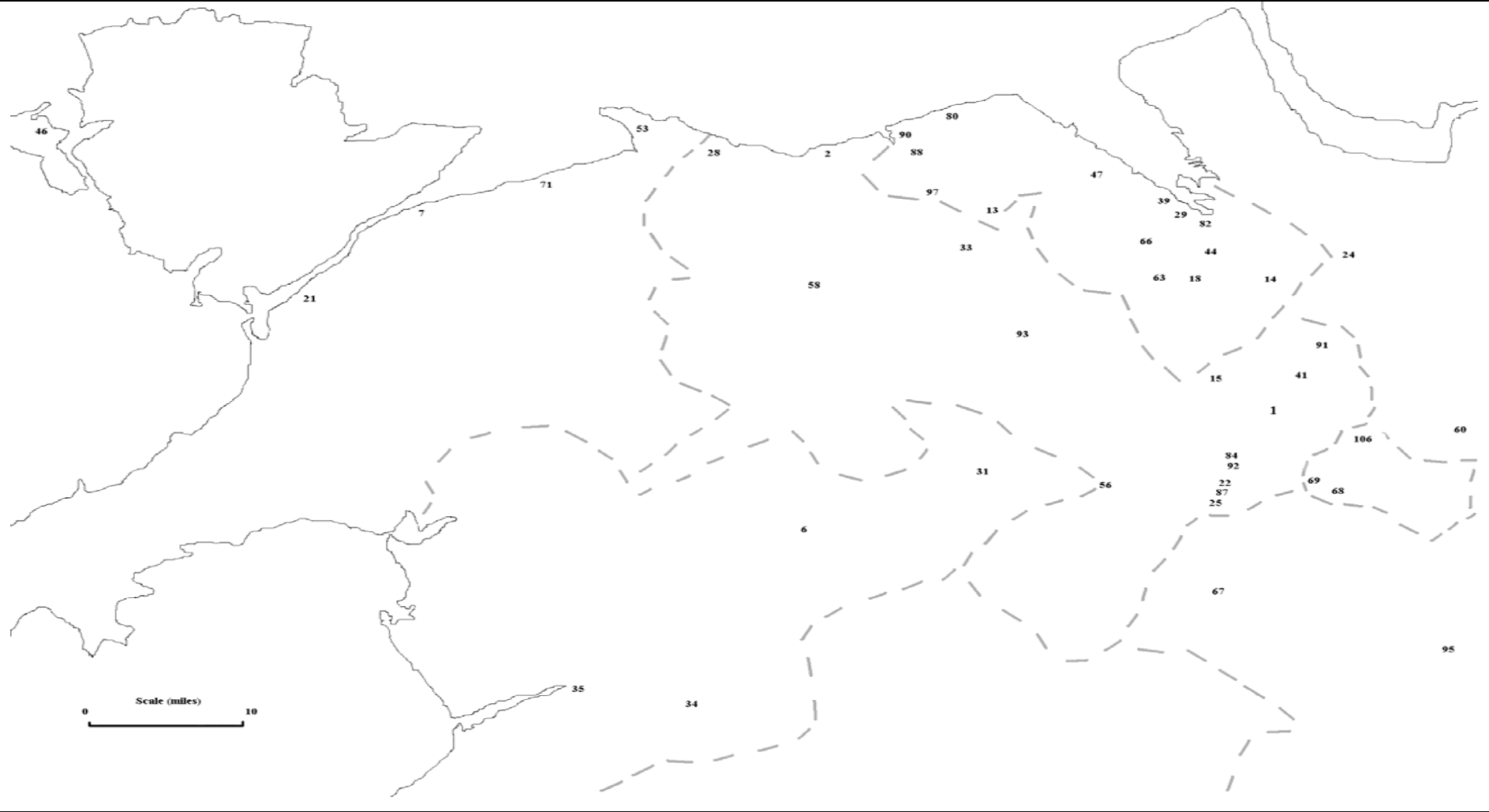


Figure 8: Geographical Distribution of Guardian Agents in August 1890

