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## **REF, TEF, and KEF; and the 'research-informed' teaching and co-production traditions in local history: analysing provincial newspapers**

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## **REF, TEF, and KEF; and the 'research-informed' teaching and co-production traditions in local history: analysing provincial newspapers**

In the present universities are facing the introduction of a revised Research Excellence Framework, the extension of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework to subject-level assessment, and the emergence of a Knowledge Exchange Framework. Against this background are particular interests in, or imperatives surrounding, the development of research-informed activity involving undergraduate students, and in university public engagement. The practice of local history has a long and proud tradition of internally and externally collaborative and enquiry-led co-production in higher education and more broadly, and is now a fitting reference point and a timely source of inspiration. This research discusses the development of, and relationships between, REF, TEF and KEF, the place of research-informed teaching, and the contemporary significance of local history. The study also reports on some of the results of a student-engagement activity involving the indexing, analysis and interpretation of a provincial newspaper, for Ilfracombe, in Devon. Such a choice of primary source is particularly apt, not least because its demanding material format invites group reading and collective scrutiny. In addition, provincial-press publications yield and test knowledge of what the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought to districts and communities; they also demand an appreciation of conceptual and critical understanding; and, in addition, support diverse and advanced methodological experimentation.

Keywords: TEF; REF; KEF; research informed; co-production; local history

### ***Three Frameworks, research-informed teaching and co-production, and the role of local history***

Through the final quarter of the twentieth century a set of local historians built up a body of literature on thought and practice in local history. It is of a scale, diversity, detail and quality that we are unlikely to see amassed again. The names of its authors are many and various, and their contributions considerable. Making a list of leading figures – a difficult task to undertake fairly – would have to

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include David Hey, as well as other local historians, such as David Dymond, John Marshall, John Richardson, Philip Riden, Alan Rogers, W. B. Stephens and Kate Tiller. The guides, introductions, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and historiographical overviews that they produced formed one of the harvests of a long 'Indian Summer' for local history.<sup>1</sup> Local history at this time was an integrated and interconnected 'establishment', built, led and inspired by such individuals, together with university adult-education department certificate programmes, community evening classes, and local groups and societies. This mutually interdependent framework was largely dismantled through the first couple of decades of the twentieth-first century. Research exercises, and their emphasis on the 'international' significance of output, and policies relating to the funding of part-time and lifelong learning, contributed towards the rapid contraction of the network of extra-mural departments, and other liberal-arts adult-education course provision by Workers Education Associations and Local Education Authorities. This 'establishment' had benignly fostered a culture and environment that had supported considerable co-enquiry and co-production. As the twentieth century closed at least, local history had much to celebrate by way of the fruits of its labour, including much collective and research-led endeavour and output.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, in the lead up towards the co-existence of both a Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (now Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework), there has emerged a heightened level of anticipation and expectation around research-informed learning and teaching. Policy drivers for this include the endowment of teaching with the same worth as research (together with parity around modes of evaluation), enhancement of the student experience, and embedding transferable skills and employability. Moreover, there is much conceptualising and 'modelling' of research-informed practice.<sup>3</sup> One particular four-fold division might be adopted. At one end of the trajectory is 'research-informed' activity. This encompasses, for the students, the relatively passive, one-way exposure to and assimilation of the research ideas, interpretations and findings of academics. Further on from this is 'research-skills' learning and teaching, that is, the practical, 'hands-on' or 'in the field' training in research methodologies. More

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developed still, is participation by students in pedagogical research, that is, active and applied research into the teaching and learning philosophy and methods of a discipline. Most developed is 'research co-production', in which students work with academics or other research professionals as co-enquirers, presenters and authors.<sup>4</sup>

In parallel with the emergence of TEF, the 2021 REF appears to be enhancing the place of one of the areas of emphasis associated with its 2014 predecessor, 'impact'. Indeed in this context local-history activity has enjoyed some revived and restored reason-for-being in universities. The 'Panel Criteria and Working Methods' of the 2014 REF could give local historians new heart. For the quest for impact in certain spheres has been long enshrined in the ethos and purpose of local history, with its well-established modes of operation around external engagement and community outreach: 'in the domain of civil society...informing and influencing the form and content of associations between people and groups to illuminate and challenge cultural values and social assumptions;' and 'in the domain of cultural life...creating and interpreting cultural capital in all of its forms to enrich and expand the lives, imaginations and sensibilities of individuals and groups.'<sup>5</sup> The impact achieved by the arts and humanities and assessed through REF2014 was found to be particularly successful, relatively local and regional in orientation, and diverse and dynamic.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, impact is to be augmented as a component of the REF to come, both that associated with public engagement, but also internal academic impact through teaching and learning.<sup>7</sup>

Alongside the further evolution of REF, the onset of TEF might give the local-history practitioner additional positive cause. Particular lines in the 2014 Technical Consultation featured values that are well instilled in local-history custom and practice, and expectations of what any university-located local history activities ought base themselves upon, within as well as extra-murally: a 'learning environment [which] is enriched by linkages between teaching and scholarship, research or professional practice', and the 'involvement of staff who teach in research, scholarship or professional practice, and involvement of students in real research projects'.<sup>8</sup>

The year 2017 has also seen announced the creation of a Knowledge Exchange Framework. Research on the nature of university knowledge exchange has been gathering apace in recent years. However, the late-twentieth century local history establishment would find many of its expressions to be readily recognisable: like TEF

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and REF, there is an appreciation of both the connections between research and teaching, and of student engagement - through short courses and lifelong learning, and work placements and projects; and, akin to the public impact achieved through REF, there is to be found external networking and outreach, awareness raising and knowledge diffusion, and social cohesion and community regeneration.<sup>9</sup> A more developed appreciation of the character of arts and humanities knowledge exchange has also been more firmly established. Again, academic local historians, past and present, would find familiar certain modes of knowledge exchange, for example: engagement with non-commercial external organisations, community-based activities, and the third sector.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Practicing 'research-informed' teaching and co-production: provincial newspaper analysis***

Projects involving provincial newspapers generate, at the very least, rich and illuminating 'research-informed' teaching and learning. The great growth in the production, circulation and consumption of provincial newspapers through the Victorian and Edwardian periods was stimulated by an array of interconnecting processes, among the more prominent being: the lifting of fiscal levies on the press, advances in printing technology and bulk transportation, rapid urbanization, the establishment of general education, the raising of literacy levels, the extension of participative democracy, a widening interest and engagement in social reform and municipal progress, and the cultivation of local civic pride and patriotism. Furthermore, the dependence upon national news content in the provincial press steadily gave way to far more substantive profiling of local and regional life. Today, therefore, local newsprint archives form a vast repository of empirical material that reflects these various features of, and forces within, national and provincial life in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup>

The local and regional press can also form the basis of more developed 'research-informed' teaching, that is, extending beyond empirical knowledge and understanding to building an acknowledgement and appreciation of conceptual and critical thought and analysis. The provincial newspaper, as a historical source, is multi-dimensional and sophisticated. Its function was far more than being merely to passively document received news. The press was an active agent in forming opinion, influencing attitudes, and enabling change. Local and regional newspapers also fostered senses of

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place, community and cultural identity. Their success depended upon how well they related to prevailing, if ever shifting, geographies of population and settlement, units of political representation and administration, zones of industrial and commercial activity, social institutions and networks, and cultural provision. Press sentiment varied. It reported on national, regional and local news, but did so selectively and partially. Content could contain much objective reproduction of facts obtained from official reports and other local sources. However, editorial craft and commentary could offer interpretation – ‘spin’. On the one hand, a paper might aim to endorse the prevailing political status quo and the stance of local elites. On the other, the press might adopt an overtly critical or radical line, exploiting or exacerbating issues of local debate and conflict, and, where fitting, representing and supporting views of a popular readership set against the consensus position held by institutions and the local power elite.<sup>12</sup>

Newspapers were generally enthusiastic supporters of the towns and cities that they represented. Indeed their commercial success to a great extent depended upon this. The writing up of press content frequently drew upon ‘boosterism’, a mode of literary discourse accompanying the growth of, and competition between, towns and cities through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Boosterist writing was necessarily bias, and would give emphasis to the presence of harmonious and progressive politics, economic innovation and prowess, social development and well-being, and cultural vitality and excellence. Boosterists – including local historians, guide-book writers, as well as newspaper editors and correspondents – would typically glory in aspects of the past, celebrate the noteworthy in the present, and champion a greater future ahead. Paralleling boosterism, and in sharp contrast, was the more critical ‘muck-raking’ literary tradition of the period. This took a far more condemnatory view of town and city life, and would also feature in press comment and editorial.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Research-skills training: the indexing and conceptual and critical interpretation of the provincial press***

Provincial newspapers lend themselves well to more advanced, research-skills-led projects. Student-engagement activity can be diverse and demanding, for the material content of this primary source includes both quantitative as well as qualitative data. It is also a media type that straddles the extremes from the objective and empirical, to the highly subjective and discourse rich; and from the positive and boosterist to the negative

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and starkly critical. In addition, the analysis and interpretation of local and regional newspapers supports a range of methodological approaches that can be taken to different stages or levels of learning and training.

This is a study of just one provincial newspaper and its life over the course of a single year. Moreover, the research here examines the front pages only, and pays particular attention to the content of those columns written by the newspaper's editor. The findings of the investigation, if arising from this tightly framed methodological context, shed immediate and useful light on the broader development of the press and its role and significance. The investigation itself also reinforces understanding and appreciation of the complexity and worth of newspapers as a historical source, and what they can yield through systematic interpretation.

This research investigates the most partial and, at times, most evidently biased, sections of *Ilfracombe's Intelligencer* – its front-page editorials – and how the editor combined the reporting of facts with expression of either a critical or a boosterist nature. *Bright's Intelligencer and Arrival List for Ilfracombe, Lynton, and Lynmouth* is not Ilfracombe's earliest newspaper, but is evidently the oldest surviving, with the only publically accessible copies known being those held within a bound volume in Ilfracombe Museum.<sup>14</sup> The *Intelligencer* appeared in 1860, with four editions for the months of June, July and September of that year, three for August, and one for November. One edition only was published for each of the months of January to May 1861. Thereafter the newspaper 'folded', making way for the longer lasting *Ilfracombe Chronicle*. The final editorial on the cover page for May 1861 hints at a divergence of views between the publisher and the outgoing editor. The succeeding *Chronicle* would feature less editorial comment, and the inclusion of more news from London and further afield – 'foreign and domestic'. The presence of the *Intelligencer* and the *Chronicle* can be traced through local directories,<sup>15</sup> while fuller discussion of what is known of the history of the *Intelligencer*, and the fortunes of other Ilfracombe and related north Devon press publications, has been recounted previously and elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

The recent research carried out on the *Intelligencer* focuses on the content meriting front-page attention – the 'headline news'. The format of the cover page adopted a consistent format through 1860-1. Two wide, right and left-hand side columns are separated by a thinner centre column. Occupying much, and occasionally all, of the two broader columns is a leading article by the editor, followed, if space

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allowed, by a section with brief accounts and notices of 'Local News'. The narrower centre column comprises the *Arrival List* of 'Residents and Visitors', which runs alphabetically, street by street, through subsequent pages of the newspaper. The editorials on the front pages of sixteen editions were subjected to an indexing. This selection, being those published between June and September 1860, but also including the edition for November of that year, corresponds with much of that year's resort 'season' for the town.

This investigative undertaking began as a year-two undergraduate classroom exercise, introducing students to the task of indexing, but it evolved into to a more developed content analysis. Every editorial article was indexed twice, that is, separately and 'blind' by a pair of students. Each sentence was read and evaluated, and a mark made against one or a number of descriptive categories, depending on the range of topics under discussion. The categories given, 98, were comprised of those themes suggested by Michael Murphy (Table I). Murphy's guide to local newspapers, if 26-years-old in date, remains available as a standard work of reference from the British Association for Local History. Murphy had in turn expanded upon a 74-theme categorisation recommended by W. G. Hoskins; Hoskins, meanwhile, had derived his categories from those employed in an analysis of *The Hull Advertiser*. This first stage of indexing formed a practical task, which considered the design and application of a scheme of categories, and offered an experience of the time-consuming and daunting nature of newspaper indexing. Murphy acknowledges these challenges. He observes that the indexing of samples of content can be a more economical way forward, but this does not secure the level of comprehensiveness and representativeness that can be achieved by categorising a newspaper in its entirety.<sup>17</sup>

Table 1. Alphabetical list of newspaper indexing categories

The sampling and selective examination of newspaper material is more appropriate, however, in support of targeted content analysis. Three students assisted further in processing the indexing data for this purpose. Content analysis explores trends in subject matter and seeks to discern press representativeness and influence. It is difficult to establish for certain how significant newspapers were in reflecting and informing opinion and attitude, in particular in the case of the attention-grabbing, but

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expressly partial editorials. Yet, it can be accepted that these publications contributed to the cultivation of popular perceptions, mutually reinforcing the 'belief and outlook of their readers' – 'Newspapers presented a particular form of reality to its readership, albeit they make sense of it, or "decode" it, in different ways. The "world view" of readers is both reflected and reinforced by newspaper content'.<sup>18</sup> The content analysis of the *Intelligencer* used Murphy's 98 categories to establish quantitatively the prominence and regularity of particular topics. The number of occurrences for each category was totalled for all of the sixteen editorials. As each of the articles had been blind indexed by two students, an average was generated from the pairs of scorings. Subsequently, the occurrences by edition were brought together to identify the most frequent categories running through the full set of editorials, from June to November 1860.

The publication of *Bright's Intelligencer* coincided with an important phase of transition for Ilfracombe, alongside many other seaside resorts more generally, as they left their spa-like, 'select' identity behind, and steadily became the railway-served, 'mass'-tourism and leisure centres of the modern period.<sup>19</sup> It should be no surprise, therefore, that the main preoccupations for the editor of the town's newspaper related to the development of Ilfracombe and its attractiveness as a destination. The three themes that occur most in the editorials are the 'weather', 'towns' and 'improvements' (Table 2). The categories that follow, and form the remaining 'top ten' categories, include others that might be expected to be of interest to visitors and residents of a resort town: 'class', 'leisure' and 'food and drink'. Ilfracombe was also a commercial port and a market town serving a large rural hinterland, and other leading categories reflect additional aspects of its economic and social role: 'religion', 'agriculture', 'property' and 'land use'. This article reports on the closer study of the most prominent topics: 'weather'; 'towns' and 'improvement', which are considered together here, as these generally co-feature; and 'class'.

Table 2. *Bright's Intelligencer* 1860, editorials, 'top ten' topic occurrences.

### ***On the weather***

Sections on the weather in the *Intelligencer* offer up a range of quantitative and qualitative insights, but, more than this, the consideration of the weather reflects the

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thematically diverse range of concerns of the publication – economic, social and cultural – and the typical swaying of purpose and sentiment in newspaper coverage, from the information giving to the opinion forming, and from the positive to, if not the critical here, the phlegmatic.

The importance of the weather for the town of Ilfracombe and other seaside more generally towns is understandable, given their importance as centres for a range of maritime, resort, rural-regional, and urban-market functions and activities. For such places, the quality of the weather was an essential factor in their commercial success in their early phase of development as relatively 'select' health resorts, though to their evolution, if not for all, into mass leisure centres. Moreover, resorts would exaggerate claims to benign local climate in order to increase visitor numbers, extend the length of the season, and to out-compete rival regional destinations. Ilfracombe had established a bath house in 1836, and it was also keen to promote the attractiveness of its beaches and coastal landscape. Ilfracombe and Devon as a whole were following a broader national pattern, where northerly, and generally later-founded resorts, were seeking to compete against earlier southern coast establishments. A swing in fashion from exposure to warmth and sea-water bathing to bracing walks and appreciation of more rugged natural landscapes aided Ilfracombe and others in similar locations, but they remained sensitive to the vicissitudes of the weather and their impact on visitor perception and numbers.<sup>20</sup>

The indexing and analysis of the *Intelligencer* drew attention to the regularity of references to the weather in the editorials. Indeed two editorial articles, for the 14 September and 2 November, are given over entirely to its consideration. Furthermore, discussion of the weather is often found elsewhere on the front page, frequently warranting passing inclusion in the content of the 'Local News' sections of the *Intelligencer*. The examination of the content relating to the weather identified three dimensions: empirical observation of patterns and trends; the social and physical impact of weather events and changing conditions; and the effects of the weather on the collective mentality.<sup>21</sup>

Discussion of the weather in the *Intelligencer* most regularly comments upon the first two dimensions and their interrelationship. Thus, the changing nature of the weather is generally placed in the context of its effects on the life of the town and its surrounding area, and their economic prospects. The following passage, for 1 June

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1860, is typical, but particularly noteworthy for its interesting reference to local climate terminology:

The 'ASHEN GALE.'- Owing to the boisterous weather of Monday the 'Prince of Wales' steamer was unable to effect her projected excursion trip from Swansea.

We fear that this heavy gale from the north-west has not improved the very promising prospects of the apple crop. The gale appears to be a regular visitant at this period of the year, and derives its local name from the circumstance of its usually arriving at the twisting of the ash-buds, which process it is supposed to accelerate.<sup>22</sup>

A second passage, from the 'Local news' from later in the same year, 2 November, places the extremes and results of the weather in the context of local collective memory:

#### WINTER AND ROUGH WEATHER

The calm close weather which has prevailed during the past week presents a striking contrast to the heavy gales and tremendous seas with which we were visited in the corresponding season of last year. We shall long remember the great October gale of 1859 in which the Royal Charter was stranded on a lee shore, and she and hers so terribly destroyed; nor shall we of this place soon forget the fatal cyclone of the 1<sup>st</sup> of November which desolated so many of our homes, and in which at the height of its fury we beheld the fearful spectacle of a strong man perishing, together with his vessel which he had only navigated too well, at the very mouth of our harbour and within sight of the whole of our seafaring population.<sup>23</sup>

Another pair of comments also relate to the significance of the weather for the town's identity. However, the editor of Ilfracombe's newspaper, for 1860 at least, appeared fairly circumspect about the realities of the area's climatic conditions. Earlier in the season, on 15 June of that year, the editor remarks:

We require some more outward and tangible sign than that which the weather affords to assure us of the arrival of 'the season,' although we are now in the middle of June. The prospect however is brightening. The glass has steadily risen for the last few days in the teeth of a steady wind, and we are ready to risk our reputation as weather prophets on the prediction that the summer has at last arrived.<sup>24</sup>

On 14 September, the editor concludes more circumspectly:

The truth is, that the varied fluctuations of fair and rough seasons, of plenty and scarcity, work about the pivot of a certain ascertainable average, which average is co-existable with a man's well-being, and therefore if a man is not always satisfied, he ought to be so.<sup>25</sup>

The third dimension, the psychological significance of the weather, is much less dominant. Nonetheless a further passage, from 14 September, discusses the contribution of the weather to the local (and perhaps national) psyche:

But, in truth, it is always so: if a few consecutive months are at all abnormal in their character if it is close and thundery in a late autumn, or wet and windy in an early summer, straightway doleful lamentations, prayers, or murmurings (according to the temperament of the complainant) arise throughout the land. "Everything is going wrong," cries one man, adding in a not pious corollary, that "it generally does."

"Bread is dear enough without a wet summer to make it dearer", grumbles another.

"We ought decidedly to pray for an alteration of this disagreeable state of things," suggests a third, whose devotion is evidently in advance of his faith or his reason.

Meanwhile in-gathering time draws onward, and by and by the prospect brightens and murmurs cease, prayers are changed into thanksgivings, and everything is seen to be as right, and good, and wisely-ordered, as it always was.<sup>26</sup>

### *On urban life and improvement*

One of the broadest and most sophisticated dimensions of provincial-newspaper content relates to their function as identity-forming agents – political, economic, social and cultural – and how their discourse sought to articulate a local place and community's sense of itself. This was particularly evident for towns and cities through the mid to later nineteenth century, in their rising to the task of pressing for urban enhancements at a time of rapid development and change. Moreover, the experience of aspiring resort towns was a pronounced and particular one, in that longer-term phases of expansion combined with the shorter-term pressures of the annual season. Existing infrastructure, services, and units of government and administration were placed under considerable strain by growth of visitor numbers and the need to meet the standards expected by those arriving at places claiming to be a health or leisure resort.<sup>27</sup>

Press reports emanating from the developing towns and cities of this period typically adopted two contrasting editorial positions. One was critical, drawing the readership's attention to shortcomings in the pace and direction of local development and weaknesses in municipal action; the other more 'boosterist', a celebration of local achievement and civic culture, and place-promotional. Ilfracombe was no different. The indexing of the editor's articles placed much content within Murphy's categories of 'towns' and 'improvements'. Material relating to these themes generally coincides, and so is considered side-by-side here. Furthermore, examination of the discourse identified both of the two different editorial stances, although the polemical is preponderant.

In Ilfracombe the editor of the *Intelligencer* made criticism of development and the offices of the local Board of Health the principal subject of many of the publication's leading articles. On 1 June the Board was taken to task for its scheduling of major water mains improvements to coincide with the beginning of the summer season: 'we do not cast any imputation on the zeal and judgment of individuals – we merely impugn the result of their corporate counsels'.<sup>28</sup> On 8 June the *Intelligencer* questioned the effectiveness of the Board in regulating the polluting activities of the Ilfracombe Gas Company: 'Of what use to a town is a local Board of Health with all its costly machinery of meetings, reports, and officers'.<sup>29</sup> In this one article the editor extends his critique to 'muck raking', pointing readers towards evidence of an undesirably 'friendly' relationship between the chairmen of two organisations. On 6

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July the *Intelligencer* proposed an alternative solution to meet the deficiencies of the Board of Health. The editor describes the need for an independent committee bringing together commercial and philanthropic interests with the intention of directing attention into improving amenities and entertainments:

There are many arrangements which, in a place like Ilfracombe, dependent upon its prosperity on the comfort and amusement provided for its summer visitors, require to be carefully considered and wisely carried out. In every such town a local committee should be formed of those who are most interested in the popularity of the town, in other words the leading tradesmen, who, from their position and the stake they have in the place, are most anxious for its increasing notoriety and well-being. And this committee need not in any way be obtruded upon the public: on the contrary it will be found to work better as a strictly private and unrecognized institution.<sup>30</sup>

On 20 July the *Intelligencer's* 'Local News' reported on the formation of a new body, if still allied to the Board of Health; for it proposed the establishment of a 'working committee of business men whose object it would be to obtain the railway without loss of time'.<sup>31</sup> The preceding leading article, on 'Our Railway', found the editor ambivalent and indeed impartial, laying out the cases for and against a branch line for the town, and what it would mean for changing the town's identity as a resort:

when the railway comes as come it will sooner or later, mercantile Ilfracombe will make its money in the rising, striving, noisy sea-port borough; and the contemplative Ilfracombe will retire to the un-be-railed solitude of the farther west, and there resist for a while successfully that which is becoming well-nigh resistless.<sup>32</sup>

On 27 July the editor returned to the proposal for an independent amenity committee, emphasising in particular the need to open up and maintain new public-walking routes. The pressure on footpaths from walkers, and instances of landowners closing what were seen as ancient rights of way, feature regularly in content on the front

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page of the *Intelligencer*. On 28 September the editorial reported on pressure on the local Board of Health to set up a committee to investigate and intervene legally.<sup>33</sup>

In the edition of the newspaper for 1860, 7 September, the editor's leading article seeks to defend the generally critical position of the local political establishment that it had sustained to date through the first year of its publication:

During our own existence as the only local newspaper of this district, we have always advocated the necessity for improvement: from time to time we have chronicled acknowledged defects and shortcomings in the administration of local affairs, and endeavoured to suggest the possibility and the advisability of remedial measures. It is not surprising to us that our efforts, which in many instances have not been made in vain, have called down on our heads the wrath of the old school of contended optimists.<sup>34</sup>

A second, positive, but the far lesser, editorial position regarding urban improvement is revealed in one opening article for 10 August. In this there are grounds for celebration, even boosterist sentiment. The piece discusses church restoration and the provision of new places of religious worship. Here the editor connects values of the past and present, and where development was giving grounds for a tangible enhancement in local civic pride:

There is no doubt that the condition of any public building is a test of the moral and mental progress of those who frequent it. A poorly-educated, poverty-stricken, hand-to-mouth-living community will be represented in its buildings by neglect and filth, as surely as a stirring, earnest, thoughtful, and well-to-do society may be recognised by the order and cleanliness which pervade its public buildings...they become in fact outwards signs of the progress of thought and well-being.<sup>35</sup>

Church and chapel restoration and building afresh was a typical feature of the developing seaside resorts of Devon, and a reflection more broadly of mid-Victorian religious revival. A new church was provided for Ilfracombe in 1856, and this was followed by a set of other churches and chapels across the town and in the surrounding

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district through the later nineteenth century. Greater and grander public building generally paralleled this, as did the provision of hotels and 'pleasure' residences, especially from the 1870s with the establishment of the rail branch line from Barnstaple. The north Devon town doubled in population size in the thirty years following 1861, its previous doubling requiring the preceding five-decade period. Indeed the architectural and civic 'look' of the town continues to owe most to the legacy of the 'High Victorian' period.<sup>36</sup>

### *On class*

The provincial and national press had much to say on the subject of class, and associated assumptions and expectations relating to attitude and custom. In the local media, meanwhile, there can be seen how more generally prevailing perceptions of social structure and order took on a particular complexion as it intersected with place-specific characteristics around, for example, party politics, economic interests, occupational groups, religious denominations or ethnic-group types. Among the local newspapers establishing themselves in the middle decades of the nineteenth century were those serving the seaside resorts. The early seaside resort-town newspapers were generally seasonal publications, appearing more regularly during the months of the season. There was an economic and cultural imperative for resorts to establish their identity and its sense of place, and for it to be articulated. Newspapers, alongside visitors' guides, fulfilled this function. The local press was keen to report on the endorsement brought by a visit from Royalty, the aristocracy or other notables; and, of a more routine nature, 'visitors' lists' were a regular feature, with an instrumental task of reporting on the number and status of those taking up residence. Furthermore, the local press articles and commentary had an important role to play in mediating between the providers of entertainment and the shifting nature of consumers and their demands, with conflict between the interests of seasonal residents and day trippers being a frequent cause for comment. Newspapers also pressed for standards to be maintained in terms of behaviour and morality among established residents and visitors alike.<sup>37</sup>

Commentary on class makes an appearance in a number of the editorials of the *Intelligencer* through 1860. This content considers areas of concerns that might be anticipated in resort newspapers more generally, with class being discussed in terms of what constituted correct behaviour and conduct, and the role that the media had to play

in setting, maintaining and promoting standards. To the topic of good and bad conduct, the editor of the *Intelligencer* devotes a whole leading article, on 3 August. The piece, entitled 'Ladies and Gentlemen', 'calls attention to a subject which is sufficiently obtrusive at all English watering and holiday places – the lack of manners in a certain section of the holiday-makers'. The editor is of the opinion that this 'nuisance is a recognised evil', that the 'ill-mannered form but a very small portion of the mass of visitors', and that 'they are not confined to any class of society'. Although this nuisance may be 'limited in extent, it is 'singularly virulent within its narrow boundaries'. The editor proceeds to offer an interpretation:

The symptoms are mainly as follows. A 'lady or 'gentleman,' whose manners at home are presentable, arrives, on holiday thoughts intent, at – say Ilfracombe, or say Scarborough, or say Malvern: the place is of no consequence. He or she becomes instantly independent of public opinion – reasoning thus, 'I am an entire stranger: it doesn't matter what I say or do.' He (for we may omit the feminine development as a matter of politeness) then 'goes in' for *brusqueness*, and without pause or pity endeavours to secure for himself every accommodation and every pleasure which the place can afford, at the least possible expenditure of trouble to himself.

The editor subsequently denounces brusqueness and praises civility, concluding, metaphorically:

the selfish tourist a peripatetic furze-brush: he wounds and scratches, and tears the feelings of every one at every step he takes; and loses his claim to the highest title which a man can be accorded, without gaining an equivalent for his loss.<sup>38</sup>

The editor also touches on class in relation to taste, and here also the newspaper can be found acting as a mediator in circumstances of tension. A number of editorials and other front-page 'Local News' items relate to the profiling of the annual cycle of local cottage garden shows. The editor is clearly a supporter, writing on 13 July of their generally utilitarian worth in bringing to bear 'the stimulus of competition', providing a market outlet, spreading new knowledge, encouraging related crafts and activities, and

fostering artistic skills. The newspaper reported prize giving under typical categories of vegetables, flowers and straw work. However, the introduction of a new prize category for collections of indigenous ferns had stirred considerable controversy and opened up division. The editor made the newspaper's position clear, endorsing the new initiative:

It is something to have taught the cottagers that money's worth exists in our woods, way-sides, and combs; on our cliffs, downs, and sea-board: it is something greater to have directed their attention to natural beauty of form, to the appreciation of minute distinctions of texture and construction, and to have brought them into contact with those minds who have learnt to value the beautiful as well as the useful, and to believe that man was intended for higher ends than to become a successful caterer of potatoes for dinner, or of apples for desert.<sup>39</sup>

The editorial emphasises the value of ferns as a local economic commodity in themselves, and their broader cultural significance for the area. The editor, in doing so, made a partial and significant choice between longer established customs and a new and externally contrived fashion, and, with it, siding for one cultural-group interest over another. From the perspective of Ilfracombe's development as a visitor attraction, the editor's view was perhaps well judged. The north Devon coast's reputation as a place to pursue the passion for natural-history collecting was spreading, with ferns being among the most sought-after prizes. Philip Gosse's *A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devon Coast* of 1853 was widely read. Moreover, in the year following the *Intelligencer's* support for fern collecting, in 1861, Gosse published *Sea-Side Pleasure: Sketches in the Neighbourhood of Ilfracombe*.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Afterword***

The short story of *Bright's Intelligencer* is an intriguing one. The reasons for the newspapers quick demise have been considered previously.<sup>41</sup> However, this study, with its particular focus on the *Intelligencer's* coverage of the improvement of the town, does give particular emphasis to the significance of one factor. The final editorial of May 1861 acknowledges the need for more news content in the publication, and indicates that this will be addressed in the design of the succeeding *Ilfracombe Chronicle*. In

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addition, the editorial opinion was to be reduced in status and profile. There is certainly much to suggest that the weight of critical comment of the structures of local government and administration will have brought the newspaper its detractors.<sup>42</sup> In the local news section of the edition for 21 September 1860, a report of a meeting of the Board of Health noted the authority's decision 'by corporate consent' not to recognise the *Intelligencer* as 'a "newspaper"'. The column, in the *Intelligencer's* defence, retorted:

We believe that quality and not quantity constitutes a newspaper, just as a board is equally a board whether it be thick and unmanageable, or flimsy and practically useless.<sup>43</sup>

Newspaper editors sought to strike the right balance between objective and empirical reporting and subjective opinion, and between the positive and negative. They had to meet the expectations of proprietors as well as achieve and sustain circulation. The *Intelligencer's* editor was far more critic than booster, and this is not surprising given the point that Ilfracombe had reached in its life course, with its 'select' phase and identity now under strain. The town had yet to experience the physical and cultural mutation that would accompany and follow the arrival of the railway. On 27 July 1860 the *Intelligencer* reported on plans for its construction by 1862. It would not be completed, however, until 1874. With this came far greater population growth, civic, commercial and domestic building projects, and reorganisation of local government and administration. The editor appeared a supporter of improvement and progress, but it is not clear whether this also corresponded with welcoming unguardedly what would be a significant and irreversible change in the town's identity. The publication, in July of 1860, foresaw a major shift in the town's economic and cultural prospects, from one of a socially selective 'watering place' to a centre maximising its commercial potential as a visitor "'port" of no small importance'.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Conclusion: policy and practice, continuity and change***

This research is an expression of the applied approach and broader significance of doing local history in the present. The project is also positioned in the current and topical context of developing practice in research-engaging learning and teaching, prompted by

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REF, TEF and KEF, and encompassing research-informed enrichment, practical skills training, and ultimately co-presentation and production. It ought to be observed, however, that the history of local history is a longstanding one, reaching from its roots in antiquarian endeavour to prominence today among much public history activity. Its restless and impulsive curiosity, and commitment to collective and collaborative enquiry, will no doubt persist and continue to flourish – through and beyond the lifetimes of formalised frameworks of excellence and exchange, and, in addition, both within the academy and without. David Hey was devoted to the traditions, customs and aspirations associated with local history; and other historians that he influenced and inspired will continue to perform, and then pass on, this sense of responsibility and mission.<sup>45</sup>

This case study is an illustration of the thematically diverse and complex, compelling and informative, and contrasting and contested character of local press material, and of the general practice of local history as a craft. Investigating local and regional newspapers as a primary source is not without its methodological challenges, but they present a range of opportunities for empirical analysis and more developed conceptual interpretation. Ilfracombe's *Intelligencer* is an especially rich and stimulating example of a nineteenth-century provincial newspaper. This analysis of Ilfracombe's *Intelligencer* identified an editorial emphasis on place perception, that is, on the qualities or shortcomings associated with the weather, facilities, and class conduct. Like local newspapers more broadly as a source, they are one of the few points of reference for discerning how collectively held thoughts and feelings were being moulded and mirrored; how communities might have perceived itself in the past; and how places sought to present and promote themselves.<sup>46</sup>

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assistance of Sara Hodson at Ilfracombe Museum, and for the museum's ongoing interest in this research.

This article has been produced as part of a collection gathered together as an appreciation of the work of David Hey. David's research was rich and diverse, with much of his output advancing and promoting knowledge and understanding of the origins of local and regional distinctiveness and of senses of place. He worked with the author of this present article to set in the Devon context one of his later areas of interest, surname history:

[The] sense of belonging not just to a town or rural parish but to a wider neighbourhood was undoubtedly stronger in the past, but is still recognisable today.<sup>47</sup>

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