

**The professionalisation of sports journalism,
c1850 to 1939, with particular reference to
the career of James Catton**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of a PhD at the
University of Central Lancashire

May/2007

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To the memory of my parents,
Kathleen Tate and Arthur Tate.

Abstract

There has been a considerable growth in research in recent years into the history of both journalism and sport, two hugely influential areas of popular culture. The two fields cover a wide spectrum of interests and there is much ground that is common to both. However, studies of journalism and the growth of the newspaper industry have largely ignored the role of the sports journalist and the place of sport within a developing press. Moreover, studies of the expansion of commercial sport and the games-playing habit, whilst touching on the place of the press in their development, and utilising newspapers as primary source material, have paid little or no attention to the place of the sports reporter in the promotion and recording of the sporting sub-culture. This thesis aims to address the shortcoming in current research with a study centring on the growth of the occupation of sports reporting from the mid-Victorian era to the inter-war years. The thesis notes the adoption of sport as a circulation aid by the popular press, considers the type of recruit attracted to sports reporting, the job's practical aspects, the position of the sports journalist within the editorial hierarchy, and the acceptance of sports reporting as a legitimate specialism within a widening editorial agenda. The career of journalist James Catton is introduced to the study to examine in detail the manner in which occupational trends impacted upon the individual reporter, and in order to trace the manner in which sports reporting could be said to have adopted a 'professional' outlook during the period of this study. The thesis reveals the uncertain standing of the sports journalist within the newspaper industry, the part-time nature of much sports reporting, with sport regarded as an occupational rite of passage for the young and the trainee,

and the struggle to rid the occupation of a reputation sullied by a perception of hackneyed journalism. The biographical section of the thesis introduces a contemporary voice, that of James Catton, to let it speak to an experience that might otherwise prove difficult to capture. Catton's working life highlights the possibilities and the demands of a career in sports journalism, and the success that the adoption of a 'professional' approach to the work could secure.

Acknowledgements

This research project grew out of an undergraduate study at the University of Central Lancashire into the presentation of sports news in the North West press at the turn of the last century. I am particularly grateful to the encouragement I received from Professor Dave Russell to pursue that interest further. My thanks also go to the History Department staff at UCLAN for making part-time undergraduate study possible, and enjoyable, for mature students through the provision of evening courses. Without that facility this work would not have been started. I have been enriched by both formal and informal interaction with scholars at the university working in a wide variety of historical fields. In particular, Professor John Walton has supported my endeavours and generously agreed to read and comment on parts of the thesis as it developed and he, together with Professor Russell, has drawn my attention to several primary and secondary sources that have helped the thesis take shape. My research entailed several trips to archives in London, and I would like to thank the History Department for help towards meeting the travel costs on two of those visits. I have been assisted in my research by staff at very many libraries and archives, and in particular I would like to record my thanks to the staff at the UCLAN Library, Burnley Central Library, Manchester Central Library, the National Library and the National Newspaper Library in London. Arsenal Football Club allowed me access to the material held in museum stock relating to James Catton which proved central to much of my research. I have benefited from opportunities to present papers at a variety of forums within UCLAN, and also in the stimulating environment of the British Society of Sport History annual conference in Southampton in April,

2003. The BSSH represents a body of historians whose work has helped guide and inform my research. The thesis would not have been attempted, or completed had it not been for the immense support, encouragement and patience of my wife Kathleen, and I owe a debt of thanks also to my children Daniel, Hannah and Aidan for their interest in my work and their tolerance regarding my excessive use of the home computer. I owe my biggest debt of gratitude to my supervisor Professor Russell for his historical insight and erudition, his enthusiasm and patience, and for his welcoming injection of humour into an at times protracted but immensely enjoyable learning experience.

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The thesis

This thesis examines the development of sports journalism as a career between 1850 and the 1930s. The gradual emergence of the sports journalist as an accepted and necessary press figure over that period is traced against a background of an expanding newspaper industry that, in part, adapted to the growing popularity of organised sport and adopted the sporting sub-culture as an integral part of its own expansion. The thesis will assess to what extent sports journalism could be said to have displayed the characteristics of a 'professional' occupation throughout the period under review. The career of sports journalist James Catton, whose working life stretched from 1875 to 1936, will be used as a case study, a contemporary voice to help illuminate, illustrate and interpret the human aspect as two dynamic and controversial forces, the newly-professionalised and codified world of late-Victorian sport, and the newspaper industry, converged to create a growing opportunity and demand for the work of the sports journalist. It is intended that the thesis will also add to the literature on the white-collar stratum of lower middle-class Britain.

Newspaper files can be invaluable resources for historians of the recent past, providing evidence of event and circumstance, with an associated insight into contemporary opinion and reaction. The newspaper report – for the purposes of this thesis, the sports report – the choice of what is deemed newsworthy or fit to publish, what is described for the reader and, at times, what is left unsaid, the type of language used, the treatment of the story on the page, its length, its tone, all contribute to a fuller understanding of the past. The version

of events and situations presented to contemporary readers can only be partial, however objective the intentions of the reporter may have been, whether delivering an eyewitness account of an incident, or acting as a third party in relating the evidence and impressions of others. The very bias that may influence the writing of a newspaper report, whether emanating from or seeking to confirm class, economic, political or national prejudice, or stemming from ignorance or misunderstanding, can add to the insight the historian can gain from the reporter's work. Equally, the knowledge, empathy and clarity that the skilled reporter can bring to his work can help illuminate and explain the actions of past generations. The worth of the newspaper report in providing a window on the past, albeit partial, selective, and at times inconsistent, is acknowledged by historians both tacitly and overtly in any work that relies on a story culled from a reporter's notebook. This applies whether the information is used simply to corroborate dates or a sequence of events, or more extensively, perhaps to build a picture of an individual or to glimpse the early growth of a sub-culture unlikely to leave an imprint in modern society's more formal documentary records. Yet whilst the opportunity to see past lives and events through the prism of the press, however flawed, is a useful, and well used, historical resource, the significance of the reporter in offering his version of contemporary life is, at times, ignored or taken as read. I would argue that a deeper understanding of the role of the sports reporter is long overdue and represents a notable omission in the development of both sports history and the history of journalism. I would also contend that a greater knowledge of the world of the sports journalist would facilitate a clearer reading of the past through the pages of the press.

By tracing the occupational structures that developed around sports journalism, this study will address the need, highlighted by several historians, to cast light on an at times obscure and yet consistently influential figure, the newspaper journalist. Writing in 1990, Joel Wiener, lamenting the anonymity of the majority of Victorian journalists, suggested, 'It is imperative that we become more knowledgeable about the human element behind journalism'.¹ The point is illustrated by Keith Sandiford who, in introducing his study of cricket in Victorian England, warned that, 'Any attempt to place cricket in a broader Victorian framework must begin with a synthesis of contemporary press reports', admitting that the cricket historian 'in search of primary materials, is even more completely at the mercy of contemporary journalists'.² Tony Mason hoped his review of the sporting press in **Association Football and English Society 1863-1915** would prompt greater research into the subject and although the growth in sports history studies has since been impressive, Mason was moved to note some 15 years later that, 'Little is known about most of the editors and writers who contributed to the Victorian Sports periodical press . . . As for the internal workings of such journals, next to nothing is known. There is no shortage of things to do'.³ In her review of editorial recruits to the Victorian press, Susan Drain conceded that, '. . . many voices are only now being identified, and their import and influence have yet to be fully appreciated'.⁴ The study's associated goal of illuminating the

¹ Joel H. Wiener, 'Sources for the Study of Newspapers', in Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, Lionel Madden (eds), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (Macmillan), Basingstoke, 1990, pp.156-163.

² Keith A. P. Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians* (Scolar Press), Aldershot, 1994, pp.5-6.

³ Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915* (Harvester Press), Brighton, 1980, p.187, Tony Mason, 'Sport', in J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society* (University of Toronto Press), 1995, p.297.

⁴ Susan Drain, 'Journalism and Journalists', in Sally Mitchell (ed), *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia* (Garland Publishing), London, 1988, pp.415-417.

development of a section of white-collar culture, in part addresses Michael French's observation that the literature on the lower middle-class 'has concentrated on the experiences of artisans and independent retailers'.⁵

Although it is not intended to suggest that sports journalists, as an occupational group, were located exclusively among the lower middle-class, the thesis will suggest that a significant proportion of newspaper reporters were drawn from this section of society.

The project will seek to explain some fundamental aspects of the sports reporter's working environment and career prospects, including an attempt to identify the appeal of the job to would-be practitioners, to assess the economic rewards associated with sports journalism, the nature of the work, the skills required to succeed, the limits or boundaries to that success and the opportunities for advancement. The original nature of the work will be further enhanced through an examination of issues of entry to the industry and training. The development of reporting styles, a significant issue in the history of sports journalism, will also be highlighted. In short, the thesis aims to illustrate the working practices of the sports reporter. It deals with the men who reported sport, and they were, almost exclusively, men, as one might well expect given the nature of the job and the social mores of the period. The study will also consider the journalist's relationship with the sports world he reported and his place within the industry he represented, together with an assessment of what opportunities, if any, were available, particularly to leading figures in the sports journalism industry, to influence sporting trends.

⁵ Michael French, 'Commercials, careers, and culture: travelling salesmen in Britain, 1890s-1930s', *Economic History Review*, LVIII 2, 2005, p.253.

Sports journalism was a specialism within newspaper editorial departments and an examination of that specialism is, naturally, the central theme of the thesis. But the development of the genre was intimately tied up with wider trends within the press. The study will suggest that reporting on a part-time basis was the predominant experience for most journalists called upon to cover sport. It was part of the work cycle, whether a daily, weekly, or much more occasional commitment. As a consequence, some of the issues and evidence considered within this work will relate, to varying degrees, to the wider occupational field of journalism and to the more numerous news reporters, from the ranks of which the sports journalist emerged.

The issue of professionalisation

The thesis will consider the issue of 'professionalisation' against the background of Catton's rise to prominence, examining the traits and skills that helped make him a leading figure in the industry, and the rewards and influence associated with that rise. Lucy Brown, in her study of the Victorian newspaper industry, notes that the journalists of the time 'were drawn from a very wide social range', but with the majority recruited from the 'more insecure and impoverished sections of the middle classes . . . who knew from an early age that they were dependent on their own wits and industry'. She remarks on their 'roving careers', their propensity to move 'from job to job at bewilderingly frequent intervals', and on the absence of the characteristics of a profession.⁶ Alan Lee, too, questions the professional standing of the journalist and notes the absence of suitable protective mechanisms within the occupational

⁶ Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Clarendon Press), Oxford, 1985, pp.75-94.

structure. For Lee, the journalist 'lived on the fringe of the intelligentsia'. The industry, with an 'insecure and erratic' employment reputation, combined, at times, with unsocial working practices,

... attracted the rootless product of an expanding society, and men seeking the upward social mobility of the burgeoning professions in far greater numbers than the professions could provide places for them.

There was, 'a certain distrust of men whose job it was to disclose unpalatable and often embarrassing facts'.⁷

Brown and Lee have, then, questioned the extent to which the journalist could claim any of the trappings of the professional. Indeed, studies of the emergence of the Victorian professional classes indict journalism with failing to control access, with the lack of appropriate qualifications and examinations, with an absence of economic stability, questionable standards, and the lack of specialised intellectual training.⁸ Mark Hampton, in his study of the Institute of Journalists and the issue of the 'professional ideal', suggests,

An examination of the failed attempt to create a 'professional' organization for journalists provides an important counterpoint to literature that generally focuses on the success stories of professionalization.

Hampton highlights,

... the ultimate rejection of any pretence towards the 'professional ideal' by a large number of journalists, who chose instead to think of

⁷ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (Croom Helm), London, 1976, pp.104-116.

⁸ A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The Professions* (Frank Cass), London, 1964 (first published 1933), pp.266-270, and W. J. Reader, *Professional Men. The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century England* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson), London, 1966, pp.146-153.

themselves as 'mental labourers' who could benefit more from a trade union than from a professional organization.⁹

Much of the occupational shortcomings associated with journalism relate to the lower rungs of the industry, especially at the level of entry. The situation at what might be called the summit of the employment chain, at the level of editorship, it has been argued, was markedly different, with 'men and women overcoming the ambivalence of earlier decades and taking on full-fledged professional status' at the end of the Victorian era.¹⁰ They were, 'as often as not, leading public figures in their own right, well-known in the communities among which they endeavoured, often in the face of furious competition, to carve out their markets'.¹¹ Harold Perkin considered newspaper editors to be 'properly placed at the top of the professional middle class'. Perkin writes of 'professional career hierarchies rearing up alongside one another', with a professional ideal 'based on trained expertise and selection by merit, a selection made not by the open market but by the judgment of similarly educated experts'.¹² Brown and Lee also highlight certain status symbols that eventually accrued to the higher ranks of Victorian journalists. Lee writes of the 'positive aspects in the struggle for professionalisation', namely influence and, with the gradual decline of anonymous writing, 'the acquisition of an

⁹ Mark Hampton, 'Journalists and the "Professional Ideal" in Britain: the Institute of Journalists, 1884-1907', *Historical Research*, Vol 72, No178, June 1999, p.185. See also, Stephen A. Banning, 'The Professionalization of Journalism. A Nineteenth-Century Beginning', *Journalism History* Vol 24, No4, Winter, 1998-1999, pp.157-163, for a review of the subject from the point of view of the press in the U.S.A.

¹⁰ Joel H. Wiener (ed), *Innovators and Preachers. The Role of the Editor in Victorian England* (Greenwood Press), London, 1985, p.XVI.

¹¹ Aled Jones, 'Local Journalism in Victorian Political Culture', in Brake, Jones, Madden, *Victorian Journalism*, Basingstoke, 1990, p.65.

¹² Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society. England Since 1880* (Routledge), London, 1990, p.90, and p.XIII.

identity', together with a place among the ranks of the middle-classes.¹³

Brown writes of the prospect of 'social weight and influence' for a lucky few, of a sense of 'separateness', a 'consciousness of themselves as a Fourth Estate'.¹⁴

In a competitive editorial labour market marked by individualism and self-help, the success enjoyed by Catton saw him elevated to a position where it would be plainly misleading to describe him as anything but a 'professional'. By mid-career he had left behind the socially and economically insecure lower levels of journalism where the 'professional ideal' was attainable only by the minority. For the majority, strategies of professional closure, by means of education, expertise and the exclusion of the unqualified, were pipe dreams. Catton earned the trappings and status of professionalism through elevation to the editorship of the *Athletic News*, but the peculiar nature of that editorship, whereby the incumbent was also expected to be the paper's star reporter and columnist, provided an additional claim to professional status, for Catton saw his own by-line become a marketable product. The manner in which he traded on that by-line in late career, when no longer editor of the Manchester sports paper, will be examined.

Although journalism falls outside the classic descriptions of 'the professions', I would suggest Catton's career fits into a wider, more fluid concept of professionalisation applicable to the changing industrial and commercial

¹³ Lee, *Origins*, pp.108-112.

¹⁴ Brown, *Victorian News*, pp.75-80.

landscape of late-Victorian and Edwardian society. On a practical level, it was a professional status conferred by,

. . . a well-understood and long-established organization of the various tasks involved in the production of newspapers. Journalists learned these systems on the job, and usually treated the work as a lifelong career . . . For most of them the day's work consisted of putting together a saleable and readable publication'.¹⁵

Judging from the sentiments expressed in many press autobiographies, few journalists of the period would have argued with the contention that the occupation's, 'cardinal professional virtues are speed, accuracy and the ability to meet deadlines'.¹⁶ In addition, the increasing prominence of news in the pages of the popular press, at the expense of political comment, saw the development of 'professional standards of objectivity',¹⁷ which, again, I would consider a measure of professionalisation.

The professionalisation of sports journalism across the full range of the newspaper industry will be studied, from the provincial title to what became a recognisably national press in the years spanning 1900.¹⁸ For the purpose of the study, the term, sports journalist, will be used to describe editorial staff charged with the job of producing sports news. The roles of the sports reporter, the sports columnist and the sports sub-editor gradually diverged as the industry matured and as the opportunity and the need for specialism

¹⁵ Brown, *Victorian News*, p.94.

¹⁶ Philip Elliott, 'Professional ideology and organisational change: the journalist since 1800', in George Boyce, James Curran, Pauline Wingate, *Newspaper history from the seventeenth century to the present day* (Constable), London, 1978, p.185.

¹⁷ Mark Hampton, "'Understanding media": theories of the press in Britain, 1850-1914', *Media, Culture, and Society*, Vol 23, No 2, March, 2001, p.217.

¹⁸ Lucy Brown, 'The Growth of a National Press', p.133, and Jones, 'Local Journalism', pp.63-64, in Brake, Jones, Madden, *Victorian Journalism*.

emerged, even though the same man might well undertake all three tasks, especially on the provincial press. Whereas the reporter might primarily be said to have covered sports events, producing a factual account of the action, the columnist was given greater scope for comment and speculation. The sports sub-editor came to specialise in a production role following a need for page layout skills as the influence of the compositor in editorial matters waned in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Time span

The period chosen to illustrate the thesis is guided by developments in both sport and the newspaper industry. The 1850s saw the gradual lowering and then abandonment of punitive newspaper taxes.¹⁹ The wider period saw a steady improvement in living standards, increasing educational opportunities and a growth in disposable incomes. These factors, combined with urban expansion, led to the emergence of a reading public of commercial proportions. Advances in rail transport together with technological innovations in printing and the telegraph system eased the way for a rapid expansion in newspaper production and the adoption of the newspaper reading habit by significant sections of the population. Allied to these developments, the focus of the industry itself shifted. A new, cheaper product was offered to potential readers, as,

Profits replaced ideals as the motor force of the new industry of journalism, while, as an accompaniment to this shift, a market for

¹⁹ For a summary of the circumstances surrounding the removal of the taxes on the press, see Virginia Stewart Berridge, 'Popular Journalism and Working Class Attitudes 1854-1886. A Study of Reynold's Newspaper, Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper and the Weekly Times', University of London PhD thesis, 1976, pp.12-26.

journalism was located somewhere near the point on the social scale where the 'man on the knifeboard of the omnibus' sat. In readership terms, classlessness edged past class as the circulation of newspapers soared into the millions.²⁰

Sport, too, underwent significant changes in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the establishment and development of clubs, ruling bodies and a sporting calendar for spectator and player alike.

One of the clearest signs of this 'revolution' in sporting practice was the dramatic increase in the range of sports available and in the number of people who played and watched them.²¹

These two immensely important cultural phenomena became fused and melded in the sports column, and then the sports page, in the period under review.

Modern sport and the modern press grew up together. The intricacies of the relationship perhaps remain to be unravelled. But it's a commonplace that newspapers contributed to the growth of sport in many ways. They provided free publicity, described the events, published the results. In the early days – the last quarter or so of the 19th century – they offered prizes, management, commitment, even judges and referees. Newspapers helped to form those sporting sub-cultures that grew up around particular sports and particular competitions.²²

Extending the thesis to include the inter-war years makes the study of long-term trends of continuity and change within sports reporting possible, against

²⁰ Joel H. Wiener (ed), **Papers for the Millions. The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914** (Greenwood Press), London, 1988, p.XII.

²¹ Neil Tranter, **Sport, economy and society in Britain 1750-1914** (Cambridge University Press), 1998, p.16.

²² Tony Mason, 'All the Winners and the Half-Times', *Sports Historian* 13, 1993, p.3.

a background of post-1900 developments in a maturing sporting sub-culture and in an established popular press.

James Catton

James Catton began his career as an apprentice reporter in 1875 and he retired as editor of the Manchester-based specialist sports weekly the *Athletic News* in 1924, later spending the final 12 years of his career as a London-based sports columnist and reporter. His working life all but spans the period of this thesis and his career covers the full spectrum of sports journalism, from work as an apprentice with part-time sporting assignments, to national recognition as an expert on sport and sports journalism. His working environment, from provincial weekly and then daily titles, Saturday evening football and cricket editions, to a specialist sports paper and then a Fleet Street Sunday paper, metropolitan evening, and assorted sports periodicals, makes him the ideal exemplar in a review of sports journalism history. His 60-year career at such a formative period in an expanding and maturing newspaper industry provides a valuable guide to the variety of journalistic roles associated with sport, and their changing nature over time.

Catton's dual role – as sports reporter and sports columnist – for the majority of his career, has made the thesis a practical proposition. The ability and opportunity to develop, at some length, his own thoughts on the sporting issues of the day through a variety of sports columns raises his profile beyond that of a more anonymous reporter hemmed in by considerations of a more restrictive writing style, brevity (of sorts), and objectivity. With due

acknowledgement that Catton may not have had a completely free hand in the expression of his own opinions, his work still provides the historian with a deeper insight into the man and his occupation.

Catton can fairly be described as having reported most of the popular sports of his day, apart from horse racing. This gap in his career record is, I think, significant. Racing journalism soon became a specialised field. The development of the racing journalist is touched upon in the thesis, but it is my intention to cover sports journalism as a whole and not to be drawn into a close study of individual specialisms. Issues of space within the thesis dictate that racing journalism must await a separate study. It should be stressed at this point that although Catton is a central figure in the work, details from the careers of several other sports journalists will feature in the thesis.

Literature review

There has been much written on press history, with a significant growth in studies in recent years. But the literature on the history of the sports journalist is sparse, and, as a consequence, it is my intention to keep this section of the introduction brief, restricting my comments, by necessity, to those secondary studies that approach the subject at a tangent.

The place of sport in society, together with the growth of codified and commercialised games and the creation of urban sporting loyalties in the decades spanning 1900, have attracted comment and research over the past 20 years, in particular. Within that body of work there has been considerable

recourse to the evidence of newspaper reports delineating the expansion of a variety of sporting sub-cultures, especially those surrounding football and cricket.²³ The press as agent in the dissemination and popularisation of the Victorian and Edwardian games playing cult has been a feature of many of those studies, together with more specific works on the topic.²⁴ But historians of this sports history sub-discipline have often failed to penetrate the cloak of anonymity masking much of the reportage. The pages of the *Athletic News* have proved a significant source of material in a number of these studies and, where occasionally an individual journalist from the period has been identified, it has often been James Catton, writing under the pen name, 'Tityrus'. The *Athletic News* has been recognised as a popular, influential, and comprehensive recorder of Britain's sporting sub-culture, with a seamless production history stretching from the 1870s to the 1930s. Catton's editorship spanned the years 1900 to 1924. The two, combined – the man and the paper – provide a convenient point of access to a potentially rich vein of contemporary news and comment. But there is need for a fuller picture of the

²³ Wray Vamplew, *The Turf. A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing* (Allen Lane), London, 1976; Mason, *Association Football*; W. Vamplew, *Pay up and play the game. Professional sport in Britain 1875-1914* (Cambridge University Press), 1988; N Fishwick, *English Football and Society 1910-1950* (Manchester University Press), 1989; John Lowerson, *Sport and the English middle classes 1870-1914* (Manchester University Press), 1993; Sandiford, *Cricket*; J. Hill and J. Williams (eds), *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele University Press), 1996; Dave Russell, *Football and the English. A Social History of Association Football in England 1863-1995* (Carnegie Publishing), Preston, 1997; Tranter, *Sport, economy and society*; Jack Williams, *Cricket and England. A Cultural and Social History of the Inter-war Years* (Frank Cass), London, 1999; M Huggins, *Flat Racing and British Society 1790-1914. A Social and Economic History* (Frank Cass), London, 2000; Mike Huggins and Jack Williams, *Sport and the English 1918-1939* (Routledge), London, 2006.

²⁴ Tony Mason, 'Sporting News, 1860-1914', in M. Harris and A. Lee (eds), *The Press and English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Associated University Press), London, 1986; John M. Osborne, "'To keep the life of the nation on the old lines': the Athletic News and the First World War", in *Journal of Sport History* 14, 1989; Mason, 'All The Winners'; Mason, 'Sport'; Kate Jackson, 'C. B. Fry: The Sportsman-Editor', *Victorian Periodicals Review* Vol 34, No2, Summer, 2001; Jeffrey Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence. Sport, the Newspaper Press, and History', in Murray G. Phillips (ed), *Deconstructing Sport History. A Postmodern Analysis* (University of New York Press), 2006.

journal and its editor. This is not to argue that the use of anonymous press reports is in any way flawed. But I would contend that the current lack of knowledge concerning sports reporting places the historian at a disadvantage when assessing the worth of those reports.

Among the first questions which any student of history needs to ask of his or her source material are: who wrote it? When? And why? These questions pose immediate problems for the reader of any newspaper or periodical article, for the answers are neither obvious nor easily discovered. Yet the content of the press can only be interpreted with confidence once answers, however inadequate, have been found . . . The provincial journalist has sometimes to be dug out of the census returns, Post Office directories or poll books. Some remain concealed for ever. Even when we have a considerable amount of information, the identity of a journalist can remain but a shadow.²⁵

It could be argued that historians studying the newspaper industry's treatment of sport have failed to deliver a detailed appraisal of the role of the reporter, with little attempt to lift him from the 'shadow' of the past. But I also acknowledge that those selfsame historians have contributed significantly to an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between sport and the press, whereas research conducted primarily into the creation of a modern newspaper industry has tended to ignore the place of sport as a component in that advance.²⁶ The point is best illustrated with a consideration of sport within the concept of the 'new journalism' of the 1880s and 1890s. Historians of the press are agreed on the make-up of the 'new journalism', a concentration on

²⁵ Edward Royle, 'Newspapers and Periodicals in Historical Research', in Brake, Jones, Madden, **Victorian Journalism**, pp.48-50.

²⁶ Lee, **Origins**; Brown, **Victorian News**; Wiener, **Papers for the Millions**; Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, David Finkelstein, **Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities** (Palgrave), Basingstoke, 2000; Jeremy Black, **The English Press 1621-1861** (Sutton Publishing) Stroud, 2001.

the personal, the human element, crime, scandal, shock-provoking news, and sport, often at the expense of political news and comment. But whilst agreeing on sport's role as a central feature in the widening appeal of the popular press, they have failed to examine the issue in any detail.²⁷

I would suggest the literature on the evolution of the reporter, the humble gatherer of news, whether at a police court, racecourse, or political meeting, is singularly lacking, and the subject awaits a close study. As such, much of the research in this thesis providing an insight into the practicalities of reporting sport should be of value to the student of the full spectrum of newspaper reporting. Chapter Two of this thesis, in particular, should contribute to the wider history of newspaper journalism. Perhaps the fullest picture of the journalist can be found in the works of Lee and Brown.²⁸ But even here, he is subsumed in reviews taking in the status of editors, men seeking to make their mark through journalism of a literary stamp, and the question of journalism as a profession or trade. Details of the practicalities of reporting, of the experience of the man covering the courts and the council chamber, of their recruitment and working conditions are sparse, with the sporting media all but ignored.

Anyone seeking a more direct reference to the sporting media, the treatment of sport in newspapers, and, by reference, the occupation of sports reporting, must consult the work of historians who have approached the newspaper industry primarily with a view to exploring the social, economic and cultural

²⁷ Lee, *Origins*, pp.117-130.

²⁸ Lee, *Origins*, pp.104-117, Brown, *Victorian News*, pp.75-94.

development of sport.²⁹ An insubstantial and generalised image of the sports journalist is presented in these works, partly because, as Mike Huggins and Jack Williams note, 'Only a few sports journalists were known to the sporting public, since many, and particularly racing journalists, wrote under pseudonyms'.³⁰ The authors refer to the post-1918 press. But the cloak of anonymity shrouds the work of journalists across the full time span of this thesis. The task of identifying the common practitioner, below the level of editor, especially for the Victorian period, is substantial. The picture that does emerge, includes an impression of the 'class conscious' cricket reporter, 'obsessed with respectability', burdened by an 'innate snobbery'; the football reporter as 'enthusiast', earning 'a special, if not always harmonious, relationship with the local football establishment'; the ranks of the racing press being swelled by the inter-war recruitment of 'public school and university men'; a tendency for some early twentieth century journalists to adopt 'thoughtful, articulate, broadly philosophical approaches', building on an idea adopted by an earlier generation of reporters that sport 'was about good sportsmanship and civilised culture', with, in contrast, others eschewing any idea of 'reflective' journalism.³¹

Jeffrey Hill, in identifying the press report as a primary source for sports historians, cites Mason's **Association Football** as a prime example of an

²⁹ Vamplew, **The Turf**, pp.219-223; Mason, 'Sporting News', pp.168-186; Fishwick, **English football**, pp.94-107; Mason, **Association Football**, pp.187-203; Mason, 'All the Winners', pp.3-13; Mason, 'Sport', pp.291-297; Jeff Hill, 'Rite of spring: Cup Finals and community in the North of England', in Hill and Williams, **Sport and Identity**, pp.85-111; Russell, **Football**, pp.30-36, 62-69, and 103-113; Williams, **Cricket and England**, pp.65-68; Huggins, **Flat Racing**, pp.27-29; Huggins and Williams, **Sport and the English**, pp.24-28 and 45-46.

³⁰ Huggins and Williams, **Sport and the English**, p.45.

³¹ Sandiford, **Cricket**, p.12; Russell, **Football**, p.36; Fishwick, **English football**, p.94; Vamplew, **The Turf**, p.222; Mason, 'All the Winners', p.12; Mason, 'Sporting News', p.168.

'outstanding' work 'copiously constructed from primary evidence in which press accounts of various kinds occupy a principal place'.

Historians of sport in particular have resorted to the press. The files of the provincial press have been rigorously excavated, particularly for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the period most sports historians have studied. Press reports have become a staple – perhaps *the* staple – source in the task of reconstructing the history of sport and games.

But Hill goes on to suggest an over-reliance on newspaper reports, 'to the exclusion of other sources', can work to 'the detriment of the history' produced. Hill's essay highlights what he sees as the 'fictive elements' of newspaper reports and 'the opaqueness of the source itself', especially in the sub-genre reporting style of the local press 'football celebration story'.³² It is a fair question to ask. How much credence can one give to the anecdotal sports-fans-in-London 'colour' piece regularly produced by local newspapers when clubs reach a national final? Perhaps by drawing a fuller picture of the reporter writing the article, with a consideration of his economic and social background, his working schedule, and employment experience, such reports, and others, can be rendered more understandable and more useful to the historian, thereby clearing some, at least, of the 'opaqueness' that Hill complains of.

Catton's work as editor of the *Athletic News* has, as noted above, provided a means of furthering research into wider issues connected with Britain's sporting culture. Mason credited the paper with a central role in the reporting of football's growth in the years spanning 1900, describing it as 'the country's

³² Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence', pp.117-129.

leading football weekly', with mention of Catton's influential position as editor. Nicholas Fishwick, in his 1989 work **English Football and Society 1910-1950**, devoted a chapter to the role played by the press and broadcasting in helping popularise football, paying particular attention to how press coverage changed over the period. In that context, Catton is mentioned briefly among, 'The old school of football journalist . . . producing long, detailed descriptions of matches or almost academic discussions of football news'. Catton is described as presiding over a title that had failed to move with the times and of favouring a style and reporting policy that had become 'anachronistic'. The impression of Catton as a writer bound by Victorian stylistic conventions to produce 'heavy and detailed' reports, whilst at the same time commanding a reputation as a 'distinguished sports journalist', is repeated in Hill's 2002 work, **Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain**. Catton's tenure as *Athletic News* editor is deemed significant enough to be included in a 23-date chronology of events summarising the relationship between sport and the media in the period 1822-1999.³³ Catton is treated as a central figure in John M. Osborne's 1987 review of the *Athletic News* during the First World War, a study of the paper's, and by inference, Catton's attitude to the worth of sport in bolstering public morale at a time of national crisis.³⁴ The author mistakenly places Catton as an old boy of Malvern public school and thereby a member of the upper rungs of the aspiring middle classes seeking 'status education' in mid century. Catton's family background was, in fact, located more on the lower margins of the middle class, circumstances that, I believe,

³³ Mason, **Association Football**, pp.189-191, Mason, 'All the Winners', p.9; Fishwick, **English Football**, pp.102-103; Jeffrey Hill, **Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain** (Palgrave), Basingstoke, 2002, p.44 and p.58.

³⁴ Osborne, 'Athletic News', 1987, pp.137-150.

influenced his attitude to the key issue of late-Victorian sporting ethics, the standing of the professional sportsman.

In attempting to place the job of reporting within a wider context of developments in white-collar occupational structures in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, the studies in clerical employment written by David Lockwood and Gregory Anderson have been particularly useful. Patrick Duffy's 2000 work on the compositor has provided a valuable insight into a newspaper trade with a relatively successful record of occupational solidarity in protecting employment terms and conditions. The work of Lee and Brown has provided an invaluable framework detailing the growth of a popular press upon which the thesis could be developed.³⁵

Methodology

A wide variety of primary and secondary sources have been researched in order to produce this thesis. The files of newspapers and periodicals from the mid-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century have been consulted, along with trade journals associated with the newspaper business, newspaper histories, and general works on the history of individual sports and sports clubs. Journalism instruction manuals were produced regularly throughout the period of the study, and they have proved particularly useful in building a coherent picture of the job of reporting as it developed and matured to meet changes determined by the industry's drive to appeal to ever-wider

³⁵ David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker. A Study in Class Consciousness* (George Allen and Unwin), London, 1958; Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester University Press) 1976; Patrick Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor, 1850-1914. An Aristocrat Among Working Men* (Ashgate), Aldershot, 2000; Lee, *Origins*; Brown, *Victorian News*.

circulations. The autobiographies and biographies of journalists, sportsmen and administrators have provided a significant aid to research. The fact that some of the journalists' biographies were written suggests the authors were successful or boasted exceptional careers. For a historian looking for a 'type', for the general, and the commonplace, an over-reliance on the exceptional could prove misleading. In these circumstances, it is up to the historian to identify those circumstances and characteristics that helped single the individual out for success, and to identify those elements common to the occupational group, the common experience of the majority. Sports writing has, throughout the period of the study and beyond, invariably involved news reporters covering occasional sporting events. As a consequence, the reminiscences of journalists who did not specialise in sports reporting can still contain interesting asides on the press's involvement with sport and provide substance when finding answers to the practical question of how a reporter worked.

In pulling together the finer details of James Catton's career and family life, I have utilised the Census, street directories, town and city histories, and more personal items, such as wills, birth, marriage and death certificates.

Fortunately, a limited amount of correspondence directed to Catton during the course of his career has survived. Pasted into a series of volumes of cuttings of a small selection of Catton's work, and in the possession of Arsenal Football Club, the letters proved particularly useful in compiling the section of the thesis on the practicalities of gathering sports news. The correspondence has also proved invaluable in tracing the web of contacts central to Catton's

work, in highlighting issues of concern to Catton and his contemporaries, and in considering the standing of the journalist in the eyes of his sporting correspondents. Catton's own review of the sporting times he lived through, **Wickets and Goals. Stories of Play**, compiled from a series of articles written to mark his retirement from the *Athletic News* and published in 1926, has been a vital pointer to many of the significant personalities and issues in Catton's life.³⁶ But the volume is typical of its day, with only brief mention of the author's personal life, leaving questions regarding his motivations and aspirations, the practicalities of his job, interaction with fellow sports journalists and pay and conditions unanswered.³⁷

The study has involved a close reading of the Manchester-based *Athletic News* and associated titles founded by Edward Hulton, including the *Sporting Chronicle* and *Sunday Chronicle*. Catton's journalism in Manchester is more accessible than his earlier work on the *Preston Herald* and *Nottingham Daily Guardian* because of the use of his pen name 'Tityrus'. But the thesis makes use of earlier work, identified through a close reading of Catton's later journalism and references made to particular incidents he clearly witnessed first hand. The identification of Catton's early journalism helps in tracing the development of his reporting style, together with issues of continuity and change in the type of material he produced. Catton's later work on a variety of London titles has also been studied.

³⁶ J. A. H. Catton ("Tityrus"), **Wickets and Goals. Stories of Play** (Chapman and Hall), London, 1926.

³⁷ The memoirs of journalists, whilst providing a rich source of anecdote and social comment, can be singularly lacking in basic career details. It is a point confirmed by Brown, **Victorian News**, p.75.

A point consistently made by historians of the press, is the sheer volume of material available to study. Historians are 'forced to improvise typologies, methodologies, and morphologies', in order to make their research manageable.³⁸ In the case of a journalist of Catton's longevity, the comment is particularly relevant. Through tracing James Catton's career as a journalist in Preston, Nottingham, Manchester and London, through following the development of significant trends in a variety of sports, but in particular, football and cricket, and through an analysis of developments in newspaper production and the role of the journalist, the thesis has taken shape. The three strands of research provide, at times, an uneven route through the story of sports journalism's development in the formative years from 1850 to 1939. When, occasionally, those strands briefly converge before separating again, the career of James Catton assumes a welcome clarity, and goes some way towards illuminating a wider experience of countless anonymous sports journalists.

Chapter structure

The thesis chapter structure is developed around two themes. Chapters One, Two and Three consider the development of sports journalism, with particular emphasis on the occupation's growth from the mid nineteenth century to the opening decades of the twentieth century. Within this section, Chapter Two also deals with wider issues affecting newspaper journalism as a whole. The broadening of the research at this point is necessary in order to provide a

³⁸ Michael Wolff, 'Urbanity and Journalism: The Victorian Connection', the H. J. Dyos Memorial Lecture, May 29, 1979, Victorian Studies Centre, University of Leicester, pp.12-13.

foundation upon which to construct the more detailed study of the sports journalist. The second half of the thesis, Chapters Four to Six, contains a significant biographical element centring on a review of James Catton's career from 1875 to 1936, and how it relates to the industrial trends and occupational practices outlined in the opening chapters. The nature of the sources available to chart sports journalism's development renders a fixed chronological cut-off point post-1900 unsatisfactory for certain topics studied in Chapters One to Three. As a consequence, the examination of several of these themes will include material relevant to the 1920s and 1930s. But for the most part, Chapters Four, Five and Six, in presenting Catton's career, will also take up the story of sports journalism's mid- to late-Victorian beginnings and explore developments beyond 1910.

Chapter One will examine the rapid growth of the newspaper industry in the second half of the nineteenth century, and how sport came to be an important ingredient in the make-up of an expanding popular press. The development of the evening press's ubiquitous late Saturday sports editions and the associated demand for up-to-date sporting results, together with the practicalities of gathering news to meet that demand, will also be studied. The role of the reporter in the expansion of the Victorian newspaper industry will be featured in Chapter Two. The popular image of the reporter, and the reality of an occupation maturing to serve an unprecedented public appetite for news of all kinds, including sport, will be assessed. Particular attention will be paid to issues of pay and status, with an attempt to locate editorial recruits within the burgeoning ranks of Victorian 'white-collar' workers. Brief career sketches

of a small number of men and boys recruited by the press in the 1870s, the decade of Catton's entry to the business, will conclude the chapter, with a view to placing some of the earlier trends and issues in a human context. The thesis, en route to opening up the neglected field of sports journalism, will also, by necessity, open up the wider one of the journalist in general, and Chapter Two represents part of that process. Chapter Three will continue the theme of the individual, by identifying a handful of journalists, already considered masters of the business of sports reporting at the time of Catton's apprenticeship in reporting. The style of much late-century sports reporting will be touched upon in order to set the scene for stylistic advances post-1900. The chapter will then consider some of the attractions of sports reporting to would-be recruits before examining the development of whatever associational culture the journalist could call upon, with particular reference to the workings of the sporting press box. The theme of associational culture will be extended to briefly consider similarities between the economic and social standing of the sports reporter and the Victorian commercial traveller, again with the aim of assessing the place of the reporter in the commercial economy. A study of the peculiar relationship between sports journalists and the sportsmen who dabbled in journalism, will close the chapter, highlighting the economic competition the sports writer could face.

Catton's introduction to newspaper work, as an apprentice reporter in 1875, will open Chapter Four, with the intention of locating the individual within the milieu of Victorian journalism. His family background will be examined as fully as possible in order to help locate Catton within the Victorian class system

and to gauge, if possible, how typical the young Catton was as an editorial recruit. To further that theme, his educational background will also be studied. Catton's introduction to sports reporting whilst an apprentice, and the way an interest in sport shaped his early working life, will lead into an examination of career moves to Nottingham in the 1880s, and Manchester in the 1890s. The review of the practical processes involved in gathering the sporting news, featured in Chapter One, will be extended to the post-1900 period. Chapter Five will comprise a study of Catton's career as editor of the *Athletic News* from 1900 to 1924. On a more thematic note, the take-up of trade unionism within journalism, and Catton's involvement, will be looked at. His opinion of the professional sportsman, a controversial figure in the growth of spectator sport in the decades spanning 1900, will be a particular feature of the chapter. Catton's relationship with the sportsmen he wrote about will also be considered before the chapter closes with Catton's retirement as *Athletic News* editor. Chapter Six will consider his final 12 years as a sports journalist in London. In concluding a review of Catton's career, two important themes will be considered. The value Catton placed on sport in the cultural make-up of the nation will be assessed, and the issue of writing style, highlighted in Chapter Three, will be examined with reference to Catton's journalism. The chapter will include a section examining Catton's posthumous reputation, as a guide to the impact contemporaries felt he had on sports journalism. In turning to the Conclusion, it should be noted that the absence of other studies examining the work of the sports journalist and the practicalities of reporting in general, presents an obstacle in comparing the thesis' findings and in arguing their full significance. Nevertheless, the Conclusion will naturally include a

synopsis of the study's overall findings and the place of those findings within the fields of journalism history and sports studies history, in the expectation that further research into the history of sports journalism will add to the significance of this work. The Conclusion will close with suggestions for further research.

Chapter One

'The Romance of Our News Supply': Victorian press expansion, sport, and the journalist

1:1 Introduction – Page 30

1:2 'An essential reference point in the daily lives of millions': The Victorian newspaper industry and sport – Page 31

1:3 'A ubiquitous feature of Saturday-night urban life': The Saturday sports edition – Page 52

1:4 'Running for dear life to the telegraph office': To be first with the news – Page 61

1:5 Conclusion – Page 73

1:1 Introduction

This chapter will attempt to identify early features in the occupational development of the sports journalist by looking first at a general picture of industry-wide expansion, and then narrowing the focus to consider a specific development, the exploitation of the market for Saturday sports news, together with the practical means of gathering the news to serve that market. Such a course should help locate the sports journalist in the wider context of the press.

The chapter opens with an examination of developments in the British newspaper industry in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rapid expansion of titles, the establishment of a newspaper reading culture, and the place of sports news within that culture, will be considered. The late-century growth of newspapers generated a demand for journalists and, in a sense, was the prime factor in the development of sports reporting as an occupation. The culture of enterprise that lay behind the spread of the press created new working conditions for the journalist as fresh markets for potential readers were opened up. To illustrate the nature of that enterprise, the introduction of Saturday 'sports specials', weekend editions of the evening press specifically targeted at the sports enthusiast, will be studied. Technological innovations in printing facilitated a speeding up of production methods, and were accompanied by advances in communication techniques that together impacted directly on the role of the reporter. The demands and opportunities created by contemporary means of transmitting the news, in particular, the use of homing pigeons and the telegraph, will also be considered.

1:2 'An essential reference point in the daily lives of millions': The Victorian newspaper industry and sport.

The British newspaper industry was riding a flood-tide of change in the mid-1870s. A host of new titles were being established to cater for an expanding readership and a heightened demand for news. No daily papers had been published outside London before 1855, but in the second half of the century the sale and readership of the popular press took off. The expansion was unprecedented in terms of the number of titles, their circulations, their geographical spread, and the variety of print times, from morning to evening, to suit local tastes and commercial considerations. In 1868 six towns in provincial England could boast of both a morning and evening paper, and 16 towns were home to at least one daily title. By 1872 the daily paper numbers had increased to 91 in the United Kingdom, outside London, and the figure had reached 159 by 1892. By 1900, towns with both a morning and evening press had risen to 34, with 71 hosting at least one daily. The rise of the cheap evening press – morning papers tended to sell for a penny and evenings for a halfpenny – was particularly dramatic. Evening titles multiplied in number from 22 in 1872 to 85 in 1892. Weekly titles, too, increased in number, rising from under 400 in 1856 to an estimated 2,072 in 1900. Annual newspaper sales spiralled from 85 million in 1851 to 5,604 million by 1920, the number of newspapers purchased per capita over the age of 14 leaping from six copies at the earlier date to 182 copies by 1920.¹

¹ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (Croom Helm), London, 1976, p.288; Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Clarendon Press), Oxford, 1985, p.33; James Curran, Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility. The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (Routledge), London, 1991, p.43.

The industry's remarkable late-century growth was in stark contrast to the situation that had prevailed in the first half of the century, where a press hamstrung by taxation, governed by a narrow news agenda and attracting limited investment, had generated a limited appeal among the lower classes. Provincial weeklies had contained a 'meager (sic) and stale' diet of news alongside columns of political comment. Most copies of a London-based daily newspaper would pass through 'a dozen or even scores of hands', probably through subscription reading rooms and coffee houses across the country, as taxation saw cover prices as high as 7d, well out of the price range of even many middle class families. The London-based Sunday newspapers had grown in popularity, with a decided radical sentiment allied with 'generous helpings of the week's scandal and crime'. But in general, 'The 4d newspaper duty, the tax on advertisements (3s 6d each), and the paper tax combined to make cheap journalism a decidedly unattractive field for the profit-seeking enterpriser'.² The situation changed dramatically in 1855 with the abolition of the newspaper stamp tax and, in 1861, the only surviving 'tax on knowledge', the paper duty. A market for a new, cheaper press opened up for would-be newspaper entrepreneurs, and the newspaper-reading habit spread throughout the country, extending beyond the educated middle classes.

Modern historians of the press have ascribed the expansion in the newspaper industry, in variable degrees, to the gradual lowering and then abandonment of punitive taxes on the industry in mid-century; the emergence of a reading public of commercial proportions; a steady improvement in living standards

² Richard D. Altick. **The English Common Reader. A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900** (University of Chicago Press), 1963, pp.322-331.

and disposable incomes; advances in rail transport; technological innovations in printing; the falling cost of newsprint; the growth of advertising; and the evolution of the telegraph system.³ But the human element in that jigsaw should not be forgotten, and Curtis L. Perry has pointed to 'the emergence of some remarkably able proprietors and editors' playing a part in the economic advance.⁴ Alan Lee, in his survey of the popular press up to the First World War, commented, 'The trends which do appear, increasing literacy, growing population, increasing numbers of newspapers with increasing circulations, seem all to fit together, but it is difficult to see exactly what the fit was'.⁵

Whatever the fit, the end product, in terms of an expansion in titles and sales, is not in dispute. In his study of the development of the *Manchester City News*, founded in 1864, Lee noted that 'proprietors all over the country were beginning to recognize that profitable small journals could be run, with a sizeable local readership attracting valuable and consistent advertising, all at a modest cost'.⁶ Lee suggests the return on capital investments in newspapers could be as high as 20 per cent in the late nineteenth century. The *Manchester Guardian* made £20,000 a year profit most years from the 1860s to the turn of the century; the *Daily Telegraph* generated £120,000 a

³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Penguin), London, 1971; Lee, *Origins*; George Boyce, James Curran, Pauline Wingate, *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Constable), London, 1978; Harold Perkin, 'The Origins of the Popular Press', in *The Structured Crowd. Essays in English Social History* (Harvester Press), Brighton, 1981; Brown, *Victorian News*; Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*; Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press. Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Scolar Press), Aldershot, 1996; Jeremy Black, *The English Press 1621-1861* (Sutton Publishing) Stroud, 2001.

⁴ Curtis L. Perry, *Jack The Ripper and the London Press* (Yale University Press), 2002, p.57.

⁵ Lee, *Origins*, p.34.

⁶ A. J. Lee, 'The Management of a Victorian Local Newspaper, the Manchester City News, 1864-1900', in *Business History* VolXV, 1973, p.132.

year profits in the 1880s. A circulation of around 40,000 to 50,000 was enough to make a penny daily a success, and a paper with a sale of 20,000, 'could still expect to make a good profit'. As the century progressed the cost of entering an increasingly competitive market escalated as the industry adopted new print technologies and earlier ventures became established. An investment of £25,000 was enough to launch a London daily pre 1850, but at least £100,000 was needed by 1870.⁷

But profitability was not guaranteed. The *Manchester City News* initially incurred only modest weekly costs of around £15, and despite attracting weekly advertising revenue of £9 with a circulation of around 1,425, still failed to cover outgoings.⁸ The move into newspaper publishing would no doubt be eased if the investor was already an established printer with the ability to defray overheads for plant and staff, which appears to have been the case in a number of instances. Michael Harris suggests many printers were spurred on by the incentive of securing a more regular income, with their enterprise supported by a network of established commercial contacts.⁹ But many new newspaper titles were supported by limited capital in a highly competitive and untried market. This under-investment and lack of acumen in an expanding industry adapting to a changing commercial emphasis, saw titles cease publication at not infrequent intervals. Lee suggests that 'journalists often

⁷ Alan Lee, 'The structure, ownership and control of the press, 1855-1914', Boyce, Curran, Wingate, *Newspaper History*, pp.120-124.

⁸ Lee, 'Management', p.133.

⁹ Michael Harris, 'London's Local Newspapers: Patterns of Change in the Victorian Period', in Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, Lionel Madden (eds), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (Macmillan), Basingstoke, 1990, p.107.

found themselves cast out suddenly and without compensation'.¹⁰ Of the 25 newspapers known to have been founded in Northumberland and Durham between 1855 and 1868, for example, nine had ceased trading by the latter date, with only eight surviving to the new century.¹¹ The spectre of financial failure, it would seem, was a constant accompaniment to the rapid establishment of an economically buoyant popular press. But, 'The weeding out, as with other companies, came early . . . once established, a newspaper property was a sound investment'.¹²

For a significant number of these new proprietors and their editors, sport was recognised as a means of selling newspapers. The new evening press, in particular, adopted sport, especially racing and football, as an essential selling point, and played 'a crucial role in defining sport as part of a commercialised mass culture'¹³. In her study of the Victorian newspaper trade, Lucy Brown suggests, 'Sports news and business news had emerged as integral parts of the well-informed daily newspaper, and had developed their own conventions of presentation and content', by the closing decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ It is a point agreed upon by Raymond Williams in his examination of the growth of the popular press: 'With the rise of interest in sport, particularly

¹⁰ Lee, *Origins*, p.113. A. Arthur Reade, *Literary Success: Being A Guide To Practical Journalism* (Wyman and Sons), London, 1885, pp.138-141, suggests a scale of compensation had come to be accepted, backed by legal precedence, with editors entitled to six months' compensation, sub-editors to three, daily reporters to a month's notice, and weekly reporters to a week.

¹¹ Maurice Milne, 'Survival of the fittest? Sunderland newspapers in the nineteenth century', in Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (eds) *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester University Press), 1982, p.193.

¹² Lee, *Origins*, p.81. For a review of the business organisation of titles new to the market, see pp.79-93.

¹³ Williams, *Long Revolution*, p.220; Brown, *Victorian News*, pp.271-272; Lee, *Origins*, p.127; R. Holt, *Sport and the British* (Clarendon Press), Oxford, 1992, pp.306-307.

¹⁴ Brown, *Victorian News*, p.254.

football, the evening paper had a new function, and the new London evenings of the eighties (*Evening News*, 1881; *Star*, 1888) were eventually to found themselves on this as a main interest'.¹⁵ Brown further suggests the new, cheap provincial evening newspaper had begun to develop sports coverage in order to better reflect the local scene, in contrast to an earlier reliance on London matters.¹⁶ Football and cricket were among the main beneficiaries of this increased press coverage. James Walvin explains,

In the case of football, knowledge about the game's increasingly complex organisation – its fixtures, venues, times, transport arrangements, personnel and results – was actively promoted through the medium of the press. Newspapers (led by the locals) rapidly established themselves as football's information service.¹⁷

As far as cricket was concerned, Dave Russell states,

It was to the press that the task of matching myth and actuality largely fell. It has long been appreciated that the press played a crucial role in representing sporting culture to a mass audience, but its role was especially important in the case of county cricket where the limited size of the live audience gave the press enhanced powers.¹⁸

New titles were, by their nature, speculative ventures, and the consistent impression given in memoirs of the period is of small numbers of journalists employed on each title. As a consequence, editors had little alternative but to tap into the services offered by news agencies. These agencies sprang up to answer the demand, particularly from the daily press, for London-based news

¹⁵ Williams, *Long Revolution*, p.220.

¹⁶ Brown, *Victorian News*, pp.271-272.

¹⁷ James Walvin, *The People's Game. The History of Football Revisited* (Mainstream), Edinburgh, 1994, p.67.

¹⁸ Dave Russell, 'Amateurs, Professionals and the Construction of Social Identity', *The Sports Historian*, 16, May 1996, p.73.

and specialist reports, such as political commentary, society gossip, and sports results, which their clients' full-time staff could not provide, either through lack of staff, expertise or resources. Several news agencies were founded from the mid-Victorian period onwards to supply a racing results service, together with associated sporting news, to both the press and sporting clubs equipped with their own wire service. Mason suggests,

It is doubtful if many newspapers employed specialist sports reporters before 1870. Before that it was the age of the freelance and the small agency, and even afterwards they played an important role in news collection and distribution.¹⁹

But awareness of sport's commercial potential and its use as a circulation aid, meant that by the late 1880s, '... most daily newspapers had a sporting editor gathering and selecting information for several columns every day'.²⁰

The Press Association, founded in 1868, and owned by a number of leading titles in the provincial newspaper industry, restricted its early, tentative, sports coverage to horse-racing and cricket, two sports sufficiently well organised and popular to justify expenditure on results-gathering. Other small agencies had been providing the telegraph companies with a results and news service from the courses – which they in turn supplied to the clubs, 'sporting houses', and hotels across the country. A series of partnerships and mergers over the closing decades of the nineteenth century saw a handful of agencies come to dominate the market, among them Central News, established five years

¹⁹ Tony Mason, 'Sporting News, 1860-1914', in M. Harris and A. Lee (eds), **The Press and English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries** (Associated University Press), London, 1986, p.179. For the growth of the news agencies, see Brown, **Victorian News**, pp.112-126.

²⁰ J. K. Chalaby, **The Invention of Journalism** (Macmillan Press), Basingstoke, 1998, p.91.

before PA, and the Exchange Telegraph Company (Extel), founded in 1872.²¹ It was in the field of sport that some of the keenest and most expensive struggles to be first with the news were fought. By the 1890s some of the most expensive telegrams used in the London papers were for the scores of England cricket matches from Australia.²² For owners and editors, the expense of agency material would appear to have been justified as an aid to sales and as a check on staffing costs.

The daily and local weekly press were not alone in accommodating sports events in their columns. Sports news was a staple of the Sunday press, too. According to Virginia Berridge, the Sunday papers represented something of 'a half-way stage' in the establishment of a modern popular press. Titles such as *Reynold's Newspaper* and *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, were industry leaders, with the former achieving sales of 300,000 a week in the 1880s and the latter 600,000 in the early 1890s.²³ Sunday papers are considered to have specialised in sensation and sport.²⁴ They, 'were a more or less direct reflection of growing demand for cheap entertaining reading matter', and catered for 'a largely working-class audience'.²⁵ By 1890, some two million copies of Sunday papers were sold each week. The Sunday titles thrived, despite, apparently, failing to achieve respectability in the eyes, at least, of contemporary commentators. David Scott Kamper writes of a 'cultural dividing

²¹ George Scott, Reporter Anonymous. *The Story of the Press Association* (Hutchinson), London, 1968, p.39, and pp.122-128. See also J. M. Scott, *Extel 100. The Centenary History of the Exchange Telegraph Company* (Ernest Benn), London, 1972.

²² Lee, *Origins*, p.127

²³ Virginia Berridge, 'Popular Sunday papers and mid-Victorian society', Boyce, Curran, Wingate, *Newspaper History*, pp.247-249.

²⁴ Lee, *Origins*, p.125.

²⁵ Lee, 'Control of the press', pp.123-124.

line' between daily paper and Sunday paper readers. Kamper, whilst acknowledging the important place of sport within the Sunday press, questions its extent, suggesting sports coverage was 'not as significant' as imagined, partly due to practical issues. Sunday papers produced several editions, some as early as Thursday, with the bulk printed on Saturday afternoons for provincial sales. As a consequence, news of Saturday fixtures, probably the week's busiest day for sport, was limited.²⁶ This seeming uncertainty regarding sport in the Sunday press, provides a timely reminder that there is much work still to be done in analysing the make-up of the industry in Victorian times.

The growth of the specialist sporting press in many ways mirrored that of the wider industry outlined above.²⁷ Monthly journals in the first half of the nineteenth century, such as the *Old Sporting Magazine*, *New Sporting Magazine*, *Sporting Review*, and *Sportsman*, had catered for an audience of sporting enthusiasts drawn from the middle- and upper-classes, with prices ranging from 1s6d to 2s6d. Even the cheaper early weeklies, such as *Bell's Life* 'were clearly aimed above the heads of even the literate lower-class punter'. The sector had developed in response to the popularity of horse racing, country pursuits and the prize ring. They were activities that had often

²⁶ David Scott Kamper, 'Popular Sunday newspapers, respectability and working-class culture in late Victorian Britain', in Mike Huggins and J. A. Mangan (eds), **Disreputable Pleasures. Less Virtuous Victorians At Play** (Frank Cass), London, 2004, pp.83-102. One problem facing historians researching the press of any period is the issue of multi-edition papers. Content and, at a later date, presentation might change significantly from one edition to the next. The chances of several editions of a day's paper being filed in archives are slim, with the risk, therefore, of only a limited record of a paper's news agenda surviving for any particular day. In the case of Sunday papers, compiled over several days for different markets, the risk is obviously greater.

²⁷ For an overview of the development of the sporting press of the period see Tony Mason, **Association Football and English Society 1863-1915** (Harvester Press), Brighton, 1980, pp.187-203, and Mason, 'Sporting News', pp.168-186.

been overlooked or given meagre attention by the general press. Editors would react to the occasional circulation opportunities offered by local racing, say, with no sign of concerted efforts to introduce a regular service. Their papers 'would break out into a rash of turf articles at the time of their local meeting, but racing columns were not a regular feature'. In his study of horse racing, Wray Vamplew adds,

Really there was no racing press as such. However, coincident with the substantial rise in working class spending power came a rapid development of the popular racing press. By the late 1870s there were one daily, one bi-weekly, and six weekly papers wholly devoted to sporting, particularly racing matters . . . ²⁸

This expansion of specialist press coverage mirrored the growth in activity on the turf in the second half of the century. 'In the 1850s and 1860s 161 new horserace meetings were established. By the 1890s even minor horserace meetings regularly attracted daily attendances of 10,000-15,000'.²⁹

There was a market for sports news both before and after the event, and it was a demand that was by no means restricted to actual spectators.

Thousands viewed the proceedings from a distance, with the aid of the sporting press. An idea of how this potential commercial opportunity was exploited, in terms of both racing and other developing sports, is hinted at in Fred Leary's *History of the Manchester Periodical Press*, written in the last

²⁸ Wray Vamplew, *The Turf. A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing* (Allen Lane), London, 1976, p.220.

²⁹ Neil Tranter, *Sport, economy and society in Britain 1750-1914* (Cambridge University Press), 1998, p.17.

decade of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Leary's research reveals a culture of enterprise among a body of, now largely anonymous, print entrepreneurs, of varying resources. These men sought to tap into what was clearly a potentially lucrative market for racing news and comment. No doubt, it was a scenario repeated in other major cities across the country. The start of each new turf season saw a rash of publications on the city's streets to meet the demand from racing – or betting – enthusiasts. They took their place alongside often more substantial journals covering a wider sporting panorama. In 1871 *The Manchester Sporting Chronicle* was published four times a week, price 1d. Each afternoon during the racing season the paper would also issue 'two tissues' – often single sheets of paper printed on just one side – carrying details of betting and race results. It was joined in 1875 by *The Athlete: A Weekly Journal of Sports and Pastimes for Manchester and District*, also 1d, which ceased trading in 1881, and by the penny *Athletic News: A Weekly Journal of Amateur Sport*. But there was a more pronounced expansion in the city's sporting press in the 1880s. One of the longer running publications appears to have been the *Turf Telegraphic News*, later the *Sporting Telegraphic News*, which published for about four years starting in 1880, with 'the latest sporting intelligence' carried in two editions a day, followed in the afternoon by 'tissues' containing racing results. In April, 1882, *The Northern Athlete. A Weekly Journal of Sports and Pastimes* was begun, only to cease trading the same year; in September it was joined by *Bat and*

³⁰ F. Leary, *History of the Manchester Periodical Press* (handwritten/bound) Manchester Central Library, 1896. For an assessment of the place of Leary's work in the history of the Manchester press, and an examination of his motives and success, see, Michael Powell and Terry Wyke, 'Manchester Periodicals: Some New Readings. Charting the Manchester Tributary of the Golden Stream: Leary's History of the Manchester Periodical Press', *Manchester Region History Review*, 2006, pp.43-62.

Ball, at 2d, covering football, cricket, and amateur athletics; *The Sporting Chronicle Annual* was also first published that year. The following year saw the arrival of the seasonal *Sporting Chronicle Monthly Coursing Record* which ran until about 1889, and the weekly *Sporting Opinions*, price 2d. The first issue of *The Umpire* appeared in May, 1884. On sale for 1d, and covering sport, the theatre, and 'general' news, it later dabbled briefly with a midweek edition. The weekly *Judex's Opinion* (or *Index's Opinion*), an eight-page sports journal, priced 2d, made its bow that year, but was not a success and for several years following 'a circular' under the same name was sold for 1s during the racing season. That year also saw the arrival of the seasonal weekly, the *Manchester Turf Telegraph*, priced 1s. *The Cricketers Herald, Athletic and Football Times*, 1d, was printed in Manchester that year, relocating later to Blackburn. *The Result*, a new Saturday evening sports paper, lasted just two issues in February, 1885. The *Sunday Chronicle*, also 1d, was launched, and the *Lacrosse Journal*, a review of the 1884-85 season made one appearance, costing 1s. The *Cricketers Year Book*, at 6d, was printed in 1886 and discontinued in 1889. 1887 witnessed the debut of *The Sporting Chronicle Weekly Handicap Book*, 1d, *The Sporting Echo*, 1d, the penny *Latest Sporting News*, published daily, but with a run of only a few weeks, and the weekly *The Athletic Journal*, priced 1d. The two-edition *The City Racing Record* first appeared in 1888, as did *The Umpire Tissue*, a 'folio' sheet printed on one side, which appeared each race day during the season, and sold for 1d. By March, 1889, the city's appetite for sporting intelligence, and the drive for sporting press profits, prompted the debut of penny titles, *The Manchester Sporting Telegraph and Athletic World*, *The Umpires*

Handicap Book, weekly, printed during the turf season, and, in December, *The Football Programme*, a 'weekly register of rugby and association games', printed each Wednesday, with prizes offered for the greatest number of correct predictions of results.³¹ In the next six years, a further 11 sporting titles were launched. The market for sporting news and results attracted a profuse array of journals, to suit a variety of pockets, as a keenly fought struggle for readers was played out on the streets of Manchester. The competitive nature of the city's sporting press is underlined by the fact that the rush of new titles, however ephemeral, was accompanied by an increased coverage of sports news in the city's numerous weekly and daily non-sporting titles. The total circulation of daily papers, alone, had risen to around 125,000 in Manchester by 1876.³²

Part-time racing writer and full-time barber Richard Wright Procter provides a more colourful contemporary account of the Manchester newspaper market in the years spanning the end of the newspaper taxes. He provides a flavour of the novel realisation among the city's artisan classes that a regular newspaper was within their means, and of the rush to meet the new demand.

The luxury of a daily paper is becoming commonplace, and news grows old in a few hours. Editions chase each other through the day like Indian runners, each one bearing a telegram . . . There is a charming variety of fresh ventures, plain, pictorial, and even coloured, starting forth from every direction.³³

³¹ Leary, *Periodical Press*, pp.343-361, p.391, pp.408-492.

³² Altick, *Common Reader*, pp.354-356.

³³ Richard Wright Procter, *Literary Reminiscences and Gleanings* (Thomas Dinham), Manchester, 1860, pp.33-34.

Possibly the most famous sporting title of the period was *Bell's Life in London*. Tony Mason has described the paper in the 1860s as a model for the sports journals that followed. It was, 'something of a national institution . . . without which a gentleman's Sunday was incomplete'. Founded in 1822, *Bell's* concentrated increasingly on sporting matters. 'Reliability, expert comment, and good writing made *Bell's* the sort of paper which could be taken into some of the best houses'. After a spell when it came out twice a week, probably in response to competition from new titles, *Bell's* settled on a Saturday publication in 1872, priced 5d for 12 pages. Most space was devoted to horse racing and hunting, although the majority of sports received a mention. Chief rivals after mid-century appear to have been the penny titles, *Sporting Life* (1859), 'dealing mainly with the sport of kings, which it was determined to clean up', the *Sportsman* (1865), and Manchester's *Sporting Chronicle* (1871) – the outstanding success among that city's expanding sporting press scene, described above. By 1886, following a change in ownership, the competition had become too fierce for *Bell's* and its name was sold to the *Sporting Life*. Mason highlights three main characteristics which he believes *Bell's* and its chief rivals had in common: a heavy concentration on sport to the exclusion of most other issues, detailed coverage of horse racing, and the promotion and sponsorship of sport.³⁴ They all published annuals, guides, and other sporting material. By the mid-1880s the sporting 'national' dailies were also competing with a flourishing weekly sporting press, headed by *The Field*, *the Farm*, *the*

³⁴ *Bell's Life in London* reporter Ned Smith estimated he had officiated, on behalf of the paper, at 4,000 sporting contests between 1833 and 1883, *The Sporting Times*, March 7, 1891, p.6.

Garden, the Country Gentleman's Newspaper, and Manchester's Athletic News. The latter stood alone in ignoring the turf.³⁵

The 1880s is acknowledged as the decade when, making full use of the electric telegraph system, mass gambling, aided by the press, was first made possible, as evidenced by Leary's record of publishing initiatives. It was not until the 1880s that general improvements in the standard of living saw the working classes with enough disposable income to regularly indulge a taste for betting. 'The growth of betting was both followed and furthered by the tipster and the sporting press'. To place 'an intelligent bet', the punter required the 'age of the horse, weight, sire, dam, dam's sire, owner, money won, previous form, jockey, handicap, position on course, and the like', and the sporting press duly obliged.³⁶ J. Hargreaves, highlighting the specialist sporting press's commercial shift to cater for the working man, after an earlier focus on the more affluent enthusiast, notes,

'As sports acquired a bigger following among working-class people, sporting papers for the working-class reader sprang up. By the 1890s there were three dailies and twelve weeklies for horse-racing alone, and by 1900 twenty-five sporting papers were being published in London. The sports pages were absolutely vital from the beginning, both in the successful selling of this form of popular press to working-class people and in the place sport achieved in working-class culture.'³⁷

³⁵ Mason, 'Sporting News', pp.168-173. For a fascinating and detailed account of the work undertaken by one of the paper's longest-serving reporters, Ned Smith (1833-1883), see Smith's reminiscences in the *Sporting Times*, Jan 10, 17, 24, 31, Feb 7, 21, 28, March 7, 1891.

³⁶ Ross McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939', *Past and Present*, 82, February, 1979, p148, and p.166.

³⁷ J. Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture. A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (Polity Press), Cambridge, 1986, pp.66-67.

Accurate newspaper circulation figures for the nineteenth century press are notoriously difficult to come by. Quoting **Deacon's Newspaper Handbook**, Mason offers a weekly figure of 102,000 for the then twice-weekly *Sporting Life* in 1880. The weekly *Sporting Opinion* sale stood at 13,500 copies, and the *Sporting Times* at 49,000. A 30,000 sale is claimed for the *Sporting Chronicle* in 1883, and 19,700 for the Birmingham-based weekly *Saturday Night* in 1885. **Mitchell's Press Guide** listed a figure of 20,000 for the weekly *Athletic News* in 1888, increasing to 50,000 in the 1891 edition.³⁸

Entry to the business of sports newspaper publishing looks to have been as open as the news side of the industry. John Corlett is said to have bought 'the derelict' *Sporting Times* in the 1870s for £50, half of it borrowed.³⁹ Edward Hulton and Edward Bleackley began what was to turn out to be the sporting press success story of Hultons, in Manchester, with £100 capital in the early 1870s.⁴⁰

Although sport came to be accepted, and even championed, by large sections of the newspaper industry, its integration into the editorial agenda was not without problems. The press, in all its forms, had a commercial imperative to respond to changes in public taste, and the different sports were competing, however unwittingly, for a share of press coverage. *Bell's Life in London* and

³⁸ Mason, 'Sporting News', p183. Sales would fluctuate depending on the news offered. *Bell's Life in London* reporter Ned Smith estimated that a special afternoon edition of the paper, carrying his report of the Sayers v Heenan prize fight in 1860 sold 84,000 copies, priced 6d, before midnight that evening, *The Sporting Times*, Feb 7, 1891, p6.

³⁹ J. B. Booth, "Master" and Men: Pink 'Un Yesterdays (T. Werner Laurie), London, 1926, p.28.

⁴⁰ Alex M. Thompson ("Dangle"), *Here I Lie. The Memorial of an Old Journalist* (Routledge), London, 1937, p.41.

its treatment of prize fighting in mid- to late-century is illustrative of the at times uncertain nature of the press-sport relationship. The journal had immersed itself in the sporting milieu of the day, including the prize ring. The paper's editors had allowed their writers to officiate, if necessary, at bouts, before attacks upon staff covering this sporting *demi-monde* forced a withdrawal from too close a relationship in 1863. The editor, seen as an honest go-between in a sport riddled with corruption, had held stake money for prize fights, pedestrian events, and bets, and had been active 'as sporting organiser'.⁴¹ By the 1850s the paper was estimated to have held some £8,000 to £10,000 of stake money a year.⁴² But concern over the question of what constituted a respectable sporting pastime for a Victorian audience, saw a clear change in policy. In an 'awkward period of transition' between the legally questionable bareknuckle, prize-fight version of the sport and the growth of regulated boxing, the paper withdrew its patronage. Dennis Brailsford notes, 'New leisure opportunities and new leisure provision were revolutionising the sporting life of Victorian England'.⁴³

Perhaps the most serious concern for the press in its relationship with sport was the link with gambling. Editors and owners were obviously aware of the encouragement to bet that their racing news, tips and comment presented.

Mike Huggins writes that opposition to racing among society's opinion formers stemmed,

⁴¹ Dennis Brailsford, *Bareknuckles, A Social History of Prize-Fighting* (Lutterworth Press), Cambridge, 1988, p.156, p.165.

⁴² Mason, 'Sporting News', p.169.

⁴³ Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, p.156. Pedestrianism appears to have suffered a similar setback in late-century, with serious questions over the integrity of events.

. . . partly from fear of the crowds, their language and behaviour, together with broader concerns about absenteeism from work, working-class spending on pleasure and the travelling criminals who followed the races.⁴⁴

A press seeking to establish itself as an acceptable part of respectable family life was naturally sensitive to the anti-gambling sentiments expressed by a vociferous and influential section of society. Alan Lee notes that an intimate association with sport and its concomitant, gambling, proved to be a hindrance for the new evening newspapers of the 1870s and 1880s, 'as far as the politically minded were concerned'. Nevertheless, the late nineteenth-century evening press 'formed an important part of the structure' of both sport and gambling.⁴⁵ Writing in 1893, Robert Black, in his sporting survey, **Horse-Racing In England**, provides a revealing picture of the position he felt the Victorian press had carved for itself in racing circles, noting, 'the prodigious extension of the betting nuisance' and, 'the all but absolute immunity of the 'tout' under the patronage and the aegis of the said press . . .'. He describes a sport receiving extensive press coverage.⁴⁶

A small number of press proprietors and editors sought to appease the anti-gambling lobby by ignoring racing news, especially so among the more upmarket morning press. The *Leeds Mercury* did not carry racing news until the 1890s, the 1894 Derby merited only a single line report in the *Northern Echo*, and three Manchester morning papers agreed not to publish betting

⁴⁴ M. Huggins, **Flat Racing and British Society 1790-1914. A Social and Economic History** (Frank Cass), London, 2000, p.14

⁴⁵ Lee, **Origins**, p.127.

⁴⁶ Robert Black, **Horse-Racing in England. A Synoptical Review** (Richard Bentley and Son), London, 1893, pp.225-227, and p.262.

news in 1870, but only the *Manchester Guardian* persevered, and at some cost to circulation. At the turn of the century, London evening newspapers were estimated to lose between one-quarter and one-third of their sales at the end of each racing season.⁴⁷ Inevitably, the anti-betting stand taken by some titles proved less comprehensive than others. The Sunday paper, the *Weekly Times and Echo*, dropped its racing tips and predictions column in 1890, but still carried betting odds, prizes and details of upcoming meetings.⁴⁸ In pragmatic fashion, the author of a journalism manual of 1902, argued that at least the easy access to the betting odds in the press, 'may save the time and money of the infatuated person who would have gone in quest of the information elsewhere'.⁴⁹

The language in which sports news was presented was also an issue of debate, whether in the popular daily press, as part of the make-up of the 'new journalism' mentioned in the Introduction, or in the more conservative weekly press where stylistic changes and content innovations inevitably took longer to be adopted. The hallmark of much Victorian sports writing in the general press was the 'time-table' cricket and football match report, with a laboured blow-by-blow account of the action, occasionally gilded with a strained classical reference or Latin phrase, and couched in stock sporting terminology. It was a style that came to be ridiculed by later generations of reporters and, even at the time, the language used was occasionally satirised

⁴⁷ Lee, *Origins*, pp.127-128. For the attitude of the *Morning Post* to the issue in mid-century, and its decision to embrace racing after first shunning it, see Wilfrid Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937. Portrait of a Newspaper*, (Routledge), London, 1937, p.210

⁴⁸ Kamper, 'Popular Sunday newspapers', p.100.

⁴⁹ John Pendleton, *How To Succeed As A Journalist* (Grant Richards), London, 1902, p.155.

by writers on literary journals. The *Saturday Review* poked fun at the sports writers' stock turn of phrase in an 1856 essay on prize fight reporting.

The more savage the sport, the more flowery, and yet technical, is the description; and it seems as if a sort of sanction was supposed to be gained for a pursuit, if the narrative affords ample room for brilliant and striking metaphors.

The essay highlighted phrases in use, such as, 'tap the ruby', 'fib the conk', 'exchanging taps on the knowledge-box', and 'going whack with your left on the smelling bottle', adding,

. . . the gravity of the style, the extent to which the different performers are absorbed in their performance, and the mystery of the technical language employed, have something in them irresistibly comic.⁵⁰

It was a style of writing and a vocabulary popularised by an earlier generation of sports writers, with Brailsford attributing its adoption and spread to the influence of sports journalist Pierce Egan (1772-1849), whose language, ' . . . grew steadily more and more extravagant, larded with slang terms and exaggerations . . . the language of the street and the tavern, embellishing it unashamedly'.⁵¹ It was only natural that a later generation of reporters, many newly recruited to an expanding genre of journalism, should look to earlier specialists for a lead as to how to present their stories. Their 'extravagant language' was condemned as 'an abomination' by industry commentators.⁵²

⁵⁰ 'The Sporting Press', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Feb 9, 1856, pp.275-276.

⁵¹ Dennis Brailsford, 'Pierce Egan', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online (Oxford University Press) 2004-7. Golf journalist Bernard Darwin, 'Sporting Writers of the Nineteenth Century', in Geoffrey Cumberlege, *Essays Mainly on the Nineteenth Century Presented to Sir Humphrey Milford* (Oxford University Press), 1948, pp.117-126, suggests Egan was 'the parent or rather the great-grandparent of that strange jargon'.

⁵² Ernest Phillips, *How to Become a Journalist. A Practical Guide to Newspaper Work* (Sampson Low, Marston), London, 1895, p.83.

Sports journalism was not alone in its reliance on the stock phrase.

Newspaper language 'became ponderously stereotyped' and reliant on 'a traditional phraseology'.⁵³ Former *Sunday Times* editor W. Hadley joined the *Northampton Mercury*, aged 15, in the 1880s, later moving to the *Rochdale Observer*. He witnessed at first hand the lack of a pool of experience for the emerging press to tap into, with a command of shorthand often the means of entry to reporting.

. . . I soon met some of the men who had been recruited in the way just described. Shorthand was still their prime qualification. They were slaves of the book and, when they had to do anything but transcribe notes, became the victims of clichés which often they did not understand.⁵⁴

This is an issue I will return to in more detail in Chapter Three.

Despite shortcomings of style and presentation, and the whiff of hypocrisy attached to 'respectable' newspapers courting the betting constituency, the expanding popular press became 'an essential if problematic part of a "speeded up" society'. The newspaper had been transformed,

. . . into the most dynamic and profitable of all products of the printing press by the end of the century, but it had also been securely implanted into the cultural landscape as an essential reference point in the daily lives of millions of people. That was not accomplished without considerable effort . . .⁵⁵

⁵³ C. F. Carr and F. E. Stevens, *Modern Journalism. A Complete Guide to the Newspaper Craft* (Isaac Pitman), London, 1946, first published 1931, p.13.

⁵⁴ W. W. Hadley, 'The Reporter', *The Kemsley Manual of Journalism* (Cassell), London, 1954, p.226.

⁵⁵ Jones, *Powers of the Press*, pp.2-5.

The press came to represent a society 'characterized by mobility and change, an immediate present dominated by speed and punctuality'.⁵⁶ The gathering and presentation of news and sport, the raw material of competition, came to be dictated by that quest for 'speed and punctuality'. Daily papers 'were among the first commodities to be mass-produced and distributed', making use of economies of scale to make the penny and half-penny title possible.⁵⁷ The advances in print technology that made the ever-speedier production of huge quantities of papers a reality, lie outside the scope of this study. But one of the by-products of that modernisation, the Saturday evening sports special, had, from the outset, a significant impact on the working lives of the Victorian sports journalist, and the next section will examine that impact.

1:3 'A ubiquitous feature of Saturday-night urban life': The Saturday sports edition.

The 1880s witnessed the establishment and growth of the 'football special', a Saturday night late edition of the local evening press carrying that day's football reports and associated weekend sports news. They went on sale at tea-time and were designed to satisfy a growing demand for up to date sports news in towns and cities across the North and Midlands. Mason suggests the football special was to become '... as much a part of the cultural scene as the gas lamp and the fish and chip shop'.⁵⁸ Russell describes them as 'a ubiquitous feature of Saturday-night urban life'.⁵⁹ In the joint introduction to

⁵⁶ Michael Wolff, 'Urbanity and Journalism: The Victorian Connection', the H. J. Dyos Memorial Lecture, May 29, 1979, Victorian Studies Centre, University of Leicester, p.10.

⁵⁷ Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, p.41.

⁵⁸ Mason, *Association Football*, p.193.

⁵⁹ Dave Russell, *Football and the English. A Social History of Association Football in England 1863-1995* (Carnegie Publishing), Preston, 1997, p.104.

their comprehensive and hagiographic review of football's rise to prominence, the 1905 four-volume **Association Football and The Men Who Made It**, sports journalists Alfred Gibson and William Pickford are quick to include the brightly-coloured Saturday sports specials among the inventory of sporting literature attached to the game.

Newspapers and periodicals pour their daily and weekly contributions on the game in a steady avalanche . . . A game that has created such a profusion of special journals, and the great playing days of which are illuminated by innumerable broadsheets in colour like unto the rainbow, devoted solely to the purveying of fact and fancy on the one topic . . .⁶⁰

The sports specials were made possible by Victorian society's adoption of Saturday afternoon as the 'validated time to play'. Writing of Saturday sport, Dennis Brailsford, suggests,

Its contribution to the late Victorian sporting revolution was far-reaching. The reconstructed leisure time-table, of which the free Saturday afternoon became the dominant feature, altered more than the simple timing of play. It modified sports themselves, urging upon them a new compactness and order.⁶¹

The Birmingham-based *Saturday Night*, launched in 1882, appears to have been one of the first of its kind. By 1884 the *Wolverhampton Express and Star* was publishing a Saturday night sports edition. The Blackburn *Football Journal* launched to coincide with the start of the 1883-84 football season and was on sale from 7pm, and by 1889 the town's *Evening Express* was printing four Saturday editions, starting at 5.40pm. By the 1890s, Mason suggests 'few

⁶⁰ Alfred Gibson and William Pickford, **Association Football and The Men Who Made It**, Vol I (Caxton Publishing), London, 1905, p.III.

⁶¹ Dennis Brailsford, **Sport, Time and Society. The British at Play** (Routledge), London, 1991, pp.65-66.

towns of any size in England were without their football special'.⁶² Entry to the market was not confined to the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The *Nottingham Evening Post*, for example, launched its *Football Post* in 1903, with Mason noting several other new ventures in that decade.⁶³ In London, the *Evening News* was first in the field with its Saturday evening edition, launched in 1889 and printed on white paper, followed by the *Football Star*, on pink paper, in 1893, and the blue *Football Sun* in 1894. Editorial responsibility for the smooth running and content of the Saturday titles appears to have devolved on to the evening press's sports editors. In London, the *Evening News*' sports editor J. M. Dick was in charge of the sports edition, and the extra responsibilities would seem a natural extension of the role of a sports specialist.⁶⁴ The Bolton *Football Field* seems to have been run as an enterprise at one remove from the Bolton *Evening News*. Just how much editorial licence the 'specials' editors had, though, is difficult to gauge. It probably extended to a weekly or occasional comment article, setting forward the editorial opinion on the important sporting issues of the day, as well as administrative tasks, plus commissioning match reports and supervising an editing team on a Saturday afternoon and early evening, although the finer working details of the arrangement remain hidden from the historical record.

A brief examination of the Bolton-based *Football Field* is revealing in terms of the means by which a Saturday sports special came to be launched. The paper's first 'editor' was William Fairhurst who raised the idea of a penny

⁶² Mason, 'Sporting News', pp.177-178, and *Association Football*, pp.191-193.

⁶³ H. Simonis, *The Street of Ink. An Intimate History of Journalism* (Cassell and Co), London, 1917, p.217, and Mason, *Association Football*, p.193.

⁶⁴ 'Three Football Editors', *The Sketch*, Dec 19, 1894, provides a brief biographical sketch of the capital's 'football editors', p.10; Simonis, *Street of Ink*, p.66.

Saturday sports edition with his employer's, the owners of the *Bolton Evening News*. After studying shorthand in his own time, Fairhurst had joined the Tillotson family's newspaper business as a reporter in 1872, aged about 30, following early employment in the 'saddlery' trade. Fairhurst had seemingly recognised a growing demand in the town over the previous two years for a more comprehensive sports coverage. He became frustrated by the 'inadequate space' devoted to sport in the local press. A player and administrator in Bolton cricket circles, a keen cyclist, a football referee and, by 1884, a sub-editor on the *Evening News*, Fairhurst was ideally placed to assess potential demand and to set the groundwork for the first edition of the *Football Field*.⁶⁵ The paper launched on September 20, 1884, with Fairhurst writing under the pen-name, 'Olympian', and the editorial, under the headline, 'Our kick-off', proclaimed,

The Captain has given the word, the uniforms are donned, the leather is flying, and we bound over the ropes aspiring and anxious for the approval of our patrons. We are not unheralded. Our *debut* is made after careful preparation, and we come to the line fit and ready for the fray.

Pledging to cover the full spectrum of popular sports, the editorial made no apology for the primacy of football in its news agenda.

The game has fairly earned the Crown of the Athletic Kingdom, and our endeavour must be to make its reign glorious in achievements, pure in

⁶⁵ Fairhurst obituary, *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, May 7, 1905, p.2; *Cricket and Football Field*, May 8, 1909, p.1. *Evening News* wage books of the period show Fairhurst to be listed first among the weekly-paid editorial staff. Commanding the highest wage, £3.7s.6d, in 1884, he was obviously a senior member of staff, probably second in the editorial hierarchy after the editor – see wage books in the *Bolton Evening News* Archive, Bolton Archive and Local Studies Service.

morals, and conducive to the best interests of its subject votaries . . . We appeal to a big and critical constituency – Sporting Lancashire.⁶⁶

The *Football Field* launched at a time of crisis in English football caused by the growing controversy surrounding professional players, with Preston North End having been expelled from the FA Cup earlier that year in a bitter row over the use of 'imported' players. By October, Lancashire's senior clubs were threatening to form a breakaway British Football Association.⁶⁷ The fact that Fairhurst was appointed secretary of the pressure group of clubs agitating for a wider acceptance of professional players within the game, speaks volumes for the significant role being adopted by newspapermen within the football sub-culture.⁶⁸ As Mason has pointed out, newspapers provided 'management' and 'commitment' to help 'form those sporting sub-cultures that grew up around particular sports and particular competitions'.⁶⁹ In some cases, the possession of an accurate shorthand note, regular attendance at meetings and the expectation of favourable publicity might have been enough to secure a reporter's acceptance within urban sporting circles. In others, perhaps, such as with Fairhurst, a long-standing interest in Lancashire sport, together with the knowledge accrued from that close association, made them welcome allies in any dispute. Fairhurst proved to be sympathetic to the campaign to bring professionalism into the open and expose the sham amateurs. He was to later write that the *Football Field*,

. . . came just in the nick of time to fight the battle for the paid player. I am glad to say that in this respect it bore no inconsiderable part. It was

⁶⁶ *Football Field*, Sept 20, 1884, p.2.

⁶⁷ Russell, *Football*, pp.25-26.

⁶⁸ *Football Field*, Oct 18, 1884, p.5.

⁶⁹ Tony Mason, 'All the Winners and the Half-Times', *Sports Historian* 13, 1993, p.3.

in going about as the representative of the 'Football Field' that I saw a good deal of what was behind the scenes, wholesale corruption in the shape of paid 'amateurs' being rife, both in Lancashire and the Midlands.⁷⁰

A fortnight after its launch, the Bolton Saturday sports paper carried a forthright denouncement of 'the deception' within football on either side of the professional debate. The editorial suggested,

It is all very well to say that football is a strictly amateur game, but why should it be? We have professionals in every class of sport, many of whom are just as much respected as those who play for enjoyment alone . . .⁷¹

The paper continued to provide sympathetic coverage for the Lancashire clubs' demands for a change of heart by the Football Association over paid players. But it must be borne in mind that, whatever Fairhurst's personal views on the issue,⁷² much of the *Football Field's* 'critical constituency – Sporting Lancashire' – were siding with the professional argument. In particular, local clubs like Bolton Wanderers, Bolton Association, Astley Bridge, Great Lever, Halliwell, and Turton were among those pressing for an accommodation of professionals within the game, and it would have been commercially naive for the new title to have alienated the Bolton area's senior clubs and their supporters.

⁷⁰ Quoted in the *Cricketer and Football Field*, May 8, 1909, p.1.

⁷¹ *Football Field*, October 4, 1884, p.4.

⁷² On a personal level, Fairhurst's obituary described him as a 'member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church', a supporter of the temperance cause, and an advocate of '... a Christianity which aims to provide a sound and well-developed body, as the fitting home of a vigorous and joyous soul'.

The sense of the enterprise being driven from the editorial floor, rather than as an initiative of the proprietors, is underlined by the 'Memorandum of Agreement' for the *Football Field*, which has survived, between Tillotsons, Fairhurst and a third party, John Steed.⁷³ The 'management, direction, control' of the title, to run at 16 pages, priced 1d, is placed in the hands of the 'preferential employees', Fairhurst and Steed. The *Football Field* is to operate rent free, with no cost for the use of staff reporters at matches, although telegraph expenses are to be met by the new title. Charges for the use of the printing press, labour and materials are detailed, with profits to be split in nine parts, three to Tillotsons, two to Fairhurst and Steed, with four parts 'distributed among the Sporting staff and other approved employees on a scheme to be drawn up by the preferential employees and submitted to the approval of the Firm'. Unfortunately, the surviving wage books for the business do not appear to record the amount of money the reporters made in the profit-sharing deal, possibly one of the first of its kind in the newspaper industry. The memorandum specifies that the new paper be 'edited by Olympian', and that any title, 'or any personality' featured, 'becomes by the act of publication the copyright and property of the Firm'. The newspaper 'owned' the pen names adopted by reporters at a time when a writer's true identity was rarely revealed, and that served only to depress the earning potential of staff, whilst protecting the intellectual capital of the business. It is an issue that will be returned to later in the study.

⁷³ *Evening News Archive*, BEN/13/1. Bolton Archive and Local Studies Service.

One can only speculate just how widespread were initiatives such as Fairhurst's, driven by editorial 'shop floor' enterprise, in the spread of the Saturday specials. There is no reason to doubt that sports enthusiasts among the ranks of daily paper journalists, men with local sporting knowledge and contacts, were involved in the planning and launch of many of the new 'sports specials'.

The Saturday evening editions were produced, primarily, to meet the demand for news of the day's important football fixtures. They in turn produced a demand for sports journalism. The sports editor, no doubt, needed to cajole news reporters into spending their Saturday afternoons covering matches, with some taking less persuasion than others. With most papers' specialist sports journalist confined to the office to co-ordinate a high-speed sub-editing operation, or covering the most important fixture of the day, the limited ranks of full-time reporters would be swelled by occasional contributors enlisted, perhaps, to cover the exploits of their village team or a club they were associated with in some official capacity. It became a condition of employment for print room apprentices on the *Bolton Evening News*, between the ages of 14 and 18, to act as football copy messengers on Saturday afternoons, 'or to report junior matches locally, for the *Football Field*'. Aged 18, they graduated to spending their Saturday afternoons operating the linotype machines, probably for the sports edition – an indication, perhaps, of the value placed on

the two tasks by senior management, with sports reporting a secondary consideration.⁷⁴

The demand for sports news generated by the Saturday evening specials created new opportunities to earn money through reporting, in the form of lineage work – a report written by outside contributors and paid for on the basis of the wordage or number of lines of type used. Lineage might well provide a welcome addition to a reporter's wages if, say, he provided a second report of the sports match he covered and sent it off to the visiting team's local paper. Or it might represent additional income to a contributor outside the newspaper trade, with the associated risk of undermining the status of the sports reporter, possibly lowering editorial standards, and introducing an 'amateur element' into the business of journalism. But the practise was industry-wide and by no means restricted to sports reporting. The absence of professional entry standards made the nineteenth-century journalist, in particular, prey to competition from many directions, and constituted a serious threat to pay, conditions, and status. Lee notes that journalism,

'. . . had always been populated with amateurs, free lances and casuals, a truly rootless semi-intelligentsia. The job had always been a popular system of out-relief for the unemployed of every other profession . . .'⁷⁵

When the national Press Association was created correspondents outside London included 'journalists employed by the provincial papers but they also

⁷⁴ *Evening News* Archive ZBEN/9/3. Galley proof of career details of A. Boardman, upon his retirement. Boardman joined the *Evening News* in 1905. Phillips, *How to Become A Journalist*, mentions the practise of compositors covering Saturday football matches, p.81.

⁷⁵ Lee, *Origins*, p.115.

included clergymen, solicitors, town clerks, businessmen, school masters, anyone, in fact, who could be trusted to supply reliable information'.⁷⁶ It is an issue that will be returned to in Chapter Two.

There can be little doubt that an assignment covering a football match for the Saturday football editions was often the first introduction to sports reporting for many journalists. The need to provide quick, accurate 'copy' would shape the development of daily paper sports journalism for the rest of the period under review, and beyond. The manner in which reporters met this growing demand for speed, epitomised by new sports edition deadlines, together with the industry's seemingly ever-keener appetite for sports news in general, will be examined in the following section.

1:4 'Running for dear life to the telegraph office': To be first with the news

In his work on the development of the English popular press up to 1914, Lee noted,

The communications revolution which so deeply affected nineteenth-century society enabled news to be gathered, processed and distributed at a pace and on a scale which became almost an obsession of the Victorians. The question of speed was crucial, for it was the speed of communication, together with the speed of production, which made a mass press possible, albeit that before 1914 it had hardly become a reality.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Scott, *Reporter Anonymous*, p.43.

⁷⁷ Lee, *Origins*, p.59.

The sports reporter was a direct beneficiary of the 'communications revolution', in that his copy could be transmitted to the office from the football ground, the finishing post, or the prize ring in ever-quicker and more reliable fashion by use of a variety of overlapping methods, whether it be homing pigeons, telegraph, foot, cycle, train or, post-1900, the car and telephone – or a combination of several of these. Speed of composition, of assimilation and description, and of action, allied with a cool head and focused news sense came to be among the prized assets of the sports reporter. On the debit side, the need for 'instant' journalism must have been a significant factor in the adoption of stock reporting phraseology, a formatted, hackneyed style of writing designed to make speedy composition easier.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the railway boom had enabled well conducted and resourced provincial papers to tap more fully into an up-to-date London and international news system, through the use of agency material, 'ready-made' articles in stereotype, 'all sent up to them in the same, or even in an earlier train, than that which brought them the London papers. They were thus able to keep not too far behind their bigger rivals'.⁷⁸ A less expensive alternative entailed copying the news in the London titles, delivered by rail that day. Persistent accounts of the 'scissors and paste' approach – of literally cutting out any articles in the London dailies deemed worthy of inclusion and having the same story or a close version set in type in the local press, with or without suitable attribution – suggest the cheapest means of providing a service often prevailed over issues of exclusivity and integrity. Railway

⁷⁸ Lee, *Origins*, p.59.

investment also facilitated the growth of commercial sport on a regional and national scale. In a re-evaluation of the role of the railways in the growth of Victorian sport, Mike Huggins and John Tolson suggest the greatest impact of rail travel was felt, not in mass sports spectatorship but in elite participation, '... initially top rowers, jockeys or pugilists and later top football or cricket teams'.⁷⁹ It was in the wake of these professional sportsmen that the sports reporter, in particular, those working for the specialist sporting titles and the sports agencies, criss-crossed the country by rail.

Prior to the development of a 'modern' telegraph system, newspapers relied upon reports sent by rail, road, foot or homing pigeon. Some pigeons were believed to have been able to travel the 55 miles from the racecourse at Goodwood to London in 75 minutes, sometimes with a 'tissue' message attached to each leg for means of balance.⁸⁰ The carrier pigeon was an essential feature of the newspaper office, many of which would have boasted a pigeon loft of sorts, with trained handlers, although just how long into the twentieth century the system persisted is open to debate. A short article in the *Manchester Sunday Chronicle*, of July, 1898, introduced the readers to some of the finer points of a pigeon service, explaining,

Their work, as a rule, lies in carrying to the office the reporter's copy from the many cricket, golf, football, and sporting fields that encircle the city, and which, with one or two exceptions, are not in connection with either the telegraph or telephone systems. Every Saturday . . . as many as thirty or forty birds are requisitioned as messengers by a single paper.

⁷⁹ Mike Huggins and John Tolson, 'The railways and sport in Victorian Britain. A critical reassessment', in *Journal of Transport History*, Vol 22, No2, Sept, 2001, p.109.

⁸⁰ J. B. Booth, *Bits of Character. A Life of Henry Hall Dixon, "The Druid"* (Hutchinson and Co), London, 1936, p.77.

The article adds,

The reporter writes his copy on what is known as “flimsy” – a light oiled paper – and uses carbonised paper to obtain a duplicate. The “flimsy” is attached to the leg or legs of the pigeon by means of elastic bands, and at football and cricket matches the tossing of the birds from time to time is always watched by the crowd with great interest.

The ‘ingenious’ method for handling the birds on their arrival at the newspaper office is described, with mention of a specially activated bell in the sub-editor’s room to alert staff of the arrival of copy and to hasten the despatch of a copy boy to retrieve the hand-written report. To cover the risk of the bird going astray, a duplicate report might be sent via ‘the nearest railway, car, or telegraph station by hand-messenger’.⁸¹

Fleet Street journalist B. J. Evans, recalling his early days in provincial sports reporting, outlined a situation that must have been familiar to countless newsmen over the previous thirty years. An apprentice on the *Western Daily Mercury*, in Plymouth, pre-1911, Evans explained that he regularly took two carrier pigeons in a basket when he attended amateur soccer matches in ‘inaccessible parts of South Devon’. He would write his impressions of the first-half action in a special notebook containing the very thin, ‘flimsy’, paper.

At half-time, I tore out the tissue paper – perhaps a dozen sheets of it – folded them carefully, placed a piece of elastic round the packet, and attached this to the leg of my first pigeon. The bird wheeled over the ground, often cheered by the two or three hundred spectators, and then

⁸¹ *Sunday Chronicle*, July 17, 1898, p.4. *Bell’s Life in London* reporter Ned Smith provides a detailed explanation of the use of pigeons for press work in mid-century in the *Sporting Times*, Jan 10, 1891, p.6, explaining the *modus operandi* of sporting journalists supplying results news to both the press and sporting clubs.

made its way to the pigeon-loft of the *Western Daily Mercury* and *Evening Herald*.⁸²

The release of a pigeon relaying details each time a goal was scored appears to have been particularly popular among spectators, although the reception would probably depend upon which team had scored!⁸³

Evans' sporting ability was put to the test when, as a 17-year-old, he was despatched by bicycle to cover an away match of Plymouth Argyle reserves, complete with a basket of homing pigeons for his match report. He was on hand to see the keeper sprain his ankle as he stepped off the horse-drawn charabanc and, having played in goal at school, Evans was pressed into service as emergency cover.

I placed my basket of pigeons inside the goal-net, and I honestly believe that it was anxiety for them even more than the desire to acquit myself well that enabled me to keep my end up. I even stopped a penalty.

Fortunately, Argyle won easily . . . I had to write my report mostly during half-time as I sucked a piece of lemon.⁸⁴

Evans, a talented cyclist in his youth, put his prowess on the road to good use when, at a Royal visit to a point-to-point meeting on Dartmoor, he had orders

⁸² B. J. Evans, *How to Become a Sporting Journalist* (W. H. Allen), London, 1946, pp.48-49.

⁸³ Philip Bussy, 'A Private View Of The Press Box', in *CB Fry's Magazine of Action and Outdoor Life*, Jan, No 22, Vol IV, 1906, p.371. See also, Arnold Bennett, 'Football Match', *Things That Have Interested Me* (Chatto and Windus), London, 1921, p.78. For a fascinating account, post-1900, of the process of sending a match report for a Saturday evening football special by homing pigeon, seemingly based on detailed knowledge, see Arnold Bennett, *The Matador of the Five Towns* (Chatto and Windus), London, 1972, first published 1912, pp.10-24.

⁸⁴ Evans, *Sporting Journalist*, p.49. *Bell's Life in London* reporter Ned Smith refereed the 1860 championship prize fight between Sayers and Heenan in the countryside near Farnborough and made time to write a running report of the bout, extending over two hours with 37 rounds, filing his 'tissues' after every two or three rounds and sending them off by pigeon, *The Sporting Times*, Feb 7, 1891, p.6.

to 'rush my superior's copy to the nearest telegraph office on my racing bicycle'.⁸⁵

Despite the potential for mishap associated with the carrier pigeon, through bad weather, predators, and bad luck, the persistence of the system testifies to its worth and the lack of an economic and practical alternative. The pigeon and the telegraph systems operated alongside one another, and occasionally complemented each other. Arthur Binstead covered his last Waterloo Cup in 1882 as a junior in a small sports agency run by Joe Capp. The 20-year-old was assigned the task of watching the coursing action in rural West Lancashire over several days and, with the aid of a local pigeon keeper, relaying news of the winning dogs to his chief, waiting at the post office in Formby, where Capp would then telegraph the results far and wide.⁸⁶

The first message to be transmitted by telegraph for a newspaper was said to have been sent in May, 1845, for the *Morning Chronicle* along the London and South Western Railway Company's line from Portsmouth to the capital. But even in the 1860s the method was said to be expensive and unreliable, due to demand and delays. After the Post Office took over the telegraph system, with its first telegraphs sent in 1870, cheaper press rates, a gradually more reliable service and a reasonably comprehensive network opened up new possibilities for the newspaper industry, reflected in the growth of news agencies

⁸⁵ Evans, *Sporting Journalist*, p.65.

⁸⁶ Arthur M. Binstead, *A Pink 'Un And A Pelican* (Bliss Sands), London, 1898, pp.25-27.

supplying reports by telegraph, with 20 based in London alone by 1900.⁸⁷ In 1870, private customers were charged one shilling for 20 words, with press telegrams costing a shilling for 75 words, expanding to 100 words on the cheaper night rate. Duplicates cost just 2d a message. Post Office revenue from press telegrams doubled between 1879 and 1899, with the average weekly wordage climbing from 4.2 million in 1874 to 15.7 million in 1899.⁸⁸

The gradual development of the telegraph system created fresh opportunities within, and demands upon, the newspaper industry.

The telegraph created a pressured world within journalism. It made possible the idea that a daily newspaper should encompass the events of a 'day' . . . henceforth daily journalism operated within a new tense, as it were, of the instantaneous present.⁸⁹

Mike Huggins has written of the significant impact information supplied over the electric telegraph had on horse racing, and especially betting. The Electric Telegraph Company had laid a line direct from Doncaster as early as 1852, with Epsom boasting a 'permanent circuit' by 1857. Huggins goes on to note an increase in telegraph messages sent from United Kingdom race meetings, from 114,479 (135 meetings) in 1870, to 436,603 (264 meetings) in 1875.

⁸⁷ Lee, *Origins*, pp.60-61. For a brief summary of how the telegraph developed from a method of 'signalling the movements of railway stock' in mid-century to a means of turning 'information into packets of carefully measured words', see Iwan Rhys Morus, 'Telegraphy and Commercial Culture in Early Victorian England', *Victorian Studies*, Vol 39, No3, Spring 1996, pp. 367-378. For an overview of the efforts made by the provincial press for reform of the telegraph system pre-1870, see David Ayerst, *Guardian. Biography of a Newspaper* (Collins), London, 1971, pp.142-147. For a brief first-hand account of how the advent of a cheaper telegraph service impacted on the provincial press in the years after 1870, see Wemyss Reid, 'Some Reminiscences of English Journalism', *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol XLII, July-Dec, 1897, pp.58-60.

⁸⁸ Brown, *Victorian News*, pp.13-14.

⁸⁹ Anthony Smith, 'The long road to objectivity and back again; the kinds of truth we get in journalism', in Boyce, Curran, Wingate, *Newspaper History*, p.167.

Certainly in the early 1870s much of the traffic at meetings was still generated by bookmakers, owners and other regular racegoers, but the volume of press messages was growing relative to it. The impact varied with the perceived general importance of the race result . . .

The telegraph companies had sent news to 173 newspapers in 1868, but the figure had risen to 467 newspapers by 1870, and Huggins notes, 'The special rates for news brought in the halfpenny evening paper with its racing results.

The evening paper brought more immediacy to betting. Bets could be placed during the day and the result known that evening; the attraction of this to working-class communities may be seen in the rise of betting alongside the growth of the evening press.⁹⁰

Chambers's Journal in 1873 carried a descriptive article on the work of the staff manning the telegraph operation for big sporting occasions. The piece mentions a 'Travelling Telegraph Office', an 'office on wheels', that had recently been established, first used at the Boat Race, then Windsor, Henley regatta, the Canterbury cricket week, Lord's and a number of race meetings. The feature describes how a travelling telegraph staff of 17 would be augmented for an especially popular event, say the St Leger week at Doncaster. Readers were given a glimpse behind the scenes as the telegraph clerks, all 'hand-picked staff', coped with demand at a race meeting, boasting a knowledge of newspaper deadlines and styles, and bringing errors in copy to the notice of the reporters.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Huggins, *Flat Racing*, pp.27-29. The significant rise in the number of press messages sent from individual courses is highlighted in a table on p.28, with, for example, 204 press messages sent from Lincoln in 1870, rising to 2,243 in 1875, and 266 in Nottingham in 1870, rising to 1,096 by 1875.

⁹¹ 'The Special Staff', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature Science and Art*, Jan 11, 1873, pp.18-20.

Sports writer Martin Cobbett noted the relationship between the sports reporter, particularly the racing journalist, and the 'Special Telegraph Staff' who, '... get to know each writer's business as well as he knows it himself'.⁹² Cobbett, later to make a name for himself in racing journalism working for *Sporting Life*, the *Globe*, the *People* as its first sporting editor, the *Referee*, the *Penny Illustrated*, the *News of the World*, and *Tribune*, reported the 1882/83 England cricket tour to Australia for *The Sportsman*. The paper's coverage of the tour makes fascinating reading. Cobbett filed lengthy travel articles and match reports, mailed back to London to save costs, together with brief telegraphed summaries of the more important matches. The end product could be something of a confusing mix, with month-old travel reports appearing out of sequence with the telegraphed news which was, at times, so brief as to leave the reader and *Sportsman* staff perplexed as to events. But the series of reports is illustrative of the nature of the medium and the way it was adapted for press purposes.⁹³ Cobbett was making the best use he could of the technology available to him, with one eye on the prohibitive cost of international cable communication. The success or otherwise attached to *The Sportsman*, in terms of newspaper sales or industry kudos, following on from its decision to send a reporter to cover the Australian tour, cannot now be gauged. One suspects it was considerable. On a more personal level, Cobbett's presence on the tour merited mention in his obituary almost 25 years later, and his daughter later felt his work in Australia, undertaken when

⁹² Martin Cobbett, *The Man on the March* (Bliss, Sands and Co), London, 1896, pp.32-33.

⁹³ For example, see *The Sportsman*, Oct 7, p.8, and Oct 11, p.4, Nov 15, p.3, Nov 22, p.3, Nov 24, p.4, Nov 28, p.4, and Dec 19, p.3, all 1882.

he was already 36, 'may perhaps be taken to have established Martin Cobbett's position as a sporting journalist'.⁹⁴

The Oxford and Cambridge University Boat Race appears to have been one of many sports events where competition to be first with the news became a feature of the day. J. B. Booth, who worked for *The Sporting Times*, recalled a period when, among those reporters covering the race, 'The custom had gradually arisen of sending the result away before the actual finish, and taking the risk . . .' To speed up the relaying of the result back to the newspaper offices, rockets were used to signal the winner, and eventually the Post Office stationed a van at the winning line with a staff of telegraph clerks. Two reporters would position themselves on the van roof armed with binoculars and drop a message through a lid on the roof announcing the winner, with the news to be sent to a list of newspaper addresses supplied in advance to the clerks waiting expectantly below.⁹⁵ In 1894, the Exchange Telegraph Company was credited with sending the result of the Boat Race to 800 subscribers within three seconds of the final declaration, with a dozen 'temporary telegraph stations' lining the route.⁹⁶

Arthur Binstead, mentioned above, noticed the quickening tempo of the reporter's working day on the racecourse in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. Writing in 1898 of his entry to the ranks of sports journalism in the early 1880s, Binstead noted,

⁹⁴ *The Times*, April 25, 1906, p.9; Martin Cobbett, *Wayfaring Notions* (Sands and Co), London, 1906, p.XVI.

⁹⁵ J. B. Booth, *A Pink 'Un Remembers* (T. Werner Laurie Ltd), London, 1937, pp.36-37.

⁹⁶ William G. Fitzgerald, 'The Romance of Our News Supply', *The Strand Magazine*, July to Dec, Vol X, 1895, p.77.

There were some good fat berths knocking about in those days, and the holders of them could stroll about leisurely, back losers, mix with the highest followers of the sport, and still keep "the tale" going; now all that is altered. Two-thirds of the good fellows in the reportorial cockloft are in the employ of one or other of the big Press Agencies, and, from the time the numbers go up for the opening race until ten or twenty minutes after the last winning jockey has been weighed in, they are so punctiliously busy that only occasionally can they slip out to "oil the machinery."⁹⁷

When stripped of the note of whimsy and mild mockery, Binstead is describing an occupation under pressure to perform in tandem with a demanding technology. The rush for speed was not restricted to sport. In 1895, the 'News Gallery' handling press work at the General Post Office, London, was fine-tuned to the needs of both the morning and evening press, housing between 14 'telegraphists' at around 8am, rising to about 140 between 6pm and 8pm. At 10am the staff numbered around 40 and at 2pm about 90.⁹⁸ By 1906 one sports reporting agency, at least, had installed 'transmitters' at the Oval and Lord's. As late as 1902, 'there was much grumbling' over the absence of telegraph facilities inside Old Trafford for a Test match, suggesting the omission was an exception rather than the norm. The shortcoming was overcome by a corps of messengers on cycles⁹⁹

Personal endeavour, even physical risk, could play a part in being first with the news. Martin Cobbett recalled a reporting assignment in Newcastle, where, in the race to be first to telegraph the result of a boat race on the Tyne, he hired a man with a row-boat to take him off the umpire's steamer at a pre-

⁹⁷ Binstead, *A Pink 'Un*, pp.23-24.

⁹⁸ Fitzgerald, 'News Supply', p.72. See also, Vamplew, *The Turf*, p.222.

⁹⁹ Bussy, 'Press Box', p.369, and p.371.

arranged point at a cost of £5, with strict instructions to allow no one else on the boat. His athletic leap on to the smaller boat was to no avail, for the oarsman opted to supplement his earnings by taking the rival pressmen to shore, as well, at a shilling a head. 'I was first ashore and running for dear life to the telegraph office', recalled Cobbett. With the aid of a friend, who took over the mission when Cobbett fell exhausted, the result was sent, 'and the wires broke down before the next despatch arrived'. On another occasion, Cobbett was knocked overboard from the 'Press boat', along with the *Sportsman* reporter, at Barnes on the Thames, when covering a skulling race. Cobbett swam ashore and filed a story from the nearest post office before being ordered to leave because of his dishevelled condition.¹⁰⁰

Judged at this distance in time, the sometimes frenetic rush, admittedly in extreme examples, to swim a river, fire a rocket, race a colleague, and be first with the sports result, appears a little extreme, with the end product an occasionally marginal time advantage over a rival publication or news agency. But that is to lose sight of what, for contemporaries, must have been a circulation imperative. Sports results sold papers. A 1913 study of the industry, pronounced, 'Incomparably the keenest competition in the newspaper world is developed as the result of rivalry to bring out the earliest news of sporting events'.¹⁰¹ For the general public, the essence of reporting was probably summed up in the title of an 1895 article in *The Strand Magazine*, 'The Romance of Our News Supply'. The author introduced his examination of the technology behind the news story,

¹⁰⁰ Cobbett, *Wayfaring Notions*, pp.XIII-XVI.

¹⁰¹ G. Binney Dibblee, *The Newspaper* (Williams and Norgate), London, 1913, p.82.

One almost despairs of conveying, in a single article, an adequate idea of the fascinating romance of the news supply to this country. When one of our dashing war correspondents, fired with feverish enthusiasm, performs a feat that astonishes Europe, or when cricket lovers are enabled to follow, almost over by over, Stoddart's Antipodean innings, then, indeed, the public appreciate the marvels of modern journalism.¹⁰²

Lee sums up the sense of awe attached to the news gathering process, 'Other aspects of the popular press were important – style, capital, readership and so forth, but Victorians were quite rightly most impressed by the sheer pace of it all.'¹⁰³ There was to be no let-up in that pace, as the competition on the telegraph wires eventually developed into a competition over the telephone lines in the first decade of the new century between PA and its chief sporting rival Extel, with both organisations investing heavily, especially in their racing services.¹⁰⁴

1:6 Conclusion

The above chapter has illustrated an industry undergoing considerable change. New business opportunities had been created by the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge', and they would be further enhanced by the expansion of a potential urban readership with the means of supporting a cheap popular press. Newspaper entrepreneurs were recognising and reacting to fresh commercial possibilities. It was a period of transition for all concerned in the industry. Expansion created an increased demand for journalists and the adoption of new working procedures and new roles.

¹⁰² Fitzgerald, 'News Supply', p.69.

¹⁰³ Lee, *Origins*, p.59.

¹⁰⁴ Scott, *Reporter Anonymous*, pp.122-128.

The advent of the Saturday evening sports special is a prime example of the industry responding to a potential market. The sports specials were introduced at a time when popular sports journalism was in its infancy. The shortage of specialist sports staff available to cover a busy Saturday sports programme, compounded by a relative shortage of general news reporters on a paper's payroll, necessitated the hiring of outside correspondents, or the use of print apprentices, presumably with an aptitude for reporting. The opportunity, however fleeting, for the journalist of the time to dictate the occupational structure of the new product to his own advantage, possibly to restrict the use of outside workers and to protect the primacy of the bona fide journalist's work, was lost. It is a particular irony in the sports journalists' development that a product like the Saturday specials, shaped significantly by their own initiative and expertise, should prove a notable factor in the undermining of the reporter's professional standing by attracting a pool of unregulated and casual competitors. The sports journalist operated in too fragmented an occupation to impose standard rules and conditions. There is, in fact, no evidence to show that the editorial floor put up any resistance to the recruitment of 'outsiders' at this period. As much of the evidence in this study will highlight, new press initiatives were tackled on an ad hoc basis. There were probably as many different working arrangements, in terms of pay, responsibilities, working hours and resources, as there were different Saturday sports specials. The invitation to extend reporting assignments to non-journalists was to prove significant in sports journalism's long-term occupational development. The absence of a union structure and lack of

evidence of any occupational body to negotiate change in the workplace in the journalist's favour, meant the market dictated that change.

The growth of sports news in the popular press helped establish the reporter as a significant actor in the late-Victorian sporting world. Men like Bolton's William Fairhurst played a central role in popularising spectator sport. The knowledge that their day to day work contributed to the spread of a thriving sub-culture, of which many were no doubt enthusiastic supporters, and their probable acceptance among the local sporting fraternity, can only have added to their sense of status and self-esteem. Many of the comment articles of the time, associated with sporting developments and points of contention, such as Fairhurst's criticism of sham amateurism, are couched in a tone of shared endeavour, of proprietary concern, even. True, commercial necessity may have occasionally prompted a forced air of fraternity, although there must also have been times when a genuine sense of shared enterprise directed the pen of the reporter.

The public's fascination with the speed of production associated with the daily press may well have engendered a sense of reflected glory on the part of the reporter who played a central role in that process. But that occupational pride came at a cost. The speeding up of newspaper production placed new physical and mental strains on editorial staff. The expectation of 'immediate' news, the circulation potential of new and multi-edition titles with rival papers in the same city competing to be first with reports and results, and the means available to transmit news quickly and accurately, can only have added to an

established ethos of competition. There was a developing keenness to be first with the news and to outdo a rival title and a rival reporter. It was a competitive element that would eventually come to represent almost the essence of the reporter, and would undermine any shared action to improve group conditions and status.

Before turning, in the next chapter, to assess in more detail the men and boys recruited to fill the editorial vacancies created by an expanding industry, it is important to stress that, despite a picture of a press consumed by change, the rate of that change differed considerably across the industry. New sporting titles, racing sheets, big-city daily papers and county weeklies, jostled for readers with established businesses. A relatively lighter news agenda, where, increasingly, sport began to feature, developed alongside a more staid approach, and even where the new agenda was introduced, the modern reader might struggle to be aware of it, grounded, as it was, in the social, cultural and economic mores of another century. News content was still dictated by convention and tradition. The political essay, the leader column, verbatim reports of 'Corporation business', annual general meetings, the criminal courts, train timetables, and news of Empire and society culled from the London dailies, were the standard fare of the provincial weekly papers, and the weekly papers accounted for the majority of the titles of the time.

Chapter Two

'The rootless product of an expanding society': The late-Victorian reporter

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2:2 'Armed only with his pencil and note-book, and a splendid self-reliance': The reporter – Page 79

2:3 'Wild and exaggerated notions': Journalists' pay – Page 96

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2:5 A start in journalism: Recruits to the 1870s press – Page 123

2:6 Conclusion – Page 131

2:1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the development of the occupation of reporting in the second half of the nineteenth century. In order to better understand the growth of sports journalism, the wider field of the journalist in general must be addressed, and this chapter continues that process. The economic position of editorial workers in the industry will be assessed together with their status in society. The brief career details of eight journalists recruited in the 1870s, the decade when James Catton began his reporting career, will be highlighted in an attempt to place industry trends, outlined earlier, in the context of individual lives.

In a telling phrase used in the introductory chapter, Lee describes many mid- to late-Victorian journalists as, 'the rootless product of an expanding society, and men seeking the upward social mobility of the burgeoning professions in far greater numbers than the professions could provide places for them'.¹ The opening section of this chapter will look at how the press recruited and moulded this seemingly mobile pool of workers to meet a demand created by unprecedented expansion. The role of the reporter will be outlined along with the manner in which the industry hired candidates to fill that role. The image of the reporter, the news gatherer, is a particularly strong one throughout the period of this thesis and beyond, and sections one to three of this chapter will look at how that image, how that powerful sense of identity, developed, and will touch upon the ideal and the reality behind the stereotype. Pay and status,

¹ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (Croom Helm), London, 1976, p.113.

key issues in the everyday life of the reporter and factors in the recruitment of staff, will be highlighted, along with lineage, the selling of stories to rival newspapers, and how that practice impacted on the sports reporter. The fourth section will provide examples of the type of men and boys drawn to the business of reporting, with the emphasis on sport, and will provide career outlines with which to compare and contrast the working life of James Catton in the thesis' later chapters.

2:2 'Armed only with his pencil and note-book, and a splendid self-reliance': The reporter

The enormous increase in newspaper production in the second half of the nineteenth century, outlined in Chapter One, in turn created a demand for extra editorial staff. Census figures, although fraught with difficulty in their interpretation, provide an idea of rising numbers, with 2,403 authors, editors, and journalists listed for England and Wales in 1871, 6,096 in 1881, and 8,145 in 1891, despite classification changes.² Although there were increased opportunities to become a reporter, competition for vacancies in the press appears to have been intense throughout the century. John Robinson wrote enquiring about the possibility of a vacancy arising on a Worcester paper in 1846, a decade before social and economic circumstances triggered the industry's expansion. The editor, J Moake, replied,

² Brown, *Victorian News*, p.38. John Beveridge Mackie, *Modern Journalism. A Handbook of Instruction And Counsel For The Young Journalist* (Crosby Lockwood), London, 1894, p.104, claimed a membership of the Institute of Journalists approaching 4,000 in 1894, with Ernest Phillips, *How to Become a Journalist. A Practical Guide to Newspaper Work* (Sampson Low, Marston), London, 1895, p.2, estimating the total number of reporters to be 8,000. The rapid expansion in numbers appears to have slowed in the following three decades, with an estimated 10,000 newspaper journalists, based on the 1931 Census, according to F. J. Mansfield, *The Complete Journalist. A Study of the Principles and Practice of Newspaper-Making* (Pitman), London, 1935, p.11.

I can only say that advertisements for reporters appear very rarely, and when they do there are a hundred applications immediately. The best plan is to appear personally in the field and not to rely on advertisements or the recommendations of friends . . .³

More than 30 years later, in the midst of an employment boom in the industry, competition for jobs was equally intense. *Chambers's Journal* of 1881 carried an essay on contemporary reporting trends and revealed that more than 200 applicants had replied to a recent advertisement in the jobs column of the London *Daily News* for an 'assistant reporter' on an unspecified newspaper. But the article was not written with the intention of marvelling at an occupation in the full bloom of development. The essayist was lamenting how an expanding newspaper industry was, in his eyes, opening the door of opportunity to the wrong type of candidate. The *Chambers's* essay railed indignantly that the increased popularity of shorthand as an aid to commercial employment had prompted growing numbers to apply for reporting jobs, under, ' . . . the popular fallacy that shorthand writing and reporting are synonymous terms'. The *Chambers's* writer, warming to his subject, lamented,

' . . . the fact is thereby disclosed that there are, at the most moderate computation, hundreds of young men eager to find an opportunity of crossing the threshold of a profession which would seem to be increasingly regarded as a haven of refuge for the discontented and incompetent in well-nigh every other rank and calling. Every newspaper proprietor and editor with an experience dating back some fifteen or

³ Frederick Moy Thomas (ed), *Fifty Years of Fleet Street. Being The Life and Recollections of Sir John R Robinson* (Macmillan) London, 1904, p.17.

twenty years, knows well, and probably to his cost, that matters in this direction are very different now as compared with his earlier days'.⁴

No accounts remain of any entrance examinations associated with newspaper recruitment, or of any specific educational requirements, although the growing popularity of shorthand among potential recruits is a constant feature of memoirs and literature surrounding the industry. The sole attempt to establish a dedicated training facility for press workers at this time, appears to have been the creation of a short-lived 'Newspaper Institute', at Crewe in the mid-1870s, operated by a Cheshire newspaper chain owner. The aim was to provide a six-month course in type-setting, proof-reading, 'reporting by teaching Pitman's phonography', sub-editing and book-keeping. The course was considered adequate for the training of potential reporting 'assistants', with the rider that, 'no amount of mechanical training, however valuable in itself, will make up for the lack of tact and general aptitude needed in a reporter'. The initiative was welcomed as a means of overcoming the lack of resources available in newspaper offices to train the editorial apprentice, who was left 'very much to himself'.

. . . and as complaints are now becoming very numerous as to the falling off in ability of reporters, sub-editors, and readers, the establishment of an Institute of this kind seems to meet a want of the time'.⁵

⁴ Anonymous, 'Concerning Reporting', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* (W. R. Chambers), London, Jan 15, 1881, pp.36-37

⁵ Anonymous, 'A Newspaper Institute', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* (W. R. Chambers), London, 1879, pp.395-397. According to A. Arthur Reade, *Literary Success: Being A Guide To Practical Journalism* (Wyman and Sons), London, 1885, the scheme was eventually abandoned due to a shortage of students, pp.9-10. Lee, *Origins*, suggests it was an attempt by the founder 'to provide labour for his Cheshire chain of papers', note, p.258. The enterprise does not seem to have been repeated at any level until the University of London offered a diploma in journalism in 1919, seemingly in response to demand following World War One demobilisation, see Chapter Five.

One senses in the higher echelons of journalism a certain disdain and alarm over the issue of recruitment, a sense that a broadening of the ranks of the reporter had been accompanied by, or even necessitated, a less rigorous recruitment policy in terms of intellectual standards.

'Lads yet at school; young men in their teens; men of maturer years, even if not of much riper judgment; and fond parents entertaining ambitious designs in reference to their peculiarly gifted sons – all these must have their minds disabused of the idea that by investing some few shillings in shorthand books, and giving for a few months an occasional spare hour to their study, one is thereby fully qualified to take rank in the Fourth Estate of the realm. There is no such royal road to journalism; and it is because of the influx of large numbers who have acted upon this idea, that the efficiency and character of the profession are in danger of being lowered, and its avenues blocked up by crowds of incompetent pretenders'.⁶

The introduction of compulsory elementary education in late century had broken 'the hitherto monopolistic position' of the Victorian blackcoated worker, according to Lockwood. 'Every literate person became a potential clerk'.⁷ An enlarged pool of suitably qualified labour could only serve to depress wages and conditions of white-collar employment. A sustained high level of competition for the greatly increased number of reporting vacancies in the closing decades of the century is evidence that journalism, in its lower reaches, was subject to similar employment strains. Newspaper editor John B. Mackie noted in 1894 that a glut of qualified shorthand writers meant newspaper proprietors could 'insist on a knowledge of phonography or

⁶ 'Concerning Reporting', pp.36-37.

⁷ David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker. A Study in Class Consciousness* (George Allen and Unwin), London, 1958, pp.36-37.

stenography' as a basic requirement of reporters 'without adding to the rate of remuneration formerly paid'. Pitman's **Phonographic Teacher** was said to command a sale of 150,000 copies annually.⁸

This uncertainty surrounding the calibre of candidates for an industry seemingly in a state of almost permanent flux, was exacerbated by the lack of any standardised recruitment policy. The press's largely unstated expectations of its potential recruits, ensured a wide constituency for job vacancies. Just what personal qualities editors and proprietors looked for in assessing job applicants is open to speculation. John Naylor secured his start as a reporter after answering general knowledge questions at his interview in Bolton in 1879.⁹ Nat Gould's interview in 1878, secured after his mother replied on his behalf to a vacancy, involved a walk around Newark's finer features and a talk about the countryside and history with the paper's editor.¹⁰ Recruitment was dictated by market conditions.¹¹ The individual editor assessed the raw material represented by job applicants and offered the pay and conditions required to fill the vacancy. Although editors' expectations of

⁸ Mackie, **Modern Journalism**, pp.1-5. Of the six evening schools in Manchester in 1890, five had offered shorthand classes and had taught 2,000 pupils over a two-year period, *Manchester City News*, May 23, 1891, p.7. Even the authors of shorthand manuals were aware of the false expectations that could arise as to a student's suitability for a reporting post, armed only with a knowledge of shorthand. W. Mattieu Williams, in his **Shorthand for Everybody**, 1867, cautioned, 'I beg most emphatically to repudiate any pretensions to make reporters of those who learn the simple system of shorthand which this book expounds', quoted in E. H. Butler, **The Story of British Shorthand** (Pitman), London, 1951, p.121. For an account of the growing popularity of shorthand as a means of entering the world of late-Victorian commerce, see Gregory Anderson, **Victorian Clerks** (Manchester University Press) 1976, pp.101-104.

⁹ Frank Singleton, **Tillotsons 1850-1950. Centenary of a Family Business** (Tillotson), Bolton, 1950, p.12.

¹⁰ Nat Gould, **The Magic of Sport** (John Long), London, 1909, pp.93-95.

¹¹ For a fascinating contemporary insight into the method of advertising press vacancies and the type of written response a job advert might elicit, in terms of style, presentation, wage negotiation, career outlines, the nature of editorial responsibilities, and time-scale, see file DDX 1101/27/8, Lancashire Record Office, Preston, *Burnley Gazette* correspondence, 'Application for post of reporter and sub-editor', March, 1867.

academic attainment among recruits remained unstated, there were a few general qualities looked for, at least according to industry commentators. An appetite for literature, in order to broaden the mind and complete one's education, was suggested almost unanimously by a number of manuals offering advice to newspaper recruits, with Reade insisting, 'Without hesitation, without compromise, he must resolutely choose the best books, and read them only'.¹²

General knowledge was placed at a premium, with the youth advised to have,

'... a knowledge of Latin and French, and of geography, history, and politics. He should know something of art, science, literature, industry, and sport; and, indeed, pretty well everything from heathen mythology to the rules of debate in the House of Commons'.¹³

Expectations had not risen post-1900. James Haslam, a former president of the National Union of Journalists, writing in the 1920s, echoed earlier advice by highlighting grammar, English composition, and general knowledge as prime attributes. He recommended the youth stay on at school until 16. But on that point, after almost two decades of NUJ efforts to regulate pay and conditions, together with the Institute of Journalists' struggle to elevate journalism and protect standards, the ex-NUJ president was forced to concede,

But this is not binding. Very much depends upon the intelligence and aptitude of the beginner. If he has the real "journalistic sense", that is the journalistic mind or instinct – watches others do their work, and takes the advice of his seniors, he will gradually become reliant to fill a post,

¹² Reade, *Literary Success*, p.131.

¹³ John Pendleton, *How To Succeed As A Journalist* (Grant Richards), London, 1902, p.67.

perhaps of an inferior character at first in the reporting or sub-editorial section of the newspaper.¹⁴

This lack of a formal recruitment policy after more than a half-century of expansion is summed up in the 1911 guide, **Choosing A Boy's Career**. The guide's author explained, 'Many still consider that no special journalistic education is needed beyond that to be picked up in the office of a paper, preferably a small one', adding, 'however . . . a good groundwork of general education is increasingly necessary'.¹⁵

The means of entry to the editorial department for the aspiring junior included an apprenticeship as a reporter after leaving school or after a spell in alternative employment. Internal transfers appeared common, from clerical duties, the advertising office, the reading room and from among the compositors where experience of handling all classes of 'copy' – from news to advertising – offered a grounding in newspaper practice and style, and where any shortcomings in education could be addressed through night school classes. A formal apprenticeship meant that, '. . . by the time he has completed his seven years' training, he has learned more than can be acquired at either school or college'.¹⁶

But there must have been many informal arrangements concerning the hiring of would-be reporters, especially in the early years of what was an

¹⁴ James Haslam, 'Careers For Boys. Hard Work and Joys of Journalism', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, March 9, 1925, p.3.

¹⁵ Henry C. Devine, **Choosing A Boy's Career. A Practical Guide for Parents, Guardians, Schoolmasters** (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent), London, 1911, p.51.

¹⁶ Mackie, **Modern Journalism**, pp.17-19.

unregulated boom in recruitment. Edward Hulton is claimed to have not taken on a formally indentured apprentice reporter until 1898, almost 30 years after he had launched the first of his highly successful sporting titles in Manchester.¹⁷ The employment of more mature candidates as 'trainees' certainly points to a flexible approach. Terms of indenture ran from three years to seven, in contrast to the strict seven-year apprenticeship for compositors, noted by Duffy.¹⁸ Hamilton Fyfe graduated to the reporting ranks on *The Times* in the 1890s after first working as the editor's secretary.¹⁹ Graduate W. Hutcheon secured his first paid job as a reporter in Bradford in 1887 after working for free for 10 months on the *Aberdeen Free Press*.²⁰ Like so much associated with the development of the popular press, advances in formalising an apprenticeship system, to the satisfaction of employers and journalists alike, were uneven. The NUJ began an investigation into editorial apprenticeships in 1912, and reported its findings in 1914. With information to hand from 58 branches, the union could report, 'It is evident in a good number of offices apprentices and what are described as boy reporters are exploited for the purpose of keeping down wages'. Members were informed that among the worst cases of exploitation, one news agency employed a sub-editor 'and

¹⁷ Bernard Falk, *He Laughed in Fleet Street* (Hutchinson), London, 1937, p.27. The author claimed to be Hulton's first apprentice reporter.

¹⁸ Patrick Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor, 1850-1914. An Aristocrat Among Working Men* (Ashgate), Aldershot, 2000, p.9, p.59, p.69. The relative strengths of the two occupational groups, the printer and the journalist, are clearly marked by the issue of apprenticeships. The seven-year print apprenticeship controlled numbers, maintained skill levels, and added to status and exclusivity among compositors. The lack of a strictly adhered to indenture period left reporting prey to unregulated competition.

¹⁹ Hamilton Fyfe, *Sixty Years of Fleet Street* (W. H. Allen), London, 1949, pp.24-25.

²⁰ W. Hutcheon, *Gentlemen of the Press* (John Murray), London, 1933, p.46. It is interesting to note that although Duffy, *Skilled Compositor*, pp.52-54, states that entry to printing might involve the payment of 'a premium' by the parent or guardian of an apprentice, especially a compositor, it does not appear to have been widespread among reporters judging from the absence of evidence among journalists' memoirs.

five apprentices and boys'. The prevailing situation appeared to be some way short of the union's goal of one apprentice to four seniors.²¹

The route from the composing room to the editorial floor remained open and popular throughout the period under discussion and, as new technology was introduced, further internal openings were created, including the promotion of 'telephonists in daily newspaper offices'.²² A trained compositor was likely to earn more than a reporter on the weekly press, in part due to the compositors' occupational strength, derived from competition among newspaper proprietors for their services, and the vulnerability arising from 'the perishable nature of the product'.²³ The decision to switch trades, albeit within the same firm, suggests the development of latent literary ambition coupled with a determination to join the white-collar class of workers, perhaps after a truncated schooling brought about by economic necessity.²⁴ The work of the compositor required 'a high standard of literacy'.²⁵ F. J. Mansfield entered the newspaper industry in Kent on the printing side of the business in the 1880s; although he classed himself as a 'budding journalist'. Like his father before him, also a journalist, Mansfield served time setting type, reading proofs, feeding the printing-press. He was then given reporting assignments,

²¹ NUJ National Executive Council Minutes, Jan, 1914, MSS.86/1/NEC/4, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

²² Haslam, 'Hard Work', *Evening Chronicle*.

²³ Duffy, *Skilled Compositor*, p.78.

²⁴ James Haslam, who began his newspaper career in Lancashire in the closing years of the nineteenth century, was earning 22s a week and was in charge of a compositor-reporter 12 months his junior but who earned 35s a week as he was a member of the Typographical Society, quoted in F. J. Mansfield, "**Gentlemen, The Press!**" *Chronicles of a Crusade (Official history of the National Union of Journalists)* (W. H. Allen), London, 1943, p.189. There may well have been friction in the industry as compositors took up reporting posts, and the question of wage levels, social standing, and advancement in such instances awaits further study.

²⁵ Duffy, *Skilled Compositor*, p.17, p.21, p.38.

'including a good deal of sport . . . Columns of football had to be written at the week-end'.²⁶

Reporting apprenticeships were largely taken up by teenagers. Brown writes, . . . most journalists had begun their careers in their teens, or as soon as they left the University. Journalism was seen as a specialized craft. The discipline of writing, to a specified theme, at a fixed length, to a precise deadline, is probably one that can only be acquired when young. This early entry alone gave journalists a distinct identity . . .²⁷

But there is a distinct sense of a two-tier recruitment policy within the industry. Pendleton noted 'a tendency', by the turn of the century, for graduates to enter journalism in 'the literary departments of the daily papers', and among the leader writers. But the youth, 'obliged to bustle for a livelihood long before his beard comes', might begin a career in journalism as, 'a "printer's devil," copyholder, or editor's amanuensis, or is articed to learn the art and mystery of reporting'.²⁸ Journalism was said to have become 'an attractive career' for university graduates with restricted prospects, men with,

. . . no desire at all to become under-masters in public schools, possess little or no capital to take them into commercial pursuits, and cannot afford to wait for the great prizes which law and medicine have to offer to the astute and to the diligent. It is from men of this indeterminate class that journalism is continually enlisting recruits.²⁹

²⁶ Mansfield, *The Complete Journalist*, pp.117-118.

²⁷ Brown, *Victorian News*, p.80.

²⁸ Pendleton, *How To Succeed*, p.27.

²⁹ F. S. A. Lowndes, 'Journalism for University Men', *The Contemporary Review*, Vol LXXX, 1901, p.814.

But journalism held an appeal even for those graduates with a more secure future mapped out. George Brodrick trained to be a barrister and secured employment as a leader writer on *The Times* in 1860 when an essay he had published on 'Representative Government' attracted the attention of the paper's proprietor.³⁰ Oxford graduate Henry Spenser Wilkinson was an examiner in German for the Civil Service Commissioners when, in 1895, a personal recommendation from a peer he knew, to the proprietor of the *Morning Post*, helped secure appointment as the paper's dramatic critic on eight guineas a week, and later as a leader writer.³¹

Training for the job of reporting appears to have developed, or been improvised, along fairly pragmatic lines. In a hit-and-miss fashion, now partially hidden to the historical record, the human resources available to proprietors and editors, themselves often untried in the publishing field, were utilised in a fairly informal and unstructured manner. According to memoirs of the period, the youth was soon put to work on minor reporting assignments. Once 'qualified', or at least experienced in the demands of the job, Brown highlights the 'roving careers' and the extreme mobility of the reporter. It was a trait partly explained by the fact, 'Promoters of new or expanded papers looked for professional and experienced people to run them, rather than for people with local connections'.³²

³⁰ George Charles Brodrick, **Memories and Impressions 1831-1900** (James Nisbet), London, 1900, pp.129-130.

³¹ Henry Spenser Wilkinson, **Thirty-Five Years 1874-1909** (Constable), London, 1933, pp.198-199.

³² Brown, **Victorian News**, pp.81-82.

Whatever the route to seniority, newspaper reporting generated a distinct occupational image. *Chambers's Journal* ran a series of articles throughout 1881 examining the role of the journalist and, in particular, the place of the reporter in the newspaper industry.³³ The author, or authors, of the essays appear particularly well informed about the state of the industry, and go on to present a brief outline of the qualities believed to be needed to meet the demands of the job. The journal suggests the reporter,

'... must possess the faculty of intuitively seizing upon the essential features of any occurrence which he may be instructed to report... He must also have an intuitive perception of the relative value of words with all their shades of meaning... A reporter, too, requires a well-balanced mind, a cool head, and an impartial judgment. We do not say a reporter should have no fixed principles, no private opinions of his own; but he must be careful not to allow these opinions to influence his reports... A reporter also requires to be able to concentrate his thoughts upon his work in any circumstances. Whilst others around him are in a state of the wildest enthusiasm, he must be perfectly cool, and absorbed only in his work... He must be acquainted not only with the history of the past, but also with the occurrences of the present... he must possess the power of assimilation... Of course, this means in many cases a good deal of superficiality; but all journalists must, from the exigencies of their situation, be more or less superficial'.³⁴

The *Chambers's* series was part of a growing body of literature devoted to the phenomenon of late-Victorian newspaper expansion. Judging by the number and variety of essays and commentaries published in journal and book form,

³³ Anonymous, 'Concerning Reporting', Jan 15, 'Literary Beginners', Jan 29, 'Some Curiosities of Journalism', February 19, 'Some Curiosities of Reporting', Aug 6, *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* (W. R. Chambers), London, 1881.

³⁴ Anonymous, 'Concerning Reporting', pp.37-38. The superficiality highlighted appears to have been a feature of the educational requirements of the late-Victorian clerk, too, according to Lockwood, *Blackcoated Workers*, pp.20-21.

the educated public had developed a fascination for the speed of newspaper production, the increase of titles, advances in technology from telegraphy to the presses, and the organisation and management of newspaper offices. All were deemed suitable subjects for discussion and analysis.³⁵ Together with this curiosity of a general nature, there developed a steady flow of manuals and guides devoted to practical advice for the would-be editorial recruits. A feature of these guides was the attempt to build a composite picture of the 'ideal' reporter, as well as outlining the rewards and pitfalls associated with newspaper work.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the issue of health and the need for a robust constitution is a recurring theme in a series of titles running from the 1880s through the Edwardian period to the inter-War years. A. Arthur Reade in his 1885 work, **Literary Success: Being A Guide To Practical Journalism**, warns,

'... By day and night, in fine weather and in foul, Sunday and week-day alike, the reporter must be ready to go wherever duty calls. He must also be prepared to go without regular meals; to expose himself to varieties of temperature; and to toil when others play. Such conditions, to which all reporters must submit, are, it is quite obvious, unfavourable to health and long life. Even strong men not infrequently break down, and retire into less laborious occupations'.³⁶

The warning was probably introduced, in part, with a view to discouraging the less committed from applying to join the editorial ranks. There is though, I feel,

³⁵ John Pendleton, **Newspaper Reporting In Olden Times and To-day** (Elliot Stock), London, 1890, p.205, lists 29 articles on journalists and newspapers carried in a variety of literary journals between 1864 and 1886.

³⁶ Reade, **Literary Success**, p.132.

a risk of the modern reader dismissing too readily Reade's alarm over 'the perils to health', couched as it is in unappealing hyperbole, and associated with what many might see as a predominantly sedentary occupation. The practical difficulties, discomfort and time-consuming nature of nineteenth century transport and the rudimentary character of communication technology – both central elements in the successful discharge of the reporter's duties – should not be ignored. The frequency with which the 'health warning' is repeated in subsequent manuals demands it be taken seriously. Even by 1925, with significant advances in both transport and communications, Haslam, in a newspaper advice column on careers, wrote, 'Journalism becomes more rather than less strenuous, and physical health and strength are as essential as versatility of mind'.³⁷ Both Reade and Haslam, in works written 40 years apart, touch upon the mental strain associated with the role of reporter, with Reade citing 'fast writing' as an issue and Haslam suggesting,

'. . . if a journalist is not at any time actually applying himself to an urgent daily necessity, he is invariably troubled about the work he has done – as to whether or not it is satisfactory or correct – or he is thinking of the work he knows he may be called upon to do within the next few hours'.³⁸

The threat to a reporter's health and well being posed by the insalubrious working conditions encountered as standard in 'white-collar' employment of

³⁷ Haslam, 'Hard Work', *Evening Chronicle*.

³⁸ On the subject of health as an issue in reporting, see also Pendleton, *Newspaper Reporting*, pp.50-51, and Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, pp.23-25.

the time, would have been exacerbated by the need to work unsocial hours and the readiness to undertake unpredictable assignments.³⁹

On a more positive note, the guides of the time paint a rather romantic picture of the adventurous reporter, the 'contemporary historian', a man of action, dashing to railway accidents and political meetings, untainted by vested interest and party allegiance, free of cynicism, an honest, unbiased servant of the community, a man living on his wits with an instinctive appreciation of news values, blessed with tact and resource. It's an image sure to have appealed to a boy or a young man seeking a career slightly out of the ordinary. John Pendleton saw the reporter as 'courageous, sharp as a hawk, mentally untiring, physically enduring'.

When "on duty" he does not admit the word danger into his vocabulary. He will risk death at a Fenian meeting, go down a pit choked with after-damp, penetrate into the vilest fever den, take notes in the midst of a riot, disguise himself as a tramp and sleep in a lodging-house – go anywhere and report anything at any time of the day or night, armed only with his pencil and note-book, and a splendid self-reliance.⁴⁰

Of course, the days of high drama and excitement are tempered by warnings of municipal reporting, covering public meetings and, on the smaller weekly papers, non-journalistic work such as canvassing, collecting accounts, book-

³⁹ The office situation of the reporter, judging by contemporary accounts, was, at times, remarkably similar to that of the commercial clerk. For a review of the often 'cramped and unhygienic' conditions experienced by Victorian clerks and the threat posed to their health, see, Anderson, **Victorian Clerks**, pp.15-20, and p.9 for a contemporary account. The physical development of newspaper offices is not dealt with in any detail in secondary sources, but the impression given by journalists is one of cramped, insalubrious and improvised accommodation.

⁴⁰ Pendleton, **Newspaper Reporting**, pp.160.

keeping, proof-reading and the like.⁴¹ Mackie warns of "'fag" work', with the rider that, 'If he is really anxious to make progress in his profession, he will not object to the drudgery, but rather will welcome it'.⁴² But the 'common-place' was said to be leavened with 'the most wonderful combination of variety and opportunity for personal adventure'.⁴³ Apprentices on the Bolton press in the 1880s were expected to work in the 'Counting Office', 'from time to time', a proviso that, I would suggest, would not be uncommon across the industry in small-scale concerns attempting to ensure staff flexibility in the face of an uneven workload.⁴⁴ Physical labour was occasionally the lot of the apprentice reporter, at least if the experience of Nat Gould was in any way typical. As 'pupil' to the editor he responded to a mechanical crisis on the *Newark Advertiser* press, stripped to the waist and, with the editor, helped the printers.⁴⁵

For Mackie, the reporter had to be 'always, and above everything, strictly loyal to fact and fair play'.

'The public affairs of the district, civil and ecclesiastical, are at his finer ends. He knows public men of all types and ranks, and is more or less trusted by them. To secure, however, the full use of his opportunities, and the full development of his powers, he must never permit private and

⁴¹ Reade, *Literary Success*, pp.38-39. Forty years later, in 1925, the 'young reporter' is cautioned that he may be expected to canvass for advertisements, with commission on orders forming part of his wages, Alfred Kingston, *Pitman's Popular Guide to Journalism. A practical handbook for all engaged in or seeking to qualify for professional work on the newspaper press* (Pitman), London, 1925, p.35.

⁴² Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, p.21

⁴³ H. A. Boswell, *About Newspapers. Chiefly English and Scottish* (St Giles), Edinburgh, 1888, p.104.

⁴⁴ Apprenticeship indentures for Thomas Barnett (1889), *Bolton Evening News Archive*, Bolton Archive and Local Studies Service.

⁴⁵ Gould, *Magic of Sport*, pp.103-104. The difficulties surrounding the occupational etiquette of asking an editorial recruit to engage in physical labour appears to have been regularly circumvented, as in the case of Mansfield, mentioned earlier, by employing potential apprentice reporters initially as 'general apprentices', with an expectation they would engage in a wide variety of tasks before specialising in journalism, Mansfield, *The Complete Journalist*, pp.117-118.

personal interests to warp his judgment or affect his impartiality. He must strive to win the reputation of a truth-seeker and a truth-teller.⁴⁶

The guides and commentaries appear uniform in their endorsement of weekly paper journalism as an ideal grounding for the aspirant reporter. The early exposure to a great variety of assignments and the responsibilities associated with being part of a small workforce are rated as highly desirable. The number of editorial staff employed on each paper would vary according to size, how it was managed, and its profitability. Small weekly papers of the period might get by with 'a man and a boy', a half-penny daily with 'a manager, leader writer, sub-editor, and two reporters'. The *Yorkshire Post* employed an editorial staff of 28 in 1866, the *Manchester Guardian* got by with seven reporters in 1868. The major London papers would have employed many more.⁴⁷ The size of the paper would no doubt dictate the type of training a recruit could expect, and his level of exposure to more senior reporting tasks.

Even at this distance in time it is not difficult to imagine what attractions reporting held for the late-Victorian job seeker. The wish to escape the drab conformity and strictures of the counting house clerk would certainly be one. As would the realisation that entry to the traditional professions was out of reach without patronage, financial independence, or academic excellence. The wish to see one's work in print and to experience an occasional brush with drama and excitement must also have figured prominently. W. N. Watts, a 'prime mover' in the creation of the NUJ, had, during his time reporting in

⁴⁶ Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, p.11

⁴⁷ Brown, *Victorian News*, pp.82-84.

Blackburn in late century, worked with editorial colleagues, 'young men sometimes of good education though generally self-taught, who had dreaded the atmosphere of mill or factory and the interminable turmoil of industrial conditions'.⁴⁸ *The Journalist and Newspaper Proprietor*, the paper of the Institute of Journalists, admonished would-be recruits that the 1890s press, . . . had no cheap welcome for the young man who took to reporting for the love of beer and skittles, thinking only of the freedom, the Bohemianism, the famous men and places he would see, the notorious women he might chance to meet, the free dinners and champagne.⁴⁹

But one can't help but speculate that that is precisely what many young men hoped to encounter when opting for life as a newspaper reporter. The 'beer and skittles' might compensate, in part, for the limited pay and ambivalent status of the reporter, examined in the next section.

2:3 'Wild and exaggerated notions': Journalists' pay

Potential newspaper recruits scanning the literature on journalism outlined above, found little attempt to put a gloss on the question of pay. In 1885 Reade cautioned that a reporter covering a 'country district' might be 'considered fortunate if he receive from thirty to forty shillings a week', with the average in Wales falling to 25s.⁵⁰ Twenty-three years later, the newly-formed National Union of Journalists was moved to condemn an advertisement for a 'Reliable zealous junior (improver). Verbatim shorthand, news gatherer,

⁴⁸ Mansfield, *The Press*, p.23.

⁴⁹ *Journalist and Newspaper Proprietor*, Jan 3, 1891, p6, quoted in Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press. Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Scolar Press), Aldershot, 1996, p.125

⁵⁰ Reade, *Literary Success*, p.7.

cyclist, football. Country district affording good experience. Salary 22s
 Officials noted, ' . . . the remuneration offered is considerably below the
 amount paid to many street sweepers'.⁵¹ The unregulated and competitive
 nature of the industry was spelled out by Mackie in 1894,

There is no fixed scale of wages in the profession. The working journalist
 is left to get the best price he can for his services. As a general rule, the
 most liberal employers secure the most competent and trustworthy
 workmen.⁵²

The low-pay message was spelled out equally clearly in the 1895 guide, **How to Become A Journalist**, with R. H. Dunbar, assistant editor of the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* and former National Association of Journalists vice-president, suggesting in the introduction,

' . . . very wild and exaggerated notions are entertained as to the salaries usually paid even to the ablest and most experienced men on high-class papers. Do not take to journalism in the expectation of either gaining fame or making a fortune by it. You will get more fame by taking the Queen's shilling, and if fortune is your object you will do much better as a brewer's traveller'.⁵³

In 1872, William Fairhurst, mentioned in Chapter One, joined the Tillotsons family newspaper group in Bolton as a reporter, aged about 29, after early work in the saddlery trade.⁵⁴ There is no record of what Fairhurst, as a mature starter, was initially paid, but in 1887, by the time he was 44, he was earning £3.7s.6d a week, the top earner in the editorial department after the editor.

⁵¹ National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Minute Book of the Executive Council, sub-committee, Jan 29, 1908, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁵² Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, p.80.

⁵³ R. H. Dunbar, assistant editor *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, in introduction to Phillips, **How to Become a Journalist**, p.XXI. On the subject of pay, see also, Lowndes, 'University Men', pp.814-816, and Kingston, **Pitman's Popular Guide**, pp.10-11 and pp.110-11.

⁵⁴ Fairhurst obituary, *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, May 7, 1905, p.2.

His eight editorial colleagues earned between 7s and £3 a week.

Apprenticeship indentures for a reporter on the Bolton titles in 1889 reveal a wage rate on a scale rising annually from 5s6d a week in the first year, to 8s6d, 10s, 11s6d, up to a figure that seems to read 13s at the end of a six-year term. By 1905 the scale runs from 6s a week to 15s in the final year of a six-year apprenticeship.⁵⁵ In what appears to be a standard requirement, the parents or guardians of the apprentices were expected to provide suitable food, lodging, and clothes, and to provide for the young men during periods of ill health.

By way of contrast, figures produced by Alan Lee reveal that leading journalists – a status reached either through seniority and promotion in the provinces, or a position on the London press – could earn a very comfortable living. By the 1870s the going rate for the editor of an average London morning newspaper was probably £1,000. The pay of an editor in the provinces was often lower, with W. T. Stead's 1872 salary on the *Northern Echo* – £200 – estimated to be the average outside Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, where the figure could climb to the London rate. But even by the 1890s the editor of a small weekly might only earn £70 or £80. 'These salaries were low compared to those received at the upper reaches of other professions.' The leader writer, when employed full-time, could earn £1,000 a year in London in the 1870s, with a good provincial

⁵⁵ Wage ledgers, various dates, and apprenticeship indentures for Thomas Barnett (1889) and Charles Hoyle (1904), *Bolton Evening News Archive*, *Bolton Archive and Local Studies Service*. For an insight into the wide variety of non-reporting duties assigned to apprentice reporters, see Reade, *Literary Success*, pp.38-39. See also indenture of apprenticeship of *Blackburn Times* reporter Isaac Fish, for 1867, a three-year agreement on similar rates, file DDX 900/159, Lancashire Record Office, Preston.

daily paying up to £400 by 1885. A sub-editor on a London daily in the 1860s might earn a quarter to a third of an editor's salary. Average rates in the 1870s had put the sub-editor on a level with the experienced bank or insurance clerk and by the end of the century the leading London dailies were paying £400 to £500, the rest £250 to £300. Provincial rates were around the £150 to £300 mark in the 1870s to 1880s, rising to £400 in the 1890s. The ordinary reporter in London earned around £200 a year in the late 1860s, rising to £500 or £600 in the 1890s. Smaller papers in the provinces might pay only £1 a week in the 1890s. Apprentices and junior reporters, as already illustrated, might only earn 10s a week in mid-century.⁵⁶

Following the formation of the NUJ in 1907, its initial policy on pay rates was to leave negotiations in the hands of local representatives, with the ultimate goal of a national standard a more long-term consideration, to be pressed for when the union had grown in strength and influence. In the gradual build-up to the formulation of national standard rates, a 1913 union meeting in Glasgow was informed that of the union's 3,600 members, some 2,100 earned less than £160 a year, with some of the worst paid reporters in the industry yet to join the union. A report to senior union officials in 1915 revealed a reticence among members to reveal their annual wages, with only about 20 per cent of wage enquiry forms returned. Of those that had been filled in correctly, 71 different pay rates were described among 454 reporters and 110 sub-editors. Four reporters were earning less than 10s a week, with the top rate that of a sub-editor on £7 a week. Just over 11 per cent of the sample members

⁵⁶ Lee, *Origins*, pp.108-111

earned less than 30s a week, 45 per cent were on 30s to 45s a week, with 18 per cent on £3 and above. No one aged under 20 earned more than 30s.⁵⁷

By January, 1919, the NUJ could announce it had reached a minimum wages agreement with the Newspaper Society, the leading employers' body. Pay on weekly papers for seniors aged 23 and above would start at £3. Depending on the type of paper involved, the starting pay might rise to £4.4s a week.⁵⁸ The above evidence suggests that wage rates cited by Lee for London-based reporters represented the industry's top earners. Rates cited by the NUJ may well have been towards the lower end of the scale, based on the union's appeal to lower-paid journalists.

The pay situation regarding sports journalists is complex and varied. At one level, that of the sporting editor, a combination of roles, of writing and sub-editing, secured a rate of pay above many in the industry. But at the level of the sports reporter, whether on a general newspaper or specialist title, there was an expectation among colleagues and employers that he would earn less than his colleagues covering news.

Not until the first two decades of the twentieth century do reliable industry-wide pay rates become available, through surveys instigated by the NUJ as part of its wages campaigns. It is not unreasonable to presume the post-1900 figures reflect pay 'bands' prevalent in the late-Victorian period, if not the actual rates of pay. Figures compiled by the union's Central London branch in

⁵⁷ Mansfield, *The Press*, pp.184-211; NUJ NEC, July 10, 1915, MSS.86/1/NEC/6, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁵⁸ Mansfield, *The Press*, pp.207-208, and p.273.

1916 suggest journalists on the specialist sporting press could expect a starting pay significantly below that enjoyed by staff on general newspapers, approximately one guinea lower for junior journalists compared to those on weekly papers. A branch survey carried out three years earlier appears to confirm the impression. The lowest paid morning paper reporter was a 27-year-old on the *Sporting Life*, with seven years' experience, earning £2.13s, and barred from supplementing his pay through lineage. In negotiations with employers in 1917, the NUJ confirmed the London experience by its readiness to accept significantly lower rates of pay for its sporting members, compared to news staff. The union wanted an industry minimum of £5.5s for junior news reporters on daily papers, with £6.6s for senior reporters and sub-editors. But the claim for sports staff, whether reporter or sub-editor, was for £4.4s for juniors and £5.5s for seniors. Sports staff were expected to work an extra two years before annual increments would lift them to the minimum pay level of news staff. To cushion the apparent snub, the NUJ wanted those sports journalists assigned 'descriptive' work, together with 'Note Writers', to start on £6.6s, no doubt in recognition of the requirement for original composition that those roles demanded. The union reckoned a guinea would compensate staff drafted in for a Saturday shift covering sport, whether reporting or sub-editing. The reduced rates for sports journalists on the daily general press were repeated for staff on the specialist sporting press. The employers' response to the claim, although differing on several points, perpetuated the acceptance of lower rates for sports staff. But the newspaper proprietors were not prepared to introduce a special provision for 'the note writer'. The union responded,

This omission places sports journalism, sometimes highly technical work, on a plane more inferior than we intended. In suggesting a lower salary for sports reporters and sub-editors we had in mind the opportunities that arise for men of ability to reach the £6.6s standard by specialising as note writers on some branch of sport.

The NUJ's compromise claim on behalf of sports staff ranging from a £4.4s minimum rising to £6.6s over four years, was also rejected by the employers.⁵⁹

The union's attitude to 'sporting pay' seems, not unnaturally, to have created some ill will among sports journalists. A former member of the NUJ executive council, himself a sports journalist, blamed his colleagues for not objecting 'when we were relegated to bottom place in the scale of wages'.⁶⁰ The NUJ president in the run-up to pay bargaining was sports editor Alf Martin, who was to later complain that putting the sports journalist on a lower wage level than others in the industry was 'the most absolute nonsense'.⁶¹

There are few more sensitive issues, or more revealing, in any occupation than that of pay, and for both the NUJ and the employers to have reached agreement, in part, on the place of the sports journalist at the bottom of the editorial wages hierarchy is significant. The accord must have reflected industry norms established over many years. Granted, there was an initial expectation among the union negotiators that minimum wages for the sports journalist would be offset by premium payments for 'expert' writing in the form

⁵⁹ Mansfield, *The Press*, pp.222-241, and p.563.

⁶⁰ *The Journalist*, Nov, 1923, p.193.

⁶¹ Mansfield, *The Press*, p.416.

of the notes column, a literary feature common across the industry. But the union had been prepared to countenance an 'inferior' pay rate in general, with the prospect only of 'men of ability' being able to improve their earnings. It is suggestive of an occupational group struggling to achieve parity with colleagues, and one hampered by an inferior status, within the industry, at least. There may well have been an understanding that sports reporting, especially of professional clubs, provided ample opportunities for extra income through lineage. But even in that area, the sports journalist faced a keen struggle, as will be outlined later.

In an attempt to place the earnings of the reporter in context, a 1901 series of articles assessing family earnings, carried in *Cornhill Magazine*, provides a valuable framework. The journal located a lower middle-class budget in the range of £150 to £200 a year. Examples included younger reporters on the 'best metropolitan papers', and senior reporters on the 'best local papers'. They shared their financial status with, among others, senior telegraphists, county council clerks, police inspectors, certain skilled mechanics, bank clerks and teachers in 'London Board Schools'.⁶² Those earning slightly above £200, according to the essayist, might be prepared to spend £12 a year on servants' wages, while those at the lower end of the scale would not be expected to

⁶² G. S. Layard, 'A Lower-Middle Class Budget', *Cornhill Magazine*, Vol X, 1901, pp.656-666. Elliott, 'Professional ideology', pp.174-175, states that 'Studies of the prestige associated with different occupations in Britain have shown journalists rated among the lower professionals and small businessmen. These are the customary standards of comparison for earnings'. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, pp.2-3, writes of 'a variety of service and white-collar occupations' emerging and expanding in late century below 'the capital-owning and professional middle classes', and although he does not include the journalist among 'the low-ranking civil servants, commercial travellers, draughtsmen, shop workers, telegraphists and telephonists, warehousemen and . . . teachers and clergymen', that he felt constituted that class of worker, there can be little doubt that, on social and economic grounds, the journalist occupied that strata of society.

employ domestic staff. It was a strata of society that encompassed many of the country's clerks, the 'blackcoated workers', '. . . poised precariously between the middle and working classes'. For Lockwood, the clerk's economic position,

. . . made him forward-looking, striving and individualistic. His working life brought him into close contact with members of the middle classes and from them he borrowed the prestige that surrounds authority.⁶³

The description bears a similarity to the position of the provincial reporter. The wage rates of the reporter, outlined above, approximate to those listed by Lockwood and Anderson as applicable to certain ranks of clerk, and, just as with the journalist, there was 'a bewildering lack of uniformity' over pay.⁶⁴

Clerks, 'as a class, were fragmented and isolated in small groups in a great many offices'.⁶⁵ Clerks shared 'the prospect of upward income and job mobility', with 'great opportunity for those who rose and respectable poverty for the unfortunate'.⁶⁶ These were all characteristics of the occupation of reporting. But Anderson noted, 'One way of ensuring the respectability and integrity of clerks was by recruiting only men who were known personally', or 'nominated' by associates. This 'local' connection does not seem to have been a requisite in the newsroom, as suggested above by Brown when noting the geographical mobility of journalists.⁶⁷ That in itself might well have left the issue of 'respectability' among reporters open to question. For the clerk, respectability was a central tenet of his social standing, with low pay 'not

⁶³ Lockwood, **Blackcoated Workers**, p.99.

⁶⁴ Lockwood, **Blackcoated Workers**, p.22.

⁶⁵ Lockwood, **Blackcoated Workers**, p.32, Anderson, **Victorian Clerks**, p.10.

⁶⁶ Anderson, **Victorian Clerks**, p.21, Lockwood, **Blackcoated Workers**, p.25.

⁶⁷ Anderson, **Victorian Clerks**, p.12.

necessarily' implying low status. For the reporter, as this section will go on to illustrate, low pay was not necessarily compensated by respectable status.

Relatively low pay at the bottom end of the career structure was exacerbated by an expectation among editors and proprietors that their staff would appear each day dressed smartly, in the expectation that their reporting duties would bring them into contact with civic dignitaries and professionals in a wide range of social and business settings. The gap between the pay of a reporter and the earning power of those higher up the economic scale who he might be expected to move among, is illustrated by Haslam. In late century he was earning little more than £1 a week,

. . . and it was hinted to him that he should appear in the district with a dignified mien, consort with the big-wigs of the place as much as possible – 'as much as possible' was a happy touch, he says – and make himself generally popular.⁶⁸

The necessity, or expectation, to present an image beyond one's means was recognised by commentators to be a not uncommon characteristic among white-collar workers on a lower middle-class budget,

. . . through the action of certain economic laws, the average 'lower-middle' bread-winner is forced into an extravagance in the matter of clothes out of all proportion to his income.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Quoted in, Clement J. Bundock, **The National Union of Journalists. A Jubilee History 1907-1957** (Oxford University Press), 1957, p.7.

⁶⁹ Layard, 'Budget', pp.656-666. See also contemporary comments of journalists on the issue, Hamilton Fyfe, **Sixty Years of Fleet Street** (W. H. Allen), London, 1949, p.7, and George F. Allison, **Allison Calling** (Staples Press), London, 1948, pp.9-10, and p.20.

The issue of 'extravagance in the matter of clothes', could be said to be a symptom of what Anderson noted among clerks as, 'a false class consciousness which bore no relevance to economic realities'. The clerks' own union levelled the charge against its members at the turn of the century, and it was a charge repeated several years later, although this time by the NUJ against its members.⁷⁰

For the reporter seeking to fund a smarter sartorial image, there were opportunities to supplement his salary through lineage work, as mentioned above and in Chapter One, either with the tacit or express approval of the editor or proprietor. But the lineage openings were likely to be closed to all but senior reporters. Lineage appears to have been a contentious and divisive issue throughout the period of this study, and beyond. In keeping with the makeshift character of so much associated with the reporting business, there was no uniform organisational structure, with practices varying from office to office. The lineage payments might be pooled, paid solely to the writer, divided up according to seniority, or even 'milked' by an office-bound sub-editor handling the final draft of a report. The existence of established opportunities, or even merely the suggestion of future earning potential, can only have served to depress wage levels, with employers using the lineage issue, the chance to make money 'on the side', as a tool in whatever informal pay negotiations might have arisen. Those reporters with recourse to good lineage opportunities would probably be unwilling to risk wages agitation that might upset the status quo. A union report into pay levels in 1915 revealed

⁷⁰ Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, p.126, and Mansfield, *The Press*, pp.13-30.

that out of a survey group of 30 reporters aged 40 and above receiving £2 a week or less, it was recorded,

The majority of these are district men, and in a good proportion of cases it is stated by arrangement with proprietors much free time is available for lineage work. In several cases it is stated that employers take lineage into consideration when fixing salary . . .⁷¹

But the reporter found competition for this potential extra income. It does not appear to have been unusual for lineage work to be taken up by non-journalists. The NUJ's National Executive Council suggested lineage work in '100 towns' was in the hands of non-journalists in 1914, and noted 11 complaints of 'proprietors and editors who compel their reporters to do the work but pay them little or nothing at all for the labour'.⁷² The persistence of the lineage practice, together with evidence drawn from the career stories of several reporters, suggests a robust supply and demand structure. The benefits for the newspapers purchasing lineage included the obvious one of widening the scope of their news coverage, lessening the risk of being 'scooped' by rival titles, and the potential of keeping overheads down by limiting the need for bigger staffs.

The memoirs of Bernard Falk serve to illustrate the experience of many newspaper staff. Falk joined the Hulton group of newspapers in Manchester in 1903 and the teenager soon found his news reporting duties for the *Evening*

⁷¹ Mansfield, *The Press*, outlines the NUJ's progress to a national negotiating rate, pp.184-211; NUJ NEC, July 10, 1915, MSS.86/1/NEC/6, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁷² NUJ NEC Minutes, Jan 31, 1914, MSS.86/1/NEC/4, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. The issue was so serious, that year's NEC noted in its study of national pay bargaining, 'In approaching the question of salaries, it may be found impossible in many cases to deal with it independently of lineage'.

Chronicle expanding to take in football matches – the common lot of the apprentice – despite a parental ban on playing the game as boy, which had denied him more than a passing knowledge of the sport. His induction into the world of sports reporting included an early insight into the means of making extra money.

There were always ways and means of earning a little more money in Manchester. Sometimes you obliged a local sports agency with a duplicate; that meant an extra 2s6d or 5s in your pocket; sometimes you obliged a solicitor with a verbatim report of a law case; that meant anything up to £10 – at times more; sometimes you were given a commission by a London newspaper. One way or another I generally managed to augment my small income.⁷³

In 1913, in union circles, the question of lineage was said to be, . . . the burning issue in most of the branches – especially the appointment by newspapers of the motley crowd of outsiders, magistrates clerks, newsagents, relieving officers, clergymen, officials of football associations, and many others, as accredited correspondents.⁷⁴

The date is almost immaterial. The practice was endemic from the union's formation onwards. Opposition was not restricted to concern over financial disadvantage, either. There was a professional concern with union members complaining of 'inaccurate reports and fairy tales'.⁷⁵

⁷³ Falk, *He Laughed*, p.48. See, Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life* (Heinemann), London, 1961, p.19, for the situation in Merseyside in the 1920s.

⁷⁴ Clement J. Bundock, *The National Union of Journalists. A Jubilee History 1907-1957* (Oxford University Press), 1957, p.37.

⁷⁵ Report to NUJ Annual Delegates Meeting, Manchester, May, 1912, MSS86/1/ADM/2, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

But for the sports editor, and others occupying a more elevated position in the editorial hierarchy, the attitude to contributed copy was likely to be more ambivalent. The supply of sports lineage to the press was a keenly contested business, with competition between journalists on the staff of rival newspapers, freelance reporters, and the public. For a sports editor with a responsibility to fill a given number of column inches a day, or to ensure the coverage of a number of sports fixtures on a Saturday, the work of contributors could prove essential. Their efforts could broaden the scope of the paper's coverage, provide detailed information, compensate for meagre staffing resources, and help stay ahead of the opposition. However, for the reporter seeking to earn extra money on a Saturday sports shift by sending a lineage report to another paper, the non-journalist contributor might prove an unwelcome competitor, equally so for the freelance reporter looking for commissions. The business of gathering news could also be complicated by the attitude of club officials with a penchant for lineage pay, seeking to make money from information that might legitimately be provided to the press for free upon enquiry, or favouring one title ahead of another on the prospect of financial gain. The NUJ Central London branch was discussing the possibility of checking the spread of sports reporting by non-journalists in 1910, and in 1914 the same branch was concerned about tennis reporting being carried out by 'non-professional reporters'.⁷⁶ The situation was serious enough for the NUJ to approach the FA in 1913 to protest about officials 'contributing official news to the press'. FA secretary Frederick Wall was instructed to reply that the association, 'does not consider it has any right to interfere with the private

⁷⁶ NUJ papers, MSS86/1/BR/CL/1, and MSS86/1/BR/CL/2, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

and personal occupation of any of its members'. But the FA was prepared to remind senior representatives of earlier edicts, issued in 1904 and 1907, to the effect that '... it was not desirable that the official position of Members of the Council should be made use of in connection with their journalistic communications'; and '... a Member of the Council should not publish or comment in the Public Press, or in any way publicly, upon any matter upon which he may be called upon to act as a judge'. The FA Council believed '... that Referees and Players ought not to report matches in which they take part'.⁷⁷ The NUJ complaint appears to have been used by the FA as an opportunity to reinforce its own stand against leaking information to the press as a breach of privilege, and to caution against potentially embarrassing situations arising from reporting on games that players and referees were directly involved in. But there was no effort to call a halt to the seemingly widespread habit of contributing paid-for material to the press.

The union was fighting a losing battle over the issue, which appears to have been raised regularly at both national and local levels. One example of many, concerns the secretary of the Kent FA who drew the ire of the union by offering a weekly summary of county football news for 5s a week, information that came his way in the normal course of his duties. For several seasons he had also written 'signed articles', used by four local papers, 'which embody all the information which can only be obtained from him as secretary'. Union protests succeeded in forcing the official to withdraw his 'summary' offer and provoked the county press to cease using his signed articles. But the change

⁷⁷ FA minutes, Dec, 1913.

of heart by the newspapers was said to have been based on financial grounds, 'an objection to paying for what they considered should be supplied free'. *The Journalist* conceded that the official had never refused press requests for information.⁷⁸ It was an isolated success.

In June, 1931 the NUJ general secretary was writing to the FA and Football League clubs 'appealing to them to take steps to prevent footballers and those holding administrative posts in football clubs from competing with professional journalists by writing reports and comments'. *The Journalist* reported, though, that Wall was of the opinion 'that the journalists might very well consider approaching the newspaper proprietors instead of asking the FA to intervene'.⁷⁹ In 1934, the annual delegates' meeting at Stirling carried a motion instructing the NUJ National Executive Council to press the FA and Rugby Union to bar officials from 'providing for publication in the Press information of matches played which should be placed, freely, at the disposal of journalists'.⁸⁰

Lineage, whether by full-time reporters, freelances, sports club officials or the public was too deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the newspaper industry to be abandoned.⁸¹ The related issue of sportsmen writing for the press, and the threat that posed to the sport's reporter's livelihood and reputation will be raised in Chapter Three.

⁷⁸ *The Journalist*, Dec, 1930, p.262, and Jan, 1931, p.13.

⁷⁹ *The Journalist*, June, 1931, p.115

⁸⁰ NUJ papers, MSS86/1/ADM/5, p.52, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁸¹ *The Newspaper World*, Sept 7, 1935, p.10, carried a complaint from a freelance reporter of seven 'non journalists' reporting 'first-class football matches' for the Manchester press.

2:4 'A visitor unwelcome': The journalist's status

The uncertain economic standing, outlined earlier, that might accompany work as a reporter on the provincial press, was compounded by a certain ambivalence surrounding the social status of the newspaperman. It must be emphasised, though, 'The situation of the journalist has always been in part dependent on the status of the audience for which he worked'.⁸² The paper he worked for would also dictate the type of assignment he might be expected to undertake and the nature of the welcome awaiting him on assignments. His work might involve unpleasant confrontation. Pendleton reveals this less appealing aspect of the job when he writes that the reporter might need to rely on 'downright native impudence' in the pursuit of hard-to-get news.

The reporter . . . is sometimes a visitor unwelcome; for the enraged father does not like to be questioned about his daughter's elopement, nor does the manufacturer, tracked by some vague rumour on 'Change, care to disclose to the indefatigable and unabashed pressman the coming downfall of his firm.

That aspect of the reporter's work was considered prevalent enough to warrant bringing to the attention of the potential recruit, in particular the graduate. There was probably an assumption that the graduate had sprung from higher up the social and economic ladder than the mere apprentice, with, perhaps, a more heightened sense of what constituted respectable behaviour and company. The university recruit was warned, ' . . . the journalist must mix

⁸² Philip Elliott, 'Professional ideology and organisational change: the journalist since 1800', in George Boyce, James Curran, Pauline Wingate, *Newspaper history from the seventeenth century to the present day* (Constable), London, 1978, p.179.

freely with his fellow-creatures of every class. Nothing, within reasonable limits, must be to him "common or unclean" . . .⁸³

In assessing the position of the journalist, Lee writes that, 'the reasons for journalists having failed to secure a higher status are complex'. He notes the impression of 'venality, licentiousness and sedition' attached to the 'early radical journalists', a lingering 'feeling that in some sense journalists were really spies against whom 'Society' should be secured'. They were engaged in a search for 'unpalatable and often embarrassing facts'.⁸⁴ The political leanings of a particular paper might well create an unfavourable impression of its reporting staff among those of a different political persuasion, with the bias of the leader column clouding the perception of the, purportedly, otherwise unbiased news columns.⁸⁵ In the early 1800s, journalism 'was regarded as neither a dignified nor a reputable profession'. But in a review of the occupation, seemingly focussed on the political commentator and leader writer, prejudice against the newspaperman 'was beginning to break down' as the century progressed.⁸⁶

In an attempt to lessen this status anxiety, many commentators on the late-Victorian press, particularly those drawn from the editorial ranks, lauded the journalist's virtues of integrity, fairness and incorruptibility. The industry's shift from a heavy reliance on party politics to a more popular news agenda freed

⁸³ Lowndes, 'University men', p.818.

⁸⁴ Lee, *Origins*, pp.105-107.

⁸⁵ For a breakdown of the political leanings of the daily press of late-Victorian England see, Lee, *Origins*, pp.281-187.

⁸⁶ A. Aspinall, 'The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies*, Vol XXI, 1945, pp.216-230.

much of a newspaper's content from the taint of political bias. As a consequence it was claimed, the journalist,

. . . acquires influence in proportion as he shows himself independent, incorruptible, whole-heartedly devoted to the public good. When his character is spelled in such letters, known and read of all men, he becomes a true 'king of men.'⁸⁷

Journalists themselves appear to have had little difficulty in defending their occupation. Memoirs consistently refer to their calling as a 'profession'. But the two standard studies of the rise of the professional classes indict journalism with failing to control access, with the lack of appropriate qualifications and examinations, with a lack of stability, questionable standards, and the lack of specialised intellectual training.⁸⁸ There is an easy recourse to the word 'profession' in the reporters' memoirs consulted. It is a word adopted, seemingly without great care or consideration and, I would suggest, refers only to the sense of a 'professional outlook' within the occupation, of a commitment to high standards in the quest for accuracy, speed and exclusivity, as suggested in the Introduction. The newspaper reporter might define himself as a professional, emphasising the occupation's guiding principles of objectivity and incorruptibility, but they were features, however closely adhered to, that could not elevate him to the status of the professions.

⁸⁷ Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, p.117. For contemporary advice on how the reporter should conduct himself when offered a bribe to suppress news, see Kingston, *Popular Guide*, p.117.

⁸⁸ A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The Professions* (Frank Cass), London, 1964 (first published 1933), pp266-270; W. J. Reader, *Professional Men. The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century England* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson), London, 1966, pp.146-153.

At the other end of the newspaper spectrum from the reporter, among the 'men of letters', the political columnists and the leader writers, recourse to the description, 'profession', might well infer a belief that their work met some of the criteria associated with the 'traditional' professions. But even here, commentators agreed that their credentials were sadly lacking. Writer and human rights campaigner H. R. Fox-Bourne examined the question, 'Journalism as a Profession or Trade', for a newspaper industry audience in the 21st edition of **Sell's Dictionary of the World Press** and highlighted the distinction between the reporter and those occupying the 'higher branches' of the occupation. He suggested the gulf between the two had widened. Reporting had become, 'more of a trade, or an aggregate of trades, than it used to be', despite the training necessary to master the 'more technical' aspects of the job. The work of the commentator had shifted to become 'more of a profession', but Fox-Bourne insisted, 'Anyone of ordinary intelligence and literary aptitude may become a journalist at a day's notice', if they had something to say of interest to the public. The end product was that journalism never could be a profession. Even distinctions within the occupation could, of necessity, be dismantled.

Nor, among journalists themselves, can any barriers they endeavour to set up, prevent, say, a reporter from being also, or from becoming, a leader-writer or an editor, or both at once.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ H. R. Fox-Bourne, 'Journalism as a Profession or Trade', **Sell's Dictionary of the World Press** (Henry Sell), London, 1901, pp.19-20. See also, Hamilton Fyfe, **Sixty Years of Fleet Street** (W. H. Allen), London, 1949, p.83, and Joel H. Wiener, 'How New Was the New Journalism?', in Joel H. Wiener (ed), **Papers for the Millions. The New Journalism in Britain, 1850 to 1914**, pp.57-58, for the gulf between the leader writers and the reporter in the Victorian editorial hierarchy. W. H. Watts, writing in 1862, noted various grades of reporter, with the 'dismounted' covering news stories, and the 'regular', with 'higher aims', and dealing with debates and more weighty matters, W. H. Watts, **My Private Note-Book; or Recollections Of An Old Reporter** (Tinsley Brothers), London, 1862, p.2.

For Lee,

'... journalism, even in the 1880s, could claim few of the generally accepted qualifications of a profession. It could provide little stability, no great remuneration, was hardly recognised by the state, and had no position of monopoly privilege.'

He further adds that,

... in terms of respectability and security the journalist held a low position amongst the professional men of whom he claimed to be one. Most lived on the fringe of the intelligentsia, but were not a part of it . . .⁹⁰

Jones, though, notes two positives in the quest for respectable status among journalists. In late century, biographical studies of the capital's leading editors and journalists began to be published, together with descriptions of the internal workings of the newspaper industry, providing role models for less elevated journalists and an improved image among the public. The establishment of regional press clubs further aided the image of the reporter.⁹¹

Nevertheless, the daily working experience for many reporters was often circumscribed by petty snubs and inconvenience. The reporter seeking to fulfil his duties might be bullied by minor officials over what they should report at, say, a meeting.

... now and then some citizen who has scrambled into brief authority thinks he has a sort of prescriptive right in him – that he may order him about, tell him, not always in the most courteous language, what to chronicle and what to waive . . .⁹²

⁹⁰ Lee, **Origins**, p.107, p.113.

⁹¹ Jones, **Powers of the Press**, pp.123-124.

⁹² Pendleton, **Newspaper Reporting**, pp.84-85, p.185, pp.157-158.

Aspden recalled the brusque treatment handed out to reporters of his youth.

Often they were treated as something in the nature of a nuisance towards whom no consideration was to be extended. They were expected to endure the snubs of some Jack-in-office.⁹³

For an image-conscious industry, the seemingly widespread drinking culture attached to newspaper work posed further problems. The threat to a reporter's health and well being posed by insalubrious working conditions and unpredictable assignments, highlighted in the opening section, appears to have been exacerbated by an easy recourse to drink. Lee notes the 'great deal of attention' that the 'widespread addiction of journalists to alcohol' attracted, 'at a time when temperance was a militant movement'.⁹⁴ It is tempting to see the reputation of the heavy drinking journalist as some unfortunate literary stereotype, generated in part by the image of the larger-than-life, seedy and imprudent mid-Victorian Bohemian writer. However, the accusations cannot be dismissed so easily. The reporter's work took him into the community, often in the evening, where it was necessary for him to make contacts, to be approachable and amenable. Official engagements would invariably involve drink. Reade highlights the availability of alcohol at many engagements covered by the reporter, with a temptation to indulge in drinking to smooth social intercourse. Reade, writing in 1885, admits that 'all who have written upon the habits of journalists refer to drinking as an evil', but qualifies that image by suggesting a change in attitude – 'reporters and journalists of our day are men of sober habits, though their predecessors, it cannot be

⁹³ Hartley Aspden, *Fifty Years A Journalist* (Advertiser and Times Printers), Clitheroe, 1929, p.36.

⁹⁴ Lee, *Origins*, p.113. See also Jones, *Powers of the Press*, p.121.

denied, could scarcely lay special claim to such virtues'.⁹⁵ John Pendleton in his 1902 work, **How To Succeed As A Journalist**, felt it necessary to inform recruits of the fate of 'the shabby and thirsty bar-haunters of Fleet Street', and to warn them to give drink 'a wide berth, and be strong against temptation';⁹⁶ and despite Reade's assertion that the drinking culture associated with press work was being addressed in late century, the issue, or 'peculiar temptation', was still being highlighted in a 1925 journalists' guide.⁹⁷ Edmund Robbins, Press Association manager between 1880 and 1917, was said to have been 'shocked' by the effects of the 'bohemian' life of Fleet Street, with drink taking a heavy toll on the careers of many journalists.⁹⁸ In contrast, H. Simonis in his press history, **The Street of Ink**, could claim in 1917, 'you will find no more sober class to-day than newspaper men', although in a short section entitled 'The Old-Time Journalist in The Then "Street of Drink"', he admits the social side of reporting presented a temptation to drink, and 'with regard to the rank and file, many a promising young man was ruined mentally and morally by his associates'.⁹⁹ There was a clear attempt to create a clean, new image that, to some degree, served only to harden the old one. The strong link between drink and reporting is illustrated in a brief note in the history of the Manchester Press Club. Based in a pub in the town, it was said in a description of 1880 to be 'a place of refuge' for "the victims", the men "on duty", which means that they are kept in town like so many waiters upon Fate, until a dismal hour of

⁹⁵ Reade, **Literary Success**, pp.133-135.

⁹⁶ Pendleton, **How To Succeed**, p.20.

⁹⁷ Kingston, **Pitman's Popular Guide**, p.118.

⁹⁸ George Scott, **Reporter Anonymous. The Story of the Press Association** (Hutchinson), London, 1968, p.89.

⁹⁹ H. Simonis, **The Street of Ink. An Intimate History of Journalism** (Cassell and Co), London, 1917, p.8.

the night'.¹⁰⁰ There is even a suggestion that the police might turn a blind eye to the late-night drinks trade of the local press haunt.¹⁰¹ The drink problem associated with the journalist may well have its antecedents in the more established print industry. Duffy outlines the 'tradition of printers taking a drink during working hours', and it may well have been an industry trait adopted by the editorial department.

Its nutrient and thirst-quenching properties were important to men who had to work long hours in the hot and dusty atmosphere of the composing room . . . communal drinking practices provided a tangible social bond among workers . . .¹⁰²

The problem, understandably, was not confined to the ranks of the reporter. James Grant, writing of the mid-century state of affairs, and the pressure placed on editors by proprietors to produce a commercially viable product, remarked,

I have personally known several instances in which Editors of daily journals, having found their position . . . altogether intolerable, have sought solace for their sorrows in so immoderate a resort to the brandy-bottle, that they have become confirmed drunkards.¹⁰³

For the sports reporter, the problem was possibly accentuated by sport's close association with alcohol and the drinks trade. Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew have highlighted that close association, with reference to how the idea of drink being an aid to sporting performance, in certain situations,

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, **Fifty Years of Us. A Jubilee Retrospect of Men and Newspapers**, by the Manchester Press Club (Manchester), 1922, pp.70-71.

¹⁰¹ Mackie, **Modern Journalism**, p.111.

¹⁰² Duffy, **Skilled Compositor**, pp.47-47.

¹⁰³ James Grant, **The Newspaper Press: Its Origins – Progress – And Present Position** (Tinsley Brothers), London, 1871, p.435. See also, Jones, **Powers of the Press**, p.121, and Lee, **Origins**, pp.113-114.

persisted throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Martin Cobbett highlighted the habit of drinking among ‘the cricket ring’ of reporters who covered London fixtures for a variety of weekly newspapers in the 1870s and early 1880s. In a far from flattering description he wrote of ‘the old stagers’, who,

. . . saw batting, bowling, and fielding through the kindly influence of well-cellaried and treated Bass drawn for choice from the wood and served in its stoneware mug – shandy-gaff also . . . My experience is that you can almost gauge the tap’s quality by the ring’s demeanour.¹⁰⁵

Despite contradictory contemporary evidence, drinking posed a serious threat to the reporter’s reputation throughout the period, with the drinking culture maintained partly through tradition, the working environment and social convention.

The attendance at night-time engagements likely to pose a temptation to drink, was part of the unsocial hours working culture associated with journalism, and it may well have singled the newspaperman out as beyond the pale of normal social convention, as slightly suspicious, even. Brown suggests reporters had acquired an air of ‘separateness . . . reinforced by their unsocial hours’.¹⁰⁶ Night work could be a strain on home life, too. ‘He is in a sense a pariah from society; or rather a slave to his profession . . . The nature of his work renders him so unconventional . . .’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew, **Mud, Sweat and Beers. A Cultural History of Sport and Alcohol** (Berg), Oxford, 2002, pp.91-118.

¹⁰⁵ Cobbett, **Sporting Notions**, pp.159-160.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, **Victorian News**, p.80.

¹⁰⁷ Pendleton, **How To Succeed**, p.16.

The reporter's questionable image was highlighted by Fleet Street sports columnist Trevor Wignall when writing of his start in journalism in the first decade of the twentieth century. Wignall, an unemployed labourer with few prospects, was offered a job on the *Cambria Daily Leader*, in Swansea, on £1 a week through the efforts of a former schoolmaster. But the offer did not produce an instant acceptance.

'I was not acquainted with any reporters, but even in my limited circle I was aware they were not looked upon as the kind of person it was nice to know . . . My social position was not much higher than that of a guttersnipe, but I felt that the donning of the regalia of a reporter was nevertheless a step down. I argued and hummed and hawed and objected . . . to take what I very seriously thought was a risky and somewhat awful chance.'¹⁰⁸

A reminiscence of Old Trafford odd-job man W. E. Howard, who was appointed to take charge of the pavilion and amateurs' dressing rooms in 1888, reveals an interesting issue related to the question of status. Howard states the club's honorary secretary between 1869 and 1905, S. H. Swire, . . . had strong objections to pressmen and publicans becoming members of the Club. He had a new proposal book prepared, in which candidates for election had to describe their occupation . . . (and when asked the reasons for his objection, replied), "It is not the men I object to . . . every member has the privilege of obtaining a ticket for his wife on payment of ten shillings extra." He was most particular in keeping the ladies' enclosure as select as possible . . .¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Trevor Wignall, *Never A Dull Moment* (Hutchinson), London, 1940, pp.21-22

¹⁰⁹ W. E. Howard, *Fifty Years' Cricket Reminiscences of A Non-Player* (Lancashire County Cricket Ground, Old Trafford), Manchester, 1928, pp.19-21.

Swire's attitude suggests a suspicion, on the part of one sports official at least, that reporters, as a body, were marrying into a social class whose women were not be encouraged to mix with Old Trafford members' wives. The pinched financial circumstances of the reporter, in his early years at least, might well dictate a choice of partner from among the lower classes, perhaps lower down the social scale than his own background might have suggested.

On top of the more practical aspects of the work likely to undermine the status of the reporter, there was a widespread loathing among the higher reaches of respectable society for popular journalism as a concept, together with what it was seen to represent. Mackie noted the 'distrust and dread' of the press among commentators who 'sit in judgment on the contents of the daily sheets', and 'find cause for censure in the conspicuous publicity given to details of horrible crimes, or cases of gross immorality, and complain that the circulation of this kind of literature has a demoralising effect'.¹¹⁰ For 'the articulate classes of Britain', the Victorian popular press came to resemble, 'a sort of Juggernaut of growth and innovation'. In the eyes of the well-to-do, the city and the press were, 'the main agents through which the have-nots registered their presence and through which the haves received the unwelcome message'. For a society undergoing intense change, 'with the loss of traditional institutions and values', with 'the collapse of a putative hierarchical community', the press and city were 'distasteful or horrifying'. 'The bliss of ignorance was being contaminated', by the journalist.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, p.118.

¹¹¹ Michael Wolff, 'Urbanity and Journalism: The Victorian Connection', the H. J. Dyos Memorial Lecture, May 29, 1979, Victorian Studies Centre, University of Leicester, pp.13-26.

2:4 A start in journalism: Recruits to the 1870s press

This section will briefly examine the careers of a small number of journalists to illustrate how the expanding Victorian newspaper industry attracted and moulded its editorial staff. Brown writes of the 'energy and drive' associated with the creation of the later nineteenth century popular press. 'The specialized skills involved in collecting the news, putting it together in print, and distributing it, were developed apparently without strain.'¹¹² By adopting the point of view of the individual, rather than an industry-wide perspective, this record of seemingly unhindered occupational innovation and endeavour can be put in a narrower focus. This approach will go some way towards exposing the make-up and motivation of the individuals involved in a narrative of progress 'without strain'. The choice of journalists to illustrate this section was guided by their start in newspapers around the period of the 1870s and, where possible, an association with either sport or Lancashire, or both, bearing in mind the study's goal of examining the career of James Catton in the light of trends and practices in the wider industry he served. Just as the preceding investigation of occupational developments helps locate these brief 'lives' in a specific industrial context, a knowledge of their route into journalism will help further contextualise the experiences of James Catton in the later stages of this thesis.

In 1875, sixteen-year-old Hartley Aspden was taking his first rather tentative steps into journalism. The son of a Clitheroe book keeper, Aspden had left school at 15 to become a clerk with a firm of Blackburn solicitors. He studied shorthand and spent his spare time reporting the town's public meetings for

¹¹² Brown, *Victorian News*, p.274.

the *Preston Guardian* and occasionally the *Craven Pioneer* in Skipton, Clitheroe lying on the main road between the two towns. The work, or at least the payment side of the bargain, appears to have been conducted on a fairly *ad hoc* basis. Aspden's contributions to the *Guardian* would earn him 'a couple of sovereigns' whenever the paper's joint proprietor John Toulmin visited Clitheroe to collect advertisement accounts. During this time the teenager harboured hopes of becoming a novelist, but his work was regularly rejected by publishers. Aspden eventually opted for a full-time career as a reporter and his first newspaper job saw him earning £1 a week, aged 20, on the *Warrington and Mid-Cheshire Examiner*. His introduction to full-time journalism appears to have been on rather informal lines. There is no mention of an apprenticeship, and,

After nine months of practical experience in the collection and presentation of news, reading proofs and doing everything pertaining to newspaper production except the setting of type, I was regarded as the finished article able to walk and carry on without assistance. I was accordingly despatched to one of the branch offices at Northwich in Cheshire where I had the sole responsibility of getting all the news of the town and district for publication.

By the time Aspden was 22, he had had moved again, this time to the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* where he doubled his weekly wage to £2 and described himself as a 'journalist and newspaper reporter'.¹¹³

Frederick Higginbottom was taking his first steps in the Lancashire newspaper business in the mid-1870s, too. Born in Accrington in 1859, the son of a

¹¹³ Aspden, *Fifty Years*, pp.5-16; Census 1871 and 1881.

schoolmaster whose career took him across the North West, Higginbottom left school at 12 to work in a book shop and wholesale newsagency. Six months later he joined a lawyer's office in Southport on 5s a week, using his spare time to attend night classes. Aged 15, he joined the 'counting house' of the *Southport Daily News*, again on 5s a week, at a time when the chief reporter earned £2 a week, and a junior reporter £1. Higginbottom was encouraged to read proofs of the editorial matter and to learn shorthand and soon believed he 'had acquired a tolerably good all-round knowledge of the work of a daily newspaper and a general printing business, though on a diminutive scale'. The paper was selling 2,000 copies a day at the time. Aged 18 he took on the editorship of a 'social paper' in the resort before, aged 20, joining the *Southport Visiter*. He became a correspondent for the *Liverpool Daily Post* and joined the Press Association in London in 1881 as a 'junior sub-editor'.¹¹⁴

Preston Herald compositor Frank Coupe was born in Canada, the son of a sergeant major, and brought up at the Preston 'Militia Stores'. Coupe was an apprentice printer on the *Preston Guardian* in 1861, aged 14, before a move to the *Herald*. Although the records are a little contradictory, he appears to have graduated from the composing room to the editorial floor some time in the late 1870s, when he would have been in his early thirties. Coupe became part owner of the *Preston Chronicle* in the late 1880s before its sale and amalgamation. He made a name for himself as a 'sports writer' and was acknowledged as 'the father of Preston journalism' by the time he retired in

¹¹⁴ Frederick J. Higginbottom, *The Vivid Life. A Journalist's Career* (Simpkin Marshall), London, 1934, pp.3-10.

the 1920s after what was described by colleagues as an estimated '60 years in journalism', all spent in the area of Preston and Blackburn.¹¹⁵

In the early 1880s, John James Bentley had begun dabbling in sports journalism with the *Bolton Evening News*. Bentley, a keen and gifted footballer, and the son of the village grocer in Turton, Lancashire, submitted cricket and football reports to the paper for several years while working full-time as a clerk. His sports reporting was a constant sideline as he developed a career as an 'incorporated accountant' and 'collector of income tax'. But his failure to commit himself full-time to journalism proved no bar to advancement in the newspaper business, and by the time he was 32 he had been appointed editor of the influential *Athletic News* weekly sports paper in Manchester.¹¹⁶

Bentley was a leading light in football circles both in Lancashire and nationally, and his contacts and influence must have played a significant role in his progress as a sporting journalist.

William Pickford, born in 1862, was a contemporary of Bentley's on the *Bolton Evening News*, joining the paper as an advertising clerk in 1878. His uncle was advertising manager. Pickford, the son of a Methodist minister had lived in Little Lever, near Bolton, until the family relocated to the South Coast in 1871. Educated at a Wesleyan day school and later the 'Congregational School for the Sons of Ministers' at Lewisham in Kent, he returned to the Bolton paper in a commercial capacity, to find the district transformed into a

¹¹⁵ Coupe obituary, *Northern Daily Telegraph*, Blackburn, Aug 28, 1930, p9; *The Journalist. The Organ of the National Union of Journalists*, March, 1928, p.47; Census 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891.

¹¹⁶ Bentley obituaries, all 1918, *Athletic News* (incorporated in *The Sporting Chronicle*), Sept 3, p.4; *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, Sept 6, p.3; *St Annes-On-The-Sea Express*, Sept 6, p.2.

hot-bed of football, and he 'fell in love' with the game. The county 'was all ablaze with the successes of some of its clubs in the Football Association Cup'.

During these seasons the "News" began to realise the value of football notes and reports. Members of the staff went to matches, and I supplied frequent short notices . . . One of my jobs, and I enjoyed it, was to go to the office on a Saturday evening when the big football results were telegraphed, write them on big sheets of paper and stick them in the windows. The street used to be crowded with people at such times.

In 1883, Pickford joined the *Bournemouth Guardian* as a book keeper, and such was his skill and enthusiasm for the game of football, he joined Bournemouth Rovers where his goal-scoring exploits became the central theme of a comic song at the resort's Theatre Royal. Contributing news items and sports reports to the paper, he launched a weekly column of football notes, 'Under the Cross-bar', and believed them to be 'the first football notes in any paper south-west of London'. He became a reporter, editor and later managing director of the paper, combining his newspaper career with senior appointments within the Football Association and within refereeing.¹¹⁷

Charles Stewart Caine covered sport for the London-based Cricket Reporting Agency, founded by Charles Pardon. Born in Portsmouth in 1861 and educated at Stationers' School, London, Caine had, upon leaving school, joined a sports news agency run by George Kelly King, supplying the capital's

¹¹⁷ W. Pickford, *A Few Recollections of Sport* (Bournemouth Guardian) 1939, pp.7-24. Pickford's involvement with sports reporting in Bolton in the seasons prior to the launch of the *Football Field*, and the newspaper group's treatment of soccer news and results illustrates the manner in which potential demand for a Saturday night sports special may well have been gauged at a time of rudimentary or non-existent market research.

press with cricket reports. Upon King's death in 1879, Pardon, a sub-editor with the Press Association, together with his two brothers Sydney and Edgar, took over the business and Caine was retained. The cricketing activities of Harrow Wanderers and Uppingham Rovers at the time merited match coverage, and Caine was deputed to travel with the players. In 1880, he travelled to Preston with a Harrow Wanderers cricket touring party. He also covered rugby and football, including international matches. The freelance nature of the work meant Caine bypassed a newspaper office-based apprenticeship and the need to involve himself in news stories. His working life revolved around sports matches from his start in journalism as a teenager until his death in 1933 as editor of *Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack* and senior partner in the Cricket Reporting Agency.¹¹⁸

Caine's route into journalism through a metropolitan-based sporting agency was mirrored by another contemporary, Arthur Binstead. Born in London in 1861, Binstead, whose father ran a West End 'picture show', had ambitions to become an illustrator, but he was found a position in 'the counting house' of a furniture factory. He later joined a press agency run by Joe Capp, known in the business as 'T'owd Mon'. The work consisted of touring the country's racecourses, coursing meetings, and other sports events to provide a telegraphed results service for licensed clubs and the London and provincial press. Binstead began his 'apprenticeship' in the early 1880s among a coterie of race writers, representing a number of papers, such as the *Sporting Life* and *Sportsman*, travelling together by train to the big meetings, often

¹¹⁸ Caine obituaries, *The Times*, April 17, 1933, p.12; *Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack*, 1934, pp.25-29; *The Observer*, April 16, 1933, p.18.

accompanied by Post Office telegraph staff, working together on the courses, staying together in country town hotels, renewing acquaintances with the local 'sporting editor', and socialising at the theatre or music hall on their nights away from home. Binstead conveys a sense of 1880s racecourse agency work operating on the edge of respectable journalism and, indeed, respectable society, with gambling among the reporters endemic. In a light-hearted but critical vignette of the working habits of Capp, said to have gone through life 'fearing nothing but closing time', Binstead describes a business operating where the sport of racing intersected with gambling and the newspaper industry, with the day's work sometimes achieved more by luck than good judgement. Binstead had joined the *Sporting Life* as a sub-editor by the early to mid-1880s. And, just as for Caine, entry to journalism through sports agency work had seen him bypass a stint as a news reporter before specialising in sports work. He later established a reputation as one of the leading writers on the *Sporting Times*, or 'Pink'Un', where he stayed for 28 years, writing under the pen-name 'Pitcher', promoting an image of the Bohemian journalist with stories 'of the racecourse, of barmaids and tipsters, and music-hall stars'. He later founded and edited *Town Topics*, a man-about-town paper with considerable sports coverage.¹¹⁹

Manchester-born Nat Gould developed 'a desperate love of sport' as a child in the 1860s. At school in Southport, where a professional cricketer was employed, he had excelled at bowling, captaining the cricket team, and he played both codes of football. His infatuation with sport saw him break school

¹¹⁹ Arthur M. Binstead, *A Pink 'Un And A Pelican* (Bliss Sands), London, 1898, p.25; *Town Topics*, Nov 21, 1914, p.1 and pp.4-5; *The Times*, Nov 16, 1914, p.3.

rules to visit the Waterloo Cup coursing at nearby Altcar. His father had established a tea and grocery business, and shortly after his death Gould had followed him into the trade, although he occasionally skipped work to attend sports meetings in Manchester, even competing at athletics events. Later, when invited to try his hand at farming with relations in Derbyshire, he competed in the Shrove Tuesday football game at Ashbourne. A return to the tea trade, and disillusion with the work, was broken when, in 1877, aged 20, on his mother's prompting, he secured the position as 'a pupil' to the editor at the *Newark Advertiser* to learn press-work. Despite family warnings that the work 'was full of temptation', and that he 'would never make a decent living at it', and concern on the part of the editor that his pupil was slightly older than he felt appropriate, Gould excelled under his tutelage, covering the full gamut of local reporting assignments, including some sport. He took full advantage of the lineage opportunities the work presented, filing stories for the Press Association, the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* and the *London Daily Chronicle*. Fascinated by racing, Gould had opened 'books' on meetings, taking the bets of friends and colleagues, and occasionally losing heavily. In 1884, he quit his job and moved to Australia and continued his newspaper career, eventually specialising as a racing correspondent and later as a prolific author of sporting novels. In his time in the Midlands, Gould had been favoured with 'descriptive' assignments, and in later life he believed his aptitude for race reporting was

'born in me, because even as a schoolboy I took particular notice of everything connected with the sport'.¹²⁰

The brief biographies outlined above are illustrative of several issues surrounding the background and recruitment of reporters in the 1870s. The men and boys drawn to the occupation appear to share family backgrounds rooted in the middle class white collar and commercial strata of society, where an education was valued but where career opportunities were limited by family circumstances. They fit Lee's description, mentioned in the chapter introduction, of young men seeking upward social mobility. Their means of entry to newspaper journalism were varied and unregulated, with a hint of arbitrariness surrounding the entire business, and many of them were prepared to move to gain employment and to further their careers.

2:6 Conclusion

The above evidence points to an industry exhibiting little difficulty in attracting applicants for editorial jobs, with intense competition for a first foothold in the business. But there was a lack of conformity in the matter of recruitment and training, and certain misgivings about the calibre of would-be recruits. The absence of any formal entry requirements raises the intriguing possibility that editors and proprietors looked beyond the question of formal education and

¹²⁰ Nat Gould, **Nat Gould's Sporting Sketches. Being Recollections And Reflections On A Variety Of Subjects Connected With Sport, Horses and Horsemen, Never Before Published** (Everett and Co), London, 1900, p.8; Gould, **Magic of Sport**, pp.5-126. At the time of his death, Gould had written more than 150 novels, and his publisher had 22 in hand still to appear, *The Times*, Jul 26, 1919, p.15. See also, A. Henry Higginson, **British and American Sporting Authors. Their Writings and Biographies** (Hutchinson), London, 1951, pp.178-179.

assessed the candidate in terms of personality and initiative. Further research is necessary into the memoirs of Victorian journalists and, in particular, editors and owners, with a view to establishing the nature of job interviews and the expectations of employers. Until then, the possibility that editorial recruitment was based on an assessment of the singular characteristics of the individual, or a streak of individuality, remains open to debate.

The common experience of editorial recruits would seem to have involved training in the gathering and writing of news. Rudimentary advice of a trial-and-error nature, reliant on the patience and goodwill of senior colleagues, suggests that those who did progress from these beginnings to make a mark in the industry were already predisposed to excel. Much would depend on the initiative and skill of the individual. For the reporter, at least, a grounding in the news story usually preceded any opportunity to specialise in a particular field of journalism, such as sport.

Despite the romantic image of the reporter mentioned in the advice manuals of the time, the reality for a junior was grounded in the matter-of-fact business of civic affairs, the courts and social engagements. The job of reporting was seen by informed commentators to be a laborious one featuring considerable mental and, surprisingly, physical strain. The attraction of the job, despite relatively low pay, the threat of tedium, and unsocial hours, points to potential recruits being drawn from a strata of society where the alternatives were even less appealing. Similarities with the economic and social status of the clerk suggest editorial recruits from the lower middle classes chose newspaper

work as an alternative to the heavily supervised world of the 'counting house'. Alternatively, the colourful image of the reporter might well have attracted capable young men with a penchant for literary work, with enquiring minds and a yearning for variety in their working lives. Further research into the popular image of the late-Victorian reporter, perhaps within the fiction of the period, would help create a clearer picture.

For the junior reporter showing an aptitude for sport, the rewards were mixed. There might be the opportunity to improve basic wages with payment for Saturday sports shifts, possibly also to indulge in lineage opportunities. If sports reporting appealed to a relative minority within the industry, as seems likely given the above considerations, then the prospects for promotion to the rank of sports editor must have increased. However, as the popular press matured and opportunities to make a living as a full-time sports reporter widened, the issue of lower starting pay and, seemingly, a questionable status among editorial colleagues, must have posed significant concerns. The reporting of sport was not a closed shop. The very nature of most sporting fixtures, held in the open with public access encouraged, left the sports reporter peculiarly exposed to competition from the non-journalist.

Chapter Three

'A condition of happy independence': The sports reporter

3:1 Introduction – Page 135

3:2 'A celebrity in the sporting world': Some leading Victorian sports correspondents – Page 136

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3:7 Conclusion – Page 198

3:1 Introduction

This chapter will be used to focus in detail on the development of sports reporting, to consider its attractions, together with the demands that covering sport placed on the reporter. The growth of an associational culture will also be traced. To illustrate the opportunities that sports reporting offered, the chapter opens with a brief review of the careers of a handful of prominent Victorian journalists, men working for the specialist sporting press, and men considered a success in their chosen field. The chapter then turns to consider those aspects of the occupation of sports reporting that proved popular to the late-Victorian journalist, together with an examination of the peculiar demands of the job and, in particular, the struggle to rid the business of what was perceived as a reliance on a 'hackneyed' and contrived style of reporting. The issues of style and reporting language provide invaluable insights into the business of sports reporting, the calibre of early recruits, the question of occupational image, the presence of internal divisions within newspaper journalism, and the ambition to elevate the occupation to a higher level of competence. In order to assess the growth of an associational culture among sports journalists, the development of the press box, or press bench, will be considered. The nature of press accommodation at sports fixtures will be used to help gauge the reporter's standing in the sporting sub-culture. The behaviour associated with the use of those press facilities, in terms of editorial etiquette, provides a further means of assessing the establishment of an occupational image. The chapter will feature a brief comparison of the travelling sports reporter and the Victorian commercial traveller, in order to highlight any occupational similarities and to help further define sports

journalism's claim to an associational culture, such a strong feature of the travelling salesman's working environment. To close the chapter, the place of the sportsman-journalist in the editorial hierarchy will be considered. The figure of the sports star earning a living through newspaper work looms large in the history of sports journalism. The ubiquitous presence of the sportsman-journalist, his means of accommodation within the business of sports writing, and the strains and divisions that accommodation created among full-time sports reporters, in turn throws light on the issue of a sports reporter's ability to report sport. In particular, the hiring of talented sportsmen by newspapers, and the sportsman's willingness to cash in on his 'expert' opinion, or at the very least his name, posed the question as to whether the rank and file reporter needed sporting credentials of his own in order to claim professional competence in the eyes of sportsmen, the public and his own colleagues.

3:2 'A celebrity in the sporting world': Some leading Victorian sports correspondents

Any young man looking for a role model among the sporting journalists of the period would have been confronted by mere pen names, rather than easily identifiable writers. The sports reporter, like his counterpart in news, laboured anonymously, although the commonly assumed *nom de plume*, associated with the 'column of notes' they filled on a regular basis, did help raise the profile of sports journalism. If the writer moved on, the column would continue under the same name but with a different writer in order to protect the interests of the paper, to preserve a sense of continuity for readers – and to safeguard any feelings of readership loyalty developed through informed

writing or, in the case of racing reporters, successful tipping. It was not a system designed to aid the journalist whose public reputation, at least, was tied up with his by-line.

The *Sporting Mirror* in 1881 deemed it newsworthy to run a series of short sketches on those writers it considered the leading lights of contemporary sporting journalism. Noting the growth in sporting titles since *Bell's Life in London* had enjoyed almost a monopoly of coverage, the *Mirror* considered,

. . . sporting journalism has assumed such vast proportions, and at the present time there are many gentlemen who, attached to sport for the love of it, devote their time to improving its position by joining in its literature as a profession and a means of a livelihood.¹

There is a distinct sense of the successful sports writer being seen as a promoter of sport, of being 'on the inside', charged with improving its image.

It is worthwhile to put the series to brief use here in order to better understand the career routes taken by those who had already established themselves as successful 'sporting correspondents' by the time of the newspaper industry's remarkable late-century expansion.

George Atkinson, of *The Sporting Life*, born in 1844, had received a grammar school education in Lincolnshire before studying at King's College, London. At one time a theatrical printer, he had acted as 'dramatic correspondent' for several London periodicals before contributing a weekly 'theatrical article' to

¹ *The Sporting Mirror*, edited by 'Diomed' (H. Etherington), London, Vol I, May, 1881, p.105.

the *Sporting Life* in the early 1870s. By 1874 he was the paper's cricket editor, later taking on responsibilities for pedestrian, athletic and 'aquatic' matters by 1877. Atkinson was to be found refereeing 'at nearly all the leading pedestrian feats of the day'.²

Charles Ashley, part owner of *The Sportsman* since 1874, had been born in Sheffield in 1834 where his father kept a hotel. He was apprenticed to the printing trade on the *Sheffield Times*, developing an interest in sport and taking on turf reporting duties for the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. By 1862 he was on the *Sporting Life* payroll as a racing reporter, becoming 'principal racing reporter' on *The Sportsman* when it was launched. He had also branched out to set up an agency to supply 'sporting information' to a variety of newspapers.³

Tom Whitefoot, editor of *The Sportsman*, had been 'apprenticed as a Government pupil teacher' aged 13 in 1861 before working as an assistant in the reading room at the *Birmingham Daily Post*, later becoming chief reader at the *Sheffield Daily Independent*. He passed the 'reading examination' for *The Times* in London and was offered the next vacancy to arise, but in the meantime he had studied shorthand and took up a reporting job in Rotherham. Five years later he moved to the *Birmingham Daily Post* as a reporter, joining *The Sportsman* as a 'descriptive writer' in the late 1870s.⁴

² *The Sporting Mirror*, Vol II, July to Dec 1881, pp.49-50.

³ *The Sporting Mirror*, Vol II, pp.117-118.

⁴ *The Sporting Mirror*, Vol II, pp1-2. The position of 'reader' on the press of the time entailed reading galley proofs, copies of stories set in type, to check for errors before the final article was printed.

Henry Sampson, 'Pendragon' of *The Referee*, born in 1841, the son of a journalist, began work in a printing office aged 12. A successful all-round sportsman, by 1866 he had become a proof-reader and had begun writing for the press. He secured jobs on two titles that subsequently folded before a wide variety of writing assignments for a number of papers led to him joining *The Referee* as editor when it launched in 1877, and where his columns of sporting criticism became a feature.⁵

Grammar school-educated Charles Blake, 'Augur' of *The Sporting Life*, studied at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and practised as a vet in the West Country and London, contributing articles to the newspaper before joining the racing staff in 1868. He began writing the 'Augur' column following the death of the previous post holder in 1874.⁶

Jack Mitchell, born in Cumberland in 1846, was apprenticed as a compositor on the *Carlisle Patriot*. Before he had completed his indentures he was appointed a junior reporter and his work included covering wrestling bouts and race meetings. Through his friendship with the clerk at Carlisle racecourse the way was paved for an appointment as a junior reporter on the *Sporting Life* racing staff in 1866. A move to *The Sportsman* saw him assume responsibilities for the influential racing news column, 'Vigilant's Notebook', in

⁵ *The Sporting Mirror*, Vol I, Jan to June, 1881, pp.72-74.

⁶ *The Sporting Mirror*, Vol I, pp. 105-107.

1874. *The Mirror* considered him 'a celebrity in the sporting world'.⁷

Drawn from the middle classes, four of the six had print trade backgrounds, perhaps indicative of a more restricted means of entry to the business of newspaper reporting in mid century. The press's unprecedented expansion in late century forced a widening of the industry's recruitment base, as illustrated by the 1870s reporters featured in Chapter Two. They are presented as experts in their chosen field, men with the ear of sports administrators, performers and financiers. Of particular significance is the fact the compiler of the series limited his review to writers on the specialist press. The expansion of the popular press was not advanced enough yet to see its sporting staff elevated to the rank of celebrity.

But away from the spotlight of *Sporting Mirror* acclaim, a job on the specialist sporting press could be as far removed from sporting glory, or what passed for 'celebrity' status, as that of a reporter on a provincial weekly. Robert Blatchford, later to found the Socialist journal *The Clarion*, began work on the London title, *Bell's Life*, in 1885. He recalled,

⁷ *The Sporting Mirror*, Vol I, pp.148-149. Although the generation of sporting writers who came before Mitchell, Blake and their kind, is outside the scope of this thesis, an impression of their backgrounds and working environments can be gained through a number of works. The careers of early nineteenth century writers Charles James Apperley, known as 'Nimrod' and Rober Smith Surtees, who specialised in country pursuits, are explained in E. W. Bovill, *The England of Nimrod and Surtees 1815-1854* (Oxford University Press), 1959, and John Welcome, *The Sporting World of R. S. Surtees* (Oxford University Press), 1982. Henry Hall Dixon, 'The Druid', who began contributing to *Bell's Life* in 1839, was the subject of a study by J. B. Booth, *Bits of Character. A Life of Henry Hall Dixon "The Druid"* (Hutchinson), London, 1936, and Dixon's memoirs, *The Post and Paddock by The Druid* (Vinton), London, 1856, although disappointing in the coverage of his reporting duties, does have an interesting chapter on the mileu of the racecourse with mention of some early century sporting journalists, pp.166-183. *Manchester racing writer and poet Richard Wright Procter, born in 1816, who combined his journalism with his barber's business, awaits a modern study. See, Richard Wright Procter, The Barber's Shop* (Thomas Dinham), Manchester, 1856, *Literary Reminiscences and Gleanings* (Thomas Dinham), Manchester, 1860, and *Our Turf, Our Stage, and Our Ring* (Dinham and Co), Manchester, 1862.

I was often at work from ten o'clock one morning until one o'clock the morning following. I was sent to all kinds of places to do special articles on all kinds of subjects. I attended cricket matches, football matches, boat races, horse races, boxing contests, swimming contests, theatres, coach meets, sailing matches, military tournaments, picture exhibitions, brewers' exhibitions, sporting exhibitions, Imperial exhibitions, Lord mayor's shows, pigeon shooting contests, dairy shows, cattle shows, and committee meetings of all kinds, including one committee meeting of sporting noblemen – real live dukes, earls and baronets.⁸

3:3 'A departure from sanity'?: The attraction of sports reporting, and the demands

For many young reporters the opportunity to cover sport, to escape other, more mundane assignments lacking the potential for drama, must have proved appealing. Despite Blatchford's sardonic allusion to 'real live dukes, earls and baronets', the opportunity to mix with sporting stars, or even just to view them performing from a distance, and to pass comment on them, must have carried a certain thrill. The sheer variety of assignments listed as a chore by Blatchford, may have held genuine appeal for a journalist wearied by a round of municipal engagements. Chalaby surely pinpoints one of the attractions of sports writing when he suggests that sporting events 'can be reported as narratives'.

Sport gives much freedom to reporters to interpret sporting events in the way that they want. For this reason journalists often dramatize the contest they report, even though the competition may lack any dramatic

⁸ Quoted in, A. Neil Lyons, **Robert Blatchford. The Sketch of a Personality: An Estimate of Some Achievements** (Clarion Press), London, 1910, p.72.

ingredient. Playing up on drama and suspense, journalists are able to stir up intense feelings and spur emotions in the audience.⁹

That appeal would have been heightened had the reporter an interest in, and understanding of sport. Gordon Robbins provided a sense of the excitement sports reporting could offer the enthusiast, when he wrote,

It does not seem possible for the non-journalist to realise the rapture felt by a reporter of 21 on being handed the plums of the season, permits to view and write about conquering Australian cricketers and storming New Zealand footballers.¹⁰

That sense of thrill is confirmed by Trevor Wignall in his memoirs concerning his start in journalism around 1902. His first assignment was a village football match. A few weeks later the reporter covering Wignall's beloved Swansea Rugby Club left and the junior was requested to fill his place. 'Now this was promotion. Even more than that: it was an ascension of the heights,' he wrote.

I had gone up in one bound to the top of the bill. As a reporter of funerals or of the police court I was nobody, but as "The Watchman", the commentator of the victories and the defeats of the celebrated All Whites, I was entitled to respect and attention.¹¹

A Saturday afternoon by the sports field might well offer a welcome change of environment to that encountered during the week. Mackie warned of 'the drudgery' likely to be faced by 'the youngest member of the reporting staff of

⁹ J. K. Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (Macmillan Press), Basingstoke, 1998, pp.92-93.

¹⁰ A. Gordon Robbins, 'Foreword' in V. A. S. Beanland, *Great Games and Great Players. Some thoughts and recollections of a sports journalist* (Allen and Co), London, 1945, p.7.

¹¹ Trevor Wignall, *Never A Dull Moment* (Hutchinson), London, 1940, pp.22-23.

a daily paper'.¹² Marsland Gander summed up the air of desperation that must have driven many young reporters to seek to widen their reporting horizons. After four years working on an East End bi-weekly paper, he wrote, 'I noted with misgivings that I was approaching my twenty-second birthday and still saw no end to the round of bazaars, inquests, council meetings, police courts and organ recitals'. That same year Gander secured a job on *The Times of India*.¹³ The provincial reporter's lot was said to be, 'exceedingly laborious, is mainly concerned with masses of dull detail, and does not often lead to promotion'.¹⁴ But even among more senior colleagues, the mundane was rarely far away. The 'drudgery' entailed in much reporting is illustrated by the work of the 'reporting ring', where journalists from different papers combined to cover a public meeting, often a political rally, by taking it in turns to take a verbatim note of a speech, to be relieved by a colleague, with the note-taker then transcribing his shorthand. Messengers would then rush the report, as each 'take' was completed, and telegraph it to all the papers concerned. The practice was said to be common and was a feature at important occasions.¹⁵ Hartley Aspden writes of his own experience of the reporting ring and offers a picture of the men involved being skilled and reliable journalists.¹⁶ If shorthand writing in relays was considered to be an accomplishment of the late-Victorian reporter, how welcome might the verbal freedom of the sports pitch have seemed as an antidote to what passed for the newsroom 'fag' work?

¹² John Beveridge Mackie, *Modern Journalism. A Handbook of Instruction And Counsel For The Young Journalist* (Crosby Lockwood), London, 1894, p.20.

¹³ Marsland Gander, *After These Many Quests* (Macdonald), London, 1949, p.56.

¹⁴ F. S. A. Lowndes, 'Journalism for University Men', *The Contemporary Review*, Vol LXXX, 1901, p.819.

¹⁵ Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, pp.34-39,

¹⁶ Hartley Aspden, *Fifty Years A Journalist* (Advertiser and Times Printers), Clitheroe, 1929, pp.21-37. John Pendleton, *Newspaper Reporting In Olden Times and To-day* (Elliot Stock), London, 1890, pp.154-156, describes reporters of the ring as 'skilful', and 'thoroughly up to their work'.

From an occupational point of view, a sporting fixture offered recourse to a widened lexicon free from the pinched and formulaic reporting of the courtroom and corporation business. For a reporter capable of improvisation, of injecting colour and possibly humour or a lighter touch into his writing, the sports match could be a release. Sport, when mentioned in the journalism self-help journals of the era, is invariably listed alongside 'descriptive work', the ability to present an image to the reader of an incident or an occasion, without recourse to the verbatim quotes and procedural matters associated with civic affairs and local politics. For the gifted writer, 'these appointments are very pleasant ones, and are a welcome relief from the wearying round of alternate note-taking and transcribing'. Descriptive writing was 'the highest branch of the reporter's art'.¹⁷ For Pendleton, the journalist with a talent for 'descriptive writing', whether at a cricket match or race meeting, pit explosion or ship launch, 'is relieved to a considerable extent from the "slog" of note-taking, and secures practically the cream of newspaper work'.¹⁸ It would seem sport represented, for the journalist capable of imparting to his work a sense of personality, of opinion and authority, an outlet for his talent. These stylistic attributes were central to the 'new journalism' of late century, which was said to centre on the 'personal', a 'notion of personality'.¹⁹ *The New Review* of 1895 summed up the genre, as

. . . that easy personal style, that trick of bright colloquial language, that wealth of intimate and picturesque detail, and that determination to

¹⁷ Ernest Phillips, *How to Become a Journalist. A Practical Guide to Newspaper Work* (Sampson Low, Marston), London, 1895, pp.87-89.

¹⁸ John Pendleton, *How To Succeed As A Journalist* (Grant Richards), London, 1902, p.123.

¹⁹ Richard Salmon, 'A Simulacrum of Power: Intimacy and Abstraction in the Rhetoric of the New Journalism', in Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, David Finkelstein (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Palgrave), Hampshire, 2000, pp.27-29.

arrest, amuse, or startle, which has transformed our Press during the last fifteen years.²⁰

Sports reporting on even the humblest of weekly titles could still provide an opportunity to 'amuse, or startle', through the medium of the ubiquitous sporting notes column, a feature offering a rare opening for original composition. The average weekly paper was said to concentrate on football and cricket to the exclusion of most other sports.

All local matches will be reported fully; district matches will be supplied by correspondents or clipped from other papers; and any general items of special importance will also be "transferred" from other columns by means of scissors and paste, the whole making up the week's sporting news. Then, in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases there will be the inevitable "notes," these being written by the reporter who makes this department a special feature of his work. This represents really the whole of the sporting work required from the reporting staff, and every junior reporter ought to feel that if called upon he would be equal to the proper performance of these duties.²¹

The notes column was open for the reporter to 'set out his opinions, make his suggestions, and offer his advice', whereas match reports were restricted to 'a word-picture of what took place'.²²

However, for the writer with no interest in sport, faced with inclement weather and an alien pastime, the assignment might become a chore, an imposition at

²⁰ E. M. Phillips, 'The New Journalism', *The New Review*, No 75, Aug, 1895, p.182.

²¹ Phillips, *A Practical Guide*, p.82. The expectation that junior reporters would share the burden of sports reporting appears to have been a constant in the industry, with Alfred Kingston, *Pitman's Popular Guide to Journalism. A practical handbook for all engaged in or seeking to qualify for professional work on the newspaper press* (Pitman), London, 1925, p.23, noting of the 1925 junior, 'He will be frequently called upon to look after athletic fixtures'.

²² Phillips, *A Practical Guide*, p.83.

the end of the working week. A reporter signing himself 'Twenty Years' Experience' wrote to *The Journalist* in 1917 in response to a query in the paper from the NUJ president Alf Martin, himself a sports journalist, concerned that 'more reporters do not cultivate a knowledge of sport, and thereby add to their incomes'. The letter writer complained of the lot of the sports journalist,

... all that there was to be got out of it was the loss of Saturday leisure – in my case travelling with a League team, a good part of Sunday as well – and no return except infinitesimal sums to be saved out of expenses. I have heard similar complaints from men in other towns, who usually agreed that the reporter who knew nothing about sport and had successfully evaded efforts to teach him its rudiments, had done the best for himself.²³

In addition, the chance, or expectation, to broaden one's reporting style could, for the less gifted writer, prove an ordeal. If combined with a demand for speedy copy for a Saturday sports edition, the task must surely have generated the kind of laboured and pompous language touched upon in the opening chapter. The call to produce 'copy' with colour and flair could produce 'anxious dread as to how he is going to turn it out'.²⁴

Whatever the personal predilection of the reporter, or the standard of his writing, by the close of the century sports reporting, as noted above, represented a significant feature of popular daily journalism, and it was only natural it would develop its own conventions and working practices.

²³ *The Journalist. The Organ of the National Union of Journalists*, Sept, 1917, p.5, Oct, 1917, p.5.

²⁴ Phillips, *A Practical Guide*, pp.87-89.

In former days the sporting reporter was under the direction of the chief of the staff. Sporting news . . . has, however, asserted for itself so large and important a place in the work of the daily paper, that it has latterly been assigned a department for itself, with which neither the editor, nor the chief sub-editor, nor the chief reporter takes much concern. Within certain defined limits as to cost and space, and general character of the news supply, the sporting staff is left in a condition of happy independence.²⁵

By 1895 the author of one journalism self-help manual felt able to declare of sports journalism, 'The last few years have seen immense strides made in this department of reporting, which is now, to all intents and purposes, a profession to itself'.²⁶ The boast appears to be a reflection on the specialist nature of the work rather than any claim to 'professional' status. However, much of the work, especially on the weekly press, was in the hands of the non-specialist, with the general news reporter fitting in sporting engagements around his other responsibilities. It is impossible to provide an accurate figure for the number of full-time sports journalists in England in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. A rough calculation for the 1880s, though, using a variety of criteria, would suggest fewer than 150 daily paper sports journalists, and considerably fewer on the specialist sporting press and in the agencies. Mason doubts that many papers employed specialist sports staff before 1870 but, in a reflection of the changing news agenda, Chalaby estimates that by the 1880s the situation had been transformed, with most daily papers employing a sporting editor. Lee puts the number of daily papers in England in the 1880s at approximately 85 evening and 71 morning. With many morning

²⁵ Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, pp.32-33.

²⁶ Phillips, *A Practical Guide*, p.80

and evening titles produced by the same company and, in all probability, sharing staff and copy, the total of sports editors on the daily press must have been below 156. Turning to the specialist press, the British Newspaper Library public catalogue lists 27 papers published in 1885, using a search for titles including the words sport, sporting, turf, racing, athletics, athlete, cricket or football, and discounting 'repeats', and titles obviously associated with a daily paper, such as Bolton's *Football Field*, which would not have had an independent staff. Career details of sports journalists on some of the specialist sporting titles suggests they combined their staff jobs with freelance work providing reports for the press agencies, some of which were their own businesses. As intimated by Leary's work on the Manchester press, many of the specialist titles would get by on the efforts of an editor and contributed material from freelance sources. Even accounting for staff numbers on the better-resourced titles, it would seem the specialist press and agencies accounted for a minority of sporting journalists of the period.²⁷ However, these men would be augmented by scores of weekly paper and daily paper reporters seconded to cover sport at the weekend. How seriously the part-timer took his work is open to conjecture. A reporter on a weekly title employing only a small staff expected to turn their hand to all types of assignment, was encouraged to 'acquire a knowledge of the leading points' of the popular sports.

In some instances . . . there are reporters who have inclinations towards sport, and when this is so it may be taken for granted that their

²⁷ Tony Mason, 'Sporting News, 1860-1914', in M. Harris and A. Lee (eds), *The Press and English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Associated University Press), London, 1986, p.179, Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, p.91, Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (Croom Helm), London, 1976, p.284 and Maps 4 and 5.

knowledge will be utilized to the full, and they will find themselves marked for every engagement in which their special aptitude will be of service . . .²⁸

The experience of Trevor Wignall, in Swansea, was probably familiar to most provincial sports journalists. Wignall wrote a daily rugby article, with more on a Monday after the weekend matches. He contributed a half-page on Saturdays and 'had charge' of the Saturday football edition. On top of his sports duties, Wignall reported 'the Assizes, helped at the meetings of the Council, and did all the other tasks that fall to the country reporter'.²⁹

There is a hint of an industry struggling to keep pace with new demands, with talented writers at a premium. In 1902, Pendleton noted the 'eagerness of editors to obtain men who are able to write gracefully and authoritatively on sports and pastimes'. The editor of a daily paper had written seeking his help in filling a vacancy. The editor explained he was seeking,

. . . a first-rate cricket man to do us special introductions for the Lancashire matches played at Old Trafford. Can you recommend one? It is indispensable that the work should be done in a critical and picturesque style, and not be a mere catalogue of hits.³⁰

The sense of the industry being at times under-resourced in terms of sports coverage, of it existing in a semi-permanent state of 'catch-up' with a seemingly insatiable public appetite for news, is suggested by V. A. S. Beanland who had an intimate knowledge of the provincial newspaper

²⁸ Phillips, *A Practical Guide*, p.81.

²⁹ Wignall, *Dull Moment*, p.23.

³⁰ Pendleton, *How To Succeed*, pp.48-49.

industry in the north of England. Beanland believed that sports reporting pre-1890 had suffered in the hands of 'a coterie of outside contributors', employed on a daily press 'failing to keep pace with the growth of football'. The untrained part-timers had resorted to the hackneyed phraseology lampooned by press critics, until replaced by 'men of education and sound newspaper training'. But, for Beanland, the damage had been done, and as a consequence the sports reporters of his day had been saddled with an unfair image. His views on sporting vocabulary, of the calibre of sports reporters, and sports reporting's place in newspapers, were aired in rather incongruous fashion in *The Journalist*, in late 1918. A quarrel over an obituary notice for a former sports reporter killed on wartime service in France, revealed occupational sensitivities to perceived slurs from within the press. It also illustrates the status of some sports journalists in the eyes of their colleagues in other departments. An unsigned obituary notice on the death of *Lancashire Daily Post* sporting writer Capt W. E. Burdett, known as 'Hermes' in pre-war cricket and football circles, concluded that, 'He was a credit to the profession in every way, and, *though a sporting journalist*, found it worth while to give his work a literary finish' (author's italics). The next edition of the paper brought a response from Beanland, who, in a lengthy article, lost no time in rebutting what he saw as 'an undeserved slur' on the sports reporter in general. He condemned,

. . . this sneer at sporting journalism, and, by inference, at the men who have thought fit to devote their talents to describing and criticising the games of the people, but it is the fashion of a certain type of person in our profession . . . to affect an attitude of lofty superiority towards his sporting colleagues . . .

Beanland criticised 'this singling out of sporting journalism for a gratuitous affront'. In defence of his colleagues, Beanland listed a number of sports journalists regarded as the elite among their craft, together with sports reporters who had gone on to edit newspapers, in order to prove 'that literary merit is as adequately represented in sport as in any other branch of newspaper journalism'. They were men who had taken to sports reporting, 'sometimes through expediency, more often because of the healthy Briton's innate love of sport'. The following month, the obituary author, 'J. T. K.', did little to soothe bruised egos, responding that the phrase used 'was quite a proper one . . . there exists, even at the present day, a type of football journalist . . . whose conception of their duties is to be regretted'. The work of the 'experts' was 'only one side of the ledger'.³¹

The air of defensiveness suggested above is not uncommon in the writing of senior sports journalists when considering the place of sport in newspapers. They convey a sense of the business of sports reporting being under insidious attack, not just from outside the press, but from within, too. Writing in 1929, John Brierley, who, as 'Perseus', covered sport for the *Lancashire Daily Post*, in Preston, and who began his career in the 1890s, bemoaned 'the old idea that anything is good enough for sport', going on to place the blame for, what he saw as a questionable image, firmly at the door of the sports journalist. For

³¹ *The Journalist*, Oct, p.11, Nov, p.4, Dec, p.5, all 1918. Beanland recalled the disagreement 27 years later in his memoirs, Beanland, **Great Games**. He wrote that the obituary comment had left him 'incensed'. His thoughts are not recorded, though, on the sentiments expressed in the foreword to his book by ex-sports reporter Gordon Robbins, who, perhaps unfortunately, wrote that he was pleased to find in Beanland's book 'revelation of a literary style not always associated with the rough-and-tumble of daily journalism', in itself, a confirmation of the uncertain image sports reporters laboured under and of the persistence of that image, p.7.

Brierley, the sports reporter's Achilles' heel was the matter of style. Sports journalism's print vocabulary was an issue of keen sensitivity throughout the period of this study, and it is one that I will return to later when assessing James Catton's reporting career. Brierley believed the public had come to associate 'what is contemptuously labelled "journalese"' with sports news.

We have been too often content to approach the work slackly, too apt to think that the subject did not demand thought, originality of idea, and felicity of expression. We have thought and talked in terms of stupid hyperbole. We have had a language of our own. We have alluded to the ball in football as the sphere, the leather, the inflated windbag – anything but what it is, a ball.

It was a style of reporting, 'supremely silly, and calculated to make the educated person curl a scornful lip'.³² Efforts were being made to wean the sports reporter away from his diet of clichés. Reade's 1885 reporting guide carried a section on language with a plea to reporters to cut out the hackneyed, over-elaborate and long-winded vocabulary that had come to be a feature of the press.³³ Phillips' 1895 guide suggested,

Extravagant language should be avoided. The sporting reporters of these latter days have invented a jargon of their own which is an abomination . . . Football reporting should not necessarily indicate a departure from sanity.³⁴

³² J. A. Brierley, 'The Sports Writer And His Job', *The Journalist*, Jan, 1929, p.3.

³³ A. Arthur Reade, *Literary Success: Being A Guide To Practical Journalism* (Wyman and Sons), London, 1885, pp.25-27. Bernard Falk, covering football in Manchester around 1900, recalled 'an unassuming *Guardian* reporter who invariably took a Greek lexicon with him to the football match', Bernard Falk, *He Laughed in Fleet Street* (Hutchinson), London, 1937, p.37.

³⁴ Phillips, *Practical Guide*, pp.83-84.

Pendleton, writing in 1902, noted the survival of 'antiquated or hackneyed' language, of 'slang and the pet terms of the professional' in sports reports. But he believed standards had improved.³⁵ But Kingston, writing in 1925, still felt it necessary to berate the journalist who littered his reports with slang, slipshod English, and the ever-present 'hackneyed words'. He reserved particular opprobrium for the sports reporter, a 'class of writers who deliberately twist and torture the King's English'.³⁶

A number of historians have highlighted a stylistic change in the press coverage of football, in particular, as the twentieth century progressed. Mason, reviewing the years between 1860 and 1914, points out that the traditional, long-winded match report, bursting with 'classical or literary quotations', needed time for composition.

The pressures on both space and time which increasingly beset newspapers of all kinds as the twentieth century dawned placed limits on the utilization of other than a most economical style. Straightforwardness became more fashionable and the tendency clearly was for the colourful language and the rhetorical style, along with the literary quotations, to disappear.³⁷

Russell pinpoints the 1930s as a period of,

. . . stylistic revolution in football reporting, pioneered by the *People* but rapidly, if sometimes reluctantly, followed by many other papers. Influenced to an extent by American models, it featured shorter

³⁵ Pendleton, *How To Succeed*, pp.49-50.

³⁶ Kingston, *Popular Guide*, pp.86-87.

³⁷ Mason, 'Sporting News', p.182.

sentences and paragraphs; more gossip, often with a somewhat 'anti-establishment' slant; a rather aggressive, combative tone.³⁸

But innovation, whether commercial or editorial, was often adopted in a piecemeal and uneven fashion across the industry, a point noted by Russell who adds, 'Some sections of the press were little touched by these developments', with the more traditional and meagrely funded weekly market bringing up the rear in terms of change. The industry boasted a huge variety of titles, with weekly, evening, morning, specialist, local, regional and, eventually, national titles, all open to subtle differences in development prompted by varied levels of investment, entrepreneurial competence and staff recruitment. The 'pressures on both space and time' would have been felt less keenly on the far more numerous weekly titles.

There is no doubt that many journalists who came to write of their experiences covering sport in the years after 1900 were aware that they operated on the cusp of change, especially in terms of writing style. Two anecdotes retold by successful reporters in mid-century serve to illuminate this sense of change. They poke fun at industry stereotypes, standard, well worn images of 'old-timers', men identified through a limited reporting vocabulary, slaves to habit. They were no doubt instantly recognisable to younger recruits in reporters' rooms and on press benches across the country in the opening decades of the twentieth century and well beyond. They convey a sense of the modern versus the traditional, the new professional and the tradition-bound veteran –

³⁸ Dave Russell, *Football and the English. A Social History of Association Football in England 1863-1995* (Carnegie Publishing), Preston, 1997, p.104.

a theme that is touched upon in passing, but consistently, in the memoirs of the inter-war years' journalist. There is an element of ageism at work, a feature of the industry that I will return to later.

V. A. S. Beanland began writing on sport as a youth in 1892 and went on, over almost 50 years, to cover important sporting events for provincial newspapers in four northern cities.

In my own time newspaper writing has changed almost as noticeably as transport and warfare . . . In my younger days a story was told of one of the old-time reporters (who never varied the opening sentence of his account of a cricket or football match from: "These two teams met"), deputed to attend a charity function at which a match of sorts was to be played. It was impressed upon him by his editor that the occasion called for sympathetic treatment, and that the game, as a game, counted for little; and he was desired to get the atmosphere of the thing, to abandon stereotyped methods, and to turn out a brightly written story. The old-timer weighed in this: "There are three cardinal virtues, faith, hope and charity, and the greatest of these is charity. These two teams met" etc. In those far-off days the reporter of a cricket match would laboriously chronicle every boundary hit, every maiden-over, every bowling change in its due sequence, an irritating, uninteresting mass of detail even to the expert cricketer, while the writer of football laid in a stock of phrases, of which "give and take play followed", and "stung by this reverse" were such favourites that they might also have been kept in type with "oval", and "sphere", and "set in motion", in the newspaper composing room.³⁹

John Macadam who began in sports journalism a generation after Beanland, in the 1920s, and graduated from the provincial press to Fleet Street, working

³⁹ Beanland, *Great Games*, pp.11-12.

as the chief sports columnist on the *Daily Express* either side of the Second World War, tells a similar story. As far as he was concerned, the old-timers, the 'odd lot scrabbling with their weights and runners round the Sports Desk', survived 'mostly in the Provinces' until after the Second World War, 'still reeling off their times and results and figures with a nod at the younger ones in the trade who couldn't hold all those forgotten facts'.

On one of the Midlands football grounds the Press box is a long strip at the front of the stand. The match had just begun when old Charlie arrived. Now old Charlie had been covering this team's home matches since he was a boy. He knew every blade of grass on the ground, and could give you the life history of every player who ever passed through the books. There is an old Charlie attached to every football ground in Britain. He does a running story for the local evening paper. He does a story for one or more of the Sunday papers. He does another story or stories for one or more Monday morning papers. The word of old Charlie goes far and it goes wide. He is a type. However he may dress as he goes about his ordinary journalistic chores during the week, he always dressed the same way for the Match – long, heavy coat, muffler, cloth cap and probably goloshes. Well, on this day, old Charlie, flustered a little at being late, wheezed and panted along the line of newspapermen until he came to his seat. He dropped into the seat and undid the lower buttons of the great-coat and began to fumble in his side jacket pockets pretty much as a London taxi-driver fumbles for the odd sixpence in the change. From these pockets he took programme, notebook, telegraph forms. He spread the programme open on the ledge before him, opened the notebook on one side, placed the telegraph forms on the other. Then, from his waistcoat pocket, reached after a great deal of grunting and leaning across the man next door, he produced a large turnip of a watch and a penknife. He placed the watch above the open programme, speared it through the ring with the small blade of a penknife, so that it was securely anchored. From an upper layer of waistcoat pockets he took

anything up to half a dozen already sharpened pencils which he laid alongside the programme. He selected one of the pencils and drew the notebook towards him portentously. Only then did he look up. "Which side," he said to the next man, "kicked off with a rush?" Old Charlie – all the old Charlies – had been using the sacred soccer jargon for so long in his numerous reports that he even talked it.¹ The jargon . . . was practised seriously by only a select few. The rank and file were mere imitators who learned off the synonyms and the oblique phrases and then scattered them throughout their reports as the occasions arose to fit them. But they have no creative power and are merely stringing accepted clichés together because they are incapable of straight fresh writing.⁴⁰

Both anecdotes are redolent of the condescension of youth. No doubt the stories, and many similar ones, prompted an image familiar to successive generations of young journalists jostling the 'old-timers' for possession of the plum sporting assignments and the seat of honour in the press box. But like many stereotypes, they carry a ring of truth. The image of the tradition-bound, men lacking in inspiration, slaves to routine, encapsulated all that was decrepit in sports journalism for each fresh intake of writers. Each new generation, it seemed, wished to cast off the stigma of the old-fashioned rank and file, of the traditionalists, the aged, and the seemingly less talented. Perhaps they recognised the uncertain standing of their chosen occupation and blamed an earlier generation of sports reporters for the malaise.

Despite the above comments on the issue of style, it would be misleading to give the impression that advice on how to report sport was readily to hand in

⁴⁰ John Macadam, *The Macadam Road* (Jarrolds), London, 1955, pp.130-131.

the Victorian period. Sport frequently received meagre coverage in the journalism manuals and commentaries of the time, in itself a reflection on the secondary status of sports reporting in most offices. When mentioned, it was as an addendum to the weekly duties of the young news reporter, or treated solely, and briefly, in terms of turf reporting and, as such, seen as out of the ambit of the audience addressed in the manuals. The virtues associated with reporting in general, as outlined earlier in this chapter, were applicable, seemingly, to sports reporting, a situation due, in part, to the slow development of any specialism in the industry.⁴¹ Of the early guides consulted, Phillips' 1895 work provides the fullest treatment of sports reporting, perhaps an acknowledgement of sport's late-century rise in prominence and maturing conventions. Phillips combines 'sport and descriptive work' in one chapter, suggesting of the 'colour' article that the reporter keep his story original and light, '... enlivened with illustrations drawn from his reading or personal knowledge, and with the introduction of an occasional quotation or two to point an argument or enforce a fact'. The reporter is cautioned that in his sports report there should be,

'... no favouritism or partiality displayed, and if the game or the players have not the reporter's sympathy, his own feelings should be entirely put out of sight. In the report opinions should not be introduced... a word-picture of what took place should be given without the introduction of any expressions of opinion at all.

The young reporter was advised to be sparing in his criticism.

⁴¹ Turf reporting was undoubtedly one of the first specialisms to develop within popular journalism. Certainly, when mentioned by journalists throughout the time-span of this study, the racing journalist is portrayed as a man apart, due in part to the skills and knowledge required to perform his duties correctly, due to his working environment, and also because of racing's, and gambling's, peculiar association with the press.

It is according to the extent of a man's knowledge of the game, to the number of matches he has seen, that he is enabled to compare and criticise, to set up a standard of excellence by which he judges all other games.⁴²

When criticism is justified, it should be delivered, 'in a gentlemanly manner, such as will cause it to contain no sting nor leave behind it no bitter reflections . . . temper justice with mercy'.

The availability of advice improved in the inter-war years, reflecting sport's established prominence in popular journalism, the efforts of the NUJ and IOJ to improve training, and the presence of the first coterie of successful and veteran sports reporters experienced in handling sport for the popular press.

Daily Chronicle sports editor Percy Rudd, in one of a series of advice articles commissioned by the NUJ for its members, urged the sports reporter to dissect a sporting engagement, possibly of a day's play at cricket, to reduce it to one key moment and to build the report around that. 'Turn your sentences as elegantly and distinctively as you can; try to acquire style'. But above all else, he wrote, the cardinal rules that applied to the news reporter were paramount in sport, too, speed and accuracy.⁴³ In an earlier article, Rudd had urged that the reporter, ' . . . should know something about every sport under the sun, but should specialise in one or two of them, if he wants to do the best for himself'.⁴⁴

⁴² Phillips, *Practical Guide*, pp.80-91.

⁴³ Percy Rudd, 'What Is Required Of A Sports Journalist?', *The Journalist*, Oct, 1928, p.206.

⁴⁴ Percy Rudd, 'Sporting Journalism', *The Journalist*, June, 1922, p.83.

Veteran Lancashire sports journalist Brierley, who covered his first FA Cup Final in 1894, suggested the sports reporter 'should take pains to understand what he is writing about . . . he should make himself master of its rules and their application'.

It takes courage, independence of judgment, and sincerity of conviction to make the sort of impression upon the public consciousness in sport that you wish to achieve, the ability to analyse and weigh, and to arrive at a balanced decision. One may not possess all of these qualities . . . but they are the ideal at which we should aim.⁴⁵

Kingston, in his 1925 guide, suggested,

. . . the newspaper reporter is not expected to act as a coach to a football team, or to address his remarks to the players at all. His business is to describe fairly what happens for the benefit of those not present, and if he departs from this course he may find himself in undignified squabbles which bring no credit upon himself or his paper.⁴⁶

But the risk of 'undignified squabbles' was seemingly one worth embracing for a few. Trevor Wignall, a young man with ambitions to go far in journalism, made an early decision to push the boundaries of what was permissible and expected in contemporary sports reports.

In 1902 it was not the habit of football reporters to gaze too greedily on the misdeeds and the faults of their own sides. The other fellows were the dirty dogs; it was they who started the roughness or caused regrettable incidents. I strove to introduce a new note into that sort of reporting. I was critical of local heroes, I advocated the heaving of some of the more elderly into retirement, and I was frequently controversial. Very quickly any popularity I may have had vanished. I was threatened

⁴⁵ Brierley, 'Sports Writer', p.3.

⁴⁶ Kingston, **Popular Guide**, p.24.

with removal from the ground, I was cut by my few friends, and once, on tour in Devonshire, I was denied admission to the hotel where the players were housed.

Wignall found an ally in his editor.

He told me I had found a new line. He instructed me to continue as I had started. Sales were going up. People were talking about the Leader and cursing "The Watchman". That was my first acquaintance with the fact that saying something, even if the controversy engendered breeds anger, is more advantageous to a newspaper than sitting on the fence. And to the writer.⁴⁷

Judging from the reminiscences of contemporaries, Wignall was something of an exception in the confrontational attitude he claimed to have adopted. But his summary of the reporting norms he breached is informative in terms of the standards he felt the majority adhered to. 'The other fellows' were commonly portrayed as 'the dirty dogs', with the 'home' side often escaping censure. Match reports, generally in support of the local team, followed a trend seemingly expected by readers who were assumed by journalists to be favourably disposed to the local sporting club. Conformity made the gathering of news easier, it opened doors to officials and tour hotels. It paved the way to acceptance.

3:4 'No applause is permitted': The press box

The sports reporter, no matter what type of paper he worked for, would, by definition, spend part of his time out of the office covering sports fixtures. The

⁴⁷ Wignall, *Dull Moment*, p.23.

facilities provided for the reporter to do his job at the sporting venue – if any were offered – would inevitably vary depending upon the sport involved, the nature of the fixture and its standing in the sporting calendar, whether local, regional or national. Mason has outlined the ‘arduous business’ of collecting the sports news and the slow development of press facilities at sports events for the period 1860 to 1914. He notes the lack of ‘privileges or special facilities’ at Newmarket, for example, as late as the 1860s. ‘A position was reserved for the press at the Scotland-England football match in Glasgow in 1884, as it had been at the recent rugby match between the two countries, but the fact that the *Athletic News* saw fit to comment suggests it was not the usual occurrence’. Reporters often found themselves placed at a table in front of the spectators with no cover, although by the 1890s the first press boxes on football and cricket grounds appeared.⁴⁸

Mike Huggins in his study of Flat racing up to 1914, noted the, ‘constant pressure from the press for improvements’ to facilities, in general, at the nation’s racecourses.⁴⁹ Sports reporters were working in an environment of change in the 1880s and 1890s as, for example, football grounds were established and redeveloped to cater for a sport becoming increasingly popular and commercial, with ancillary facilities changing accordingly.⁵⁰ The piecemeal nature of ground development, with reporters expected to do their work in close proximity to spectators, could create unease on the press

⁴⁸ Mason, ‘Sporting News’, pp.179-180.

⁴⁹ M. Huggins, *Flat Racing and British Society 1790-1914. A Social and Economic History* (Frank Cass), London, 2000, pp.156-157.

⁵⁰ For a brief overview of the development and expansion of football grounds for this period, see Ray Physick, ‘Grounds’, pp.164-169, in Richard Cox, Dave Russell, Wray Vamplew (eds), *Encyclopedia of British Football* (Frank Cass), London, 2002.

benches. The page one notes column of the *Athletic News* in October, 1892, complained of rowdiness at a rugby ground,

Press stands – or reporters' benches, as they are more generally termed – are provided with more or less sumptuousness at the various football grounds, and the officials of the clubs recognise the importance of the scribe's work by providing this necessary isolation and convenience. But when, however, we come across a stand like that at Tyldesley, where the public are allowed to crowd round, we feel inclined to protest. We don't mind partisans giving expressions to their feelings down our coat collar, but when blathering idiots are allowed to shout at reporters, and cannot be choked off, then we think it is time the committee found another place for reporters or muzzled offenders.⁵¹

The conditions for cricket reporting at this period, a press tent by the boundary rope, say, appear to have been, in general, fairly rudimentary. But the early absence of segregated areas for the press at one remove from pitch side, was conducive to an informal mixing of sportsman and sports reporter. Writing of the 1880s, Martin Cobbett recalled the easy relationship between the reporter and cricketer in the intervals between play.

What joy it used to be for some to get hold of a ball and trundle to the actual players in the few minutes between the luncheon's end and the stated time for the interval to close.⁵²

However, a seat by the pitch could also have its serious disadvantages.

Gordon Robbins recalled his written description of play being obliterated by rain and sleet falling on the exposed press seats at Hunslet rugby ground.⁵³

⁵¹ *Athletic News*, Oct 24, 1892, p.1.

⁵² Martin Cobbett, *Sporting Notions Of Present Days And Past*, edited by Alice Cobbett (Sands and Co), London, 1908, p.162.

⁵³ Beanland, *Great Games*, p.8.

Being too close to the action might pose a physical risk, too. In 1902, officials at Newcastle United felt it necessary to enclose the press box with wire-netting, 'to save the faces of the fourth estate from a stray ball'.⁵⁴

The experience of reporters covering the 1893 FA Cup final between Everton and Wolverhampton Wanderers, although extreme, serves to illustrate some of the shortcomings of early press accommodation. The match was staged at the Manchester Athletic Ground at Fallowfield, and reporters were allocated seats and desks on the track around the pitch. But policing arrangements were inadequate for the big crowd attracted to the tie.⁵⁵ The *Sunday Chronicle* reported that spectators,

... broke through the barricades on the Levenshulme side of the ground and swarmed on to the running track in thousands, with the result that from the press seats there was no possibility of seeing the field of play. The police were powerless to stop them, and altogether it looked very much as if the match was to be spoiled.

Spectators clambered over the press tables to get a better view of play, destroying them in the process. Abandoned by the police and officials in the swell of over-enthusiastic fans pressed half-a-dozen deep along the touchline, the reporters watched as 'the remainder of the Press seats were soon wrecked', and they then retreated to the Pavilion enclosure to 'do their work under most disadvantageous circumstances'.⁵⁶ A diagram of the athletics ground shows the press and 'complimentary' seats directly by the side of the

⁵⁴ *Athletic News*, March 10, 1902, p.1.

⁵⁵ The crowd was put at 50,000 by the Manchester-based *Sunday Chronicle*, with a 45,000 figure in Bryon Butler's *Official Illustrated History of the FA Cup* (Headline), London, 1998, p.61.

⁵⁶ *Sunday Chronicle*, March 26, 1893, p.6; see also *Sporting Chronicle*, March 25, p.2, *Sporting Chronicle*, March 25, p.2, *Athletic News*, March 27, (all 1893), p.5.

pitch, in front of a grandstand, among the 5s section.⁵⁷ Judged on the cost of admission, with a reserved stand charging 10s 6d, other stands 4s and 3s, and the rest of the ground 1s, the 5s seats 'inside the rails', were considered by the organisers to be amongst the best, although the view from pitch side would have been lacking in perspective.⁵⁸ The pressmen fared little better a week later at Richmond Athletic Club for the England v Scotland international, when their allocated seats were taken up at the last minute by minor royalty and replaced by alternative seats with a much poorer view of the game.⁵⁹ The reporters' predicament is revealing on two counts; one, that their seats were deemed good enough to accommodate the royal visitors; and two, they were evicted with seemingly little compunction.

Clearly, individual journalists would have pressed, with varying degrees of success, for improvements at a local level. The NUJ also appears to have played a role in urging sports organisations to have a care for the pressmen covering their fixtures. The union's executive council wrote to the FA Council in 1913 suggesting that at representative matches,

. . . adequate covered accommodation is provided for representatives of the press. Both last season and the season before we received complaints from journalists who suffered great inconvenience owing to lack of this accommodation.

⁵⁷ *Sporting Chronicle*, March 24, 1893, p.4.

⁵⁸ *Sunday Chronicle*, March 19, 1893, p.4.

⁵⁹ *Sunday Chronicle*, April 2, 1893, p.7.

FA secretary Frederick Wall was instructed to reply that, 'The Council will be pleased to meet the comfort of Journalists . . . as far as possible'.⁶⁰

The press box, or press benches, helped define the public image of the sports reporter. Whether sitting prominently at pitch side or perched in the upper tiers of a grandstand, the reporter became a regular presence at all manner of sporting fixtures. Improvements to facilities can only have boosted the self-image of the reporter and appear to have reflected the gradual acceptance by clubs and organisations of the need to accommodate the press.⁶¹

Those sports not restricted to a pitch, or court, would naturally present a different variety of challenges to the journalist. The physical effort of covering a game of golf was said by Beanland to be 'the supreme test . . . of condition, and stamina, and patience', with the swapping of notes with fellow reporters, 'an integral' part of the work'. He wrote with feeling of the conditions faced by reporters at 1930s major golf tournaments alongside spectators who

⁶⁰ Football Association, minutes of The Council, Dec 15, 1913, pp.2-3. The FA Cup Final had been held at Crystal Palace in previous seasons and was to be staged there again in 1914, but the FA finance committee, meeting in February, did not specify any improvements to press accommodation, despite ordering improvements elsewhere to the ground, Further Report of the Finance Committee, Feb 2, 1914.

⁶¹ For two contemporary and informed opinions on the state of press facilities at cricket grounds spanning 1900, and the gradual improvement of the reporter's lot, together with practical innovations pioneered by the pressman to help him conduct his business, see, C. Stewart Caine, 'Hints From The Press Box', *John Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack for 1893* (John Wisden and Co), London, pp.XLV-XLVIII, and Philip Bussy, 'A Private View Of The Press Box', in *C. B. Fry's Magazine of Action and Outdoor Life*, Jan, No 22, Vol IV, 1906, p.370. B. J. Evans, *How to Become a Sporting Journalist* (W. H. Allen), London, 1946, p.48, provides a snapshot of facilities and working practices for the 1920s football ground. E. H. D. Sewell, *Rugger: The Man's Game* (Hollis and Carter), London, 1944, pp.16-17, provides a contrast in terms of the much more rudimentary press facilities provided at an important 1920s rugby union fixture, indicative, perhaps, of a more sophisticated commercial outlook adopted by professional football clubs. The scene Sewell describes is not too dissimilar to the chaos outlined above at Fallowfield almost 30 years earlier. Charles Buchan, *A Lifetime in Football* (Phoenix House), London, 1955, pp.116-117, provides an alternative opinion on the alleged benefits of the reporter's elevation from the touchline to a grandstand press seat at a distance from the sporting action.

'rampaged' over the courses at the climax of play. At the British Amateur Championships at Royal Lytham and St Annes in 1935,

... forgetting the disabilities of advancing years, I ran and scrambled with the mob, determined not to miss a single shot that human ingenuity and physical effort and endurance might make it possible to see.

The final hole on the final afternoon of the Open Championship at Muirfield that same year saw the players, '... followed in seconds by a raging, tearing mob, entirely out of hand'.⁶² Bernard Darwin wrote his copy on the final day of the Open Golf Championship at Sandwich, in 1911, 'sheltering under the lee of sandhills, sitting on the sheets as they were written in order to prevent them from flying away'.⁶³ For race reporters, the problem of keeping a check on the horses and jockeys as the action receded to a distant part of the course was said to have been overcome through a team effort by rival journalists.

One of them – usually the most experienced, who can distinguish every horse at a glance by the colours of its jockey – takes up the most advantageous position, and watches the race with a powerful pair of glasses. He narrates every movement and every development as it is in progress – just as though he were thinking aloud. His colleagues, around him, take notes of his observations, and are then in a position to write a graphic and an exact account of the race.⁶⁴

Conditions were not always ideal for the clear-thinking composition of a reasoned report at ringside for a boxing match, either. Trevor Wignall, acknowledged as one of Fleet Street's finest sports journalists between the wars, noted, 'I was in a number of boxing riots, and more than once I climbed

⁶² Beanland, *Great Games*, pp.81-100.

⁶³ Bernard Darwin, *Green Memories* (Hodder and Stoughton), London, 1928, p.72.

⁶⁴ Bussy, 'Press Box', p.373.

under rings to escape flying bottles and the stamp of heavy feet'.⁶⁵ At a bout in Cardiff in December, 1910, Wignall was felled by a swinging chair and a colleague was cut by a thrown bottle.⁶⁶

It is only to be expected that stories of extreme conditions and a breakdown in order feature prominently in journalists' memoirs, at the expense of the matter-of-fact reporting practicalities encountered at most sporting assignments. There is an absence, too, of details surrounding the introduction, or establishment, of occupational conventions governing behaviour, etiquette, and working practices on the press benches. Those anecdotal details that do emerge suggest a limited associational culture based on a loose affiliation of individuals, developed on pragmatic lines to expedite the job in hand. The need for quiet, if the sport allowed, and a willingness to share an opinion as to how an incident on the field of play might be interpreted, appear to be the limit of the press box protocol. But even these customs might not be adhered to, and much would depend on the personnel involved and a camaraderie possibly built up over several years.

Mason notes how, for important fixtures generating a great demand, a senior journalist, *au fait* with the needs of the press, might be handed responsibility by the organisers to oversee the allocation of press seats.⁶⁷ But it would seem that even at more humble gatherings a local reporter might well supervise the basic running of the press benches on behalf of the sports club. 'Standard Bearer', in a letter to *The Journalist* in 1924, highlighting a lack of co-operation

⁶⁵ Trevor Wignall, *Almost Yesterday* (Hutchinson), London, 1949, p.131.

⁶⁶ Trevor Wignall, *Ringside* (Hutchinson), London, 1941, p.35.

⁶⁷ Mason, 'Sporting News', pp.179-180.

between sports reporters, complained, 'Take the case of where a senior Press man controls the tickets for refreshments and only allows his few chosen friends to go in the room'.⁶⁸ The scenario would at least suggest some scope on the part of pressmen to control their own working environment.

It is safe to speculate that the senior reporters working in a particular press box would set the tone for the type of behaviour deemed acceptable. Those standards would obviously vary according to the nature of the sport covered. The atmosphere in a football ground can be considerably different from that of a cricket ground, with the behaviour and proximity of spectators having a profound impact on the working environment. Whatever the circumstances, there was an expectation that a reporter's sporting affinities would be suppressed. Charles Stewart Caine was said by a fellow sports writer to be 'firmly insistent on the dignified neutrality of the press-box'.⁶⁹ Cricket writer R. C. Robertson-Glasgow recalled, 'Cricket reporting used to be a solemn affair, and the Press Box, anyhow at Lord's, recalled the Silence Room of a Carnegie Library in Scotland', with the tone 'championed' by the Pardon brothers, owners of the influential London-based Cricket Reporting Agency.⁷⁰ Former player E. H. D. Sewell, at one time sports editor of the London *Standard*, recalled only two occasions when he saw Sydney Pardon 'with his feathers really ruffled' at Lord's, one of them involving press box behaviour.

... I had ushered into the old press box on the stand, just to the right of the sight-screen looking from the pavilion, my friend the then Harrovian,

⁶⁸ *The Journalist*, Oct, 1924, p.183. It would appear the practice of providing the press with a refreshments room at games, if facilities allowed, had become an established feature.

⁶⁹ Percy Rudd, 'Epilogue', in C. W. Miles (ed), *They're Off! A Journalistic Record of British Sports* (Denis Archer), London, 1934, p.273.

⁷⁰ R. C. Roberston Glasgow, *46 Not Out* (Hollis and Carter), London, 1948, p.178.

S. E. Walmsley . . . The occasion was Eton v Harrow, and the Hill were at the wicket. On the stroke of a particularly good four, I think but am not sure Mike Falcon had struck it, Walmsley fairly let himself rip, he not knowing or caring a damn about the tradition of the press box. "No applause is permitted in the press box," shouted Sydney Pardon from the end of our row, and though Harrow didn't collapse out on the middle their representative did in the staid atmosphere of the press box . . . ⁷¹

In the above instance, admittance to the press box was not limited to working journalists, a practice that appears widespread and one that would undermine attempts to impose fixed standards.

Arthur Porritt, later to become editor of *The Christian World*, began his career in journalism in the *Manchester Examiner* London office in 1890 and spent two summers covering cricket in London and following Lancashire on their visits to the southern counties. For Porritt, 'the camaraderie among the reporters in the press box made the days go by like a song'. But it did not seem out of bounds for a reporter to take a friend, or even a partner, along to sit among the press.⁷² The sense of an unsupervised access policy for the reporting seats is supported by Bernard Falk's experience. To disguise his shortcomings on the finer points of football he relied on a local enthusiast, 'mad' on football, who talked him through the play in the press box at Manchester United matches around 1900, 'for an occasional packet of cigarettes, and a more frequent glass of beer!'

. . . I learned his phraseology and comments, and shouted them through the telephone to the approving murmur of a football "fan" at the other

⁷¹ E. H. D. Sewell, *An Outdoor Wallah* (Stanley Paul), London, 1945, pp.81-82.

⁷² Arthur Porritt, *More and More of Memories* (George Allen and Unwin), London, 1947, p.50.

end, otherwise a shorthand writer. The office thought my reports so good that I was invited to spread myself further over the pages of the *Sunday Chronicle* and the *Athletic News*.⁷³

Martin Cobbett, looking back on a 30-year career in sports journalism that included work for the *Sportsman* and *Sporting Life* in the 1870s, could declare,

I venture to say that no unhandsome turn will be given to a member of the profession, and if he is in difficulty he will be seen out of it – and no charge made nor price accepted. Say I was ‘doing’ cricket, or football, or fighting, or rowing, or racing, and I was *hors de combat*, does anyone suppose that some good fellow of a competing paper or service wouldn’t see me or my stuff through, or do the same for anyone else in the line of business? I give you my word they would, and be pleased to do so.⁷⁴

The same sentiments rang true for B. J. Evans who recalled the regular help of fellow reporters when doubling up to cover the Boat Race in the morning and a top rugby match at Twickenham in the afternoon. A reporter for a rival sports agency,

... knew I was going to have a rush to get to Twickenham in time, and I gave him, the previous day, my numbered pad of copy paper. He promised that, if I could not arrive by the kick-off time, he would write the first page or two and hand it to my usual messenger, just as if I had been there. Kindness like that is common among journalists, who may be keen rivals but will never take unfair advantage of a colleague.

However, there were limits to co-operation and, for example, at a cricket match, if Evans had kept his own ‘analysis’ of a particularly effective bowler,

⁷³ Falk, *He Laughed*, p.47.

⁷⁴ Martin Cobbett, *Wayfaring Notions* (Sands and Co), London, 1906, pp.X-XI.

he would turn a deaf ear to the enquiries of a less 'industrious' colleague 'scrounging' information. 'I regret to say those questions have not been answered by me. I have always tried to help any colleague in distress, but I have refused to earn his living for him.'⁷⁵ His attitude appears to encapsulate the essence of reporting's associational culture at the practical level. In the cricket press box men were said to be able to rely on colleagues to acquaint them with the play they missed when, during quiet periods in the game, they wandered off for a drink or for a little exercise.⁷⁶ The level of co-operation was not uniform, however, and 'Standard Bearer', a cricket and football reporter quoted above, in his letter to *The Journalist*, complained of a lack of mutual aid in the press box on even basic matters. Highlighting several instances of colleagues refusing to help with the names of goal-scorers, he laments, 'I take it we are all brothers working for the good of all, and out to help each other. No journalist who is a real brother would take up that action'. The writer mentions reporters being given assignments to cover matches and facing hostility and suspicion from men who 'control the lineage' at that particular ground. The complaint calls for, 'more of the Masonic spirit' among union members, and suggests the presence of 'penny liners' and 'non-union men' in the sports reporting business made co-operation a problem. The writer suggests the introduction of badges or passwords, to be used by union members in 'Press accommodation', would force the adoption of a more co-operative attitude.⁷⁷ For 'Standard Bearer', at least, a hoped-for improvement in the reporter's associational culture lay in the actions of the NUJ and greater union solidarity, rather than individual efforts.

⁷⁵ Evans, *Sporting Journalist*, p.46, and p.52.

⁷⁶ Bussy, 'Press Box', p.373.

⁷⁷ *The Journalist*, October, 1924, p.183.

The press benches could be a testing ground for innovation and the exchange of ideas. On a visit to Belmont Park racecourse, near New York, in 1923, turf reporter Sidney Galtrey found the press room,

. . . a noisy hive of speed work, with direct cabling going on, and much discord from typewriters. I returned to one of our typical Press Rooms to find our purveyors of racing news slogging away with pen and pencil.

But a portable typewriter was soon introduced and after 'A beautiful blend of horror, outrage, indignation, pain and annoyance' on the part of the British reporters, 'the barrier of tradition and old conventions had been breached. The pioneer rapidly had a following'.⁷⁸

Depending on the standing of the reporter, his temperament, and the occasion, the press box could be the scene of 'sheer fun . . . the easy, pleasant work, the congenial environment', experienced by the teenaged Porritt,⁷⁹ or something of an ordeal, as experienced by Neville Cardus of the *Manchester Guardian* early in his career. Cardus recalled his introduction to press box work.

But not all at once did I dare go into the company of the elect, especially when I visited Lord's. I was diffident about the aristocratic Sydney Pardon, editor of *Wisden*; he would glance at me with his quizzical, experienced eyes, and I decided he was putting me down mentally as an enthusiastic provincial.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Sidney Galtrey, *Memoirs of a Racing Journalist* (Hutchinson), London, 1934, pp.289-290. As with so much attached to the development of reporting, the take-up of new initiatives was uneven, and as late as 1930, sports editor Ernest Edwards found it necessary to urge young reporters to buy typewriters and to use them to save time when writing their reports at football matches, *The Journalist*, April, 1930, p.101. Edwards' audience was made up of provincial, small-town journalists, a section of the industry invariably under-resourced. The practicalities of manoeuvring the heavy typewriters of the day to and from football grounds are not touched upon.

⁷⁹ Porritt, *Memories*, p.49.

⁸⁰ Neville Cardus, *Second Innings* (Collins), London, 1950, pp.179-180.

Cardus, who began reporting cricket for the Manchester paper in 1919, adopting the pen name, 'Cricketer', appears to have been something of an exception when it came to using press box facilities. He recalled in his memoirs,

Unless the occasion were a Test Match with the ground congested, I seldom sat in the Press Box until it was time for me, after the tea interval, to write my daily fifteen hundred words. I preferred to stay in the fresh air, walking on the grass at country places such as Tonbridge, Canterbury, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Worcester and Dover. The hours I have stood behind the screen at the bowler's end! – or wandered round the little crowd . . .⁸¹

3:6 On the road: The '*un-commercial* traveller'

It was the lot of only a minority of journalists to spend much of their working week travelling to assignments away from home. Of those who did spend time on the road, or the rails, a good proportion would have been sports reporters, working for a specialist sporting title or an agency, with a professional brief to journey where the nation's sporting calendar dictated. They would, no doubt, travel in the company of fellow reporters if possible, to ease the tedium of long trips, or they would set off in the expectation of meeting other sports journalists on arrival. Travelling together or sharing accommodation on arrival

⁸¹ Cardus, **Second Innings**, p.185. Cardus' introduction to cricket reporting - he was a former cricket coach at Shrewsbury School - came about after he 'suffered a breakdown', almost three years after he began news reporting for the *Guardian*. In Neville Cardus, **Autobiography** (Collins), London, 1947 (third edition), pp.127-128, he writes that, on his return to work, news editor Ted Crozier, 'suggested one day that I might recuperate myself by sitting in the air one or two days at Old Trafford. First-class cricket was about to be played again, experimentally with two-day matches after four years of silence. I might write reports on a match now and then, suggested Crozier'. Crozier's sympathetic action suggests a view, possibly prevalent in newspaper offices, that cricket reporting was one of the less arduous tasks on the editorial diary.

can only have helped foster whatever forms of an associational support culture the occupation could boast. On the most basic of levels, mutual support would have helped in shared planning, possibly shared costs, support in dealings with sports officials and event organisers, and the practicalities of doing the job. The presence of colleagues can only have eased the burden of professional expectation surrounding each assignment. Arthur Binstead gives a brief, light-hearted glimpse of the life of racing journalists on the road. The pressmen were said to have shared a hotel on a visit to Newcastle and to have sought entertainment together.⁸² Hartley Aspden, a reporter in Birmingham in the 1880s, recalled six or eight reporters regularly being assigned by the leading daily papers of the day to travel to political meetings in the provinces, where they would combine to cover the speech of a leading figure.⁸³

When looking for an occupational group for comparison with the travelling sports reporter, and to better identify any features peculiar to journalism on the road, it is tempting to turn to studies of the commercial traveller.

Michael French writes of the occupational fragmentation of the 'commercials', identifying them as a 'peripheral and insecure' group within the white-collar stratum, with predominantly low earnings but with middle-class aspirations, lifestyles and education. Advice manuals, 'depicted travelling as a source of opportunities and autonomy . . . that still distinguished them from the

⁸² Arthur M. Binstead, *A Pink 'Un And A Pelican* (Bliss Sands), London, 1898, pp.14-38.

⁸³ Aspden, *Fifty Years*, p.21. Alfred Kinnear writes of a corps of reporters, stenographers and Post Office 'transmitting staff' regularly despatched to cover political speeches around the country, 'The Trade in Great Men's Speeches', *The Contemporary Review*, Vol LXXV Jan-June 1899, pp.439-443.

increasingly supervised world of the clerk or sales assistant'. The highest earners might sport frock coats and silk hats. They 'defined themselves as professionals, emphasizing their enterprise', but their image was tarnished by a drinking culture. The 'ease of entry' to sales jobs created an occupational instability. These are all characteristics of the journalist, and together with journalists, 'a powerful sense of identity equipped travellers to cope with the potential isolation inherent in their work'.⁸⁴ The previous chapter touched upon the propensity of journalists to move considerable distances to take up new jobs, and the fact that unsocial hours might strain family relationships, both posing a threat to their image in respectable society. In assessing lower-middle class strategies 'for combating economic, social, and political challenges', French notes that 'Particular emphasis was placed on the family and local community'. The importance of 'family life and localism' created 'a basic tension' among commercial travellers, further emphasising similarities between the two occupations.

Unlike the more numerous commercial travellers, journalists had no retreat comparable to 'the commercial room', highlighted by A. P. Allen in his 1885 review of the life of the salesman. Large hotels on the commercials' itineraries would boast a comfortable room for their exclusive use. Allen writes of the 'un-commercial traveller' being invariably excluded from the sales fraternity and from 'the most cosy room in the hotel, the landlord knowing full well that no class of his visitors will repay him more readily for any extra outlay than his commercial friends'. The travelling salesmen appear to have relaxed in

⁸⁴ Michael French, 'Commercials, careers, and culture: travelling salesmen in Britain, 1890s-1930s', *Economic History Review*, LVIII 2, 2005, pp.352-377.

keeping with a well-rehearsed etiquette, governing behaviour in the commercial room, from smoking to formal greetings and rank at the dining table, all features designed to ameliorate prolonged absences from home, uncertain company, and a stressful job.⁸⁵ Christopher Hosgood has written of the travellers' 'marginality', and of a lifestyle, 'full of rituals and self-definitions that emphasized their individuality and exclusivity'.

Travellers were considered a separate breed by informed observers of white-collardom . . . Unlike other members of the lower middle class, who were forced to construct a defensive associational culture with the aid of only meagre personal experience. Victorian travellers had a tradition of fraternity dating back at least into the last century upon which they could draw. And it is this tradition of fraternity which makes the cultural world of the commercial traveller distinct.

Hosgood adds,

Travellers had the advantage of being able to graft their associational infrastructure onto a custom of comradeship which had been nurtured in the commercial rooms of hotels around the kingdom and which provided them with a collective assurance unique among the lower middle class.

The hotel commercial room helped the travellers in their attempt to 'fashion a sub-culture which would insulate the membership from the real or imagined vagaries and vicissitudes of Victorian life'. But their lifestyle, 'unfettered by traditional social constraints', left them open to temptation to stray from the path of respectability.

⁸⁵ A. P. Allen, **The Ambassadors Of Commerce** (T. Fisher Unwin), London, 1885, pp.47-81. Commercial travellers appear to have taken the opportunity to mix together when travelling. William Davidson writes of a dozen 'Commercials' sharing the train journey to Inverness, **Fifty Years On The Road. Recollections Of A Commercial Traveller** (Marshall Brothers), London, 1928, p.38. For commercial room etiquette, see pp.47-50.

Commercial travellers answered the potential moral challenges presented by life “on the road” with the support of an artificial family which could protect them from themselves. Late-nineteenth-century commercial travellers had access to an established private world, predating the railway age, a haven . . .⁸⁶

Huggins has noted how, ‘. . . offences against respectability were more likely where work took men away from home’.⁸⁷ The advantages accruing from Hosgood’s ‘Freemasonry’ of the road were denied the journalist. Whether the less numerous travelling journalists developed their own rules of etiquette to suit their situation remains unknown. Certainly, fixtures such as internationals, cup finals, and important race weeks, would, in the later years of this study, attract scores of journalists. Mason writes of 180 journalists attending Villa Park, Birmingham, for the England v Scotland match of 1899.⁸⁸ Attendance at the showpiece fixtures of the sporting calendar, by their very definition infrequent, enabled men who only met occasionally to rekindle friendships, and make new ones. B. J. Evans regarded the cup final ‘as a reunion day for sporting writers of the British Isles’.

There one meets men from provincial cities whom one might see often at cricket matches in the summer but who rarely visit London. Also, many Fleet Street men who do not come out to matches get tickets for this event. I have sometimes, in the gallery, met men I had not seen for years . . .⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Christopher P. Hosgood, ‘The “Knights of the Road”: Commercial Travellers and the Culture of the Commercial Room in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England’, in *Victorian Studies*, Summer, 1994, Vol 37, No4, pp.519-547.

⁸⁷ Mike Huggins, ‘More Sinful Pleasures? Lesiure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England’, *Journal of Social History*, Spring, 2000, Vol33, No3, p.591.

⁸⁸ Mason, ‘Sporting News’, pp.179-180.

⁸⁹ Evans, *Sporting Journalist*, p.50.

But their very infrequency may have prevented patterns of tradition developing, whereas for the lesser fixtures, attendances by a regular body of travelling writers would have been limited, too limited, perhaps, to generate more than a personal level of co-operation. It is, I believe, an area worthy of further research. Huggins has touched upon the growth in the inter-war period of joint social events arising from an interaction between the racing industry and journalists, such as dinners and sports days. Huggins writes of the camaraderie within the racing press, with personal biographies suggesting a 'friendly and positive' outlook and 'substantial elements of mutual solidarity'.

Racing journalists had an ambiguous relationship with racing, fairly detached, but, as journalist reminiscences show, with a strong sense of group cohesion. They spent much time away from home, and needed to create mutual support systems.⁹⁰

What detailed form those support systems took remains to be extracted from the sources. Perhaps they extended little beyond a shared sense of humour, although Kingston, in his 1925 guide, emphasised a growing sense of shared values and mutual support among pressmen. Suggesting that in former years extreme measures might have been taken to secure exclusive use, say, of 'a public document' that ought to be widely distributed among the press, the author declared there had been 'a decided improvement' in behaviour.'

Intimately connected with the reporter's work, at every point of it, outside the office, is his relationship with the representatives of other papers.

One of the things of which pressmen in this country are justly proud is

⁹⁰ Mike Huggins, *Horseracing and the British 1919-1939* (Manchester University Press), 2003, pp.44-47.

the *esprit de corps* which characterizes the more public part of their work.⁹¹

Trevor Wignall also highlighted the camaraderie among the travelling band of sports correspondents covering major assignments away from home. 'Writers on cricket are an austere and exceptionally quiet body of men when play is in progress, but when it is over they are shockingly addicted to pranks and practical jokes.'⁹²

Research into the role of the press clubs that sprang up in major cities across the country is an area that might provide further insight into the establishment of an occupational culture, as might a review of the social aspects of NUJ and IOJ membership.

But there is an air of contradiction surrounding the reporter, who must balance a need for co-operation and mutual support with the desire to be first with the news and to outperform industry colleagues who were also rivals. *Liverpool Echo* sports editor Ernest Edwards, 'Bee', in a review of Lancashire sports journalists written in 1921 highlighted that inconsistency, perhaps unwittingly, when he wrote,

There is a good sporting ring about the Lancashire journalists, sporting journalists. They are keen to be at each other and, as becomes them, keen to be "first in the field."⁹³

⁹¹ Kingston, *Popular Guide*, p.116.

⁹² Wignall, *Yesterday*, p.66.

⁹³ *Football Yarns. Being Reminiscences and incidents in the History of Everton, Liverpool, Tranmere Rovers, South Liverpool and Marine Football Clubs*, edited and compiled by "Phil" (T. Kilburn), Liverpool, 1921, p.127.

Journalists' memoirs from the earlier years of this study, as outlined in Chapter One, describe the physical effort that might be expended to be first with the news. As the industry matured, there appears to have been no let-up in that professional imperative. If anything, the anecdotes become more explicit, more brazen, feeding the popular image of ruthless men in an uncompromising industry. There is a sense of some journalists attempting to match that larger-than-life stereotype, and caution must be exercised in separating the commonplace from the extraordinary in reporters' working lives. But evidence of extreme behaviour does, at least, show the conventions that some men were prepared to break to beat a rival. What is perhaps surprising, is the pragmatic stand adopted by many to the actions of the few. Trevor Wignall, writing from bitter experience, summed up his own credo,

To retain even a lowly position in journalism it is necessary in trying situations to be less conscious of ethics than of expediency. I had discovered the solid truth of this seemingly sordid certainty in my early days, when respect for a promise extracted had caused me to be beaten to a pulp by rivals not afflicted by respect for anything. What irked me in those days was not so much the failure to pin medals on the man who kept his word, as the generous praise showered on the competitor who, in our argot, got away with murder.

An incident at the 1934 Old Trafford Test between England and Australia serves to illustrate the extreme competition some reporters seemingly encountered. Wignall, working for the *Daily Express*, became privy to late-night news at the players' hotel of sickness in the visitors' squad. After only a moment's hesitation over the ethics of relaying information not intended for public consumption, he telephoned his exclusive story to the paper. But the story appeared in the next day's *Daily Mirror*, too.

A couple of opposition lads in our trade had adopted the obvious expedient of listening-in to what I had to say on the telephone . . . I had never thought of that possibility, and probably would not think of it tomorrow if I were back on a similar assignment. Had I a reasonable complaint to make? No, not one that was worth arguing over; outsmarting the other fellow in the newspaper game is too well established to gain many supporters for a claim that it should be discarded.⁹⁴

Fellow Fleet Street sports reporter John Macadam wrote of his newspaper rivals, 'They are an amiable bunch watching each other like cats for fear of the unconsidered trifles of news that might have escaped their own eyes. It can be a harrowing experience'.⁹⁵ The sports reporter anticipated a level of co-operation with fellow journalists necessary to cover an assignment and to ensure he was not placed at a practical disadvantage. However, that had to be balanced with the drive to outdo press box colleagues in the search for novelty and exclusivity.

3:6 'The mistake of undue flattery': The sports journalist and the sportsman/journalist

This section of the thesis will be used to examine two controversial and related issues intimately associated with sports journalism and its status and standing within journalism more widely. The involvement of sportsmen in the reporting business was a constant feature of the occupation, creating both friction and a certain kudos within newspaper offices. The hiring of leading sportsmen as 'reporters', at the same time focussed attention on the question

⁹⁴ Wignall, *Yesterday*, 1949, pp.69-70.

⁹⁵ Macadam, *Macadam Road*, p.110.

of whether the journalist needed to be proficient at sport to do his job successfully? This twin issue evolved in tandem with the development, or professionalisation, of both sports journalism and sport. There is a sense pre-1900 of a possible compromise between the two roles. Depending on the sport, it appeared possible for a man to operate in both spheres successfully until the increasingly specialist demands of both made that accommodation more difficult.

That early accommodation can be seen in the careers of two of the editors of the Manchester *Athletic News*. Tom Sutton and J. J. Bentley laid claim to considerable sporting reputations. Sutton, son of a Manchester book dealer, joined the Hulton enterprise in 1875 and was editor of the *Athletic News* by 1880, at the latest, aged just 26. A specialist in coursing, under the signature of 'Donald', he was a skilled player at both the football codes in the 1870s and a founder of Manchester Rangers FC, earning selection at soccer for Lancashire, and later taking up refereeing in rugby matches. He was a handicapper at northern athletics meetings and one of the founders, in 1886, of the Manchester Athletic Club.⁹⁶ Sutton was succeeded by John James Bentley.⁹⁷ The two men had been team-mates in a Lancashire representative

⁹⁶ *Sporting Chronicle*, July 17, 1895, p.4; *Sunday Chronicle*, July 21, 1895, p.6; *Athletic News*, July 22, 1895, p.4.

⁹⁷ The rather slipshod manner in which editorial appointments on the Hulton newspapers were recorded is summed up in the treatment of the *Athletic News*' first three editors. The paper's first editor appears to have been Alec Mills (*Athletic News*, Sept 1, 1924, p.4, *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8), in charge from the paper's launch in 1875 through to 1880, although there is a suggestion that Sutton may have been joint editor for some of those years. On Sutton's death in 1895 he is described as editor, despite later suggestions that J. J. Bentley had taken charge as early as 1892. Sutton suffered a prolonged period of ill health and that may well have created a period of shared responsibilities. In the 1881 Census, Sutton is described as a newspaper reporter and in 1891 is a journalist/author.

side at football.⁹⁸ Bentley, the son of a grocer and church organist, was introduced to football as a boy in his home village of Turton, near Bolton. Sons of the local gentry attended Harrow School and were said to have 'transplanted Harrow football to the village'. Bentley joined the newly formed village football club and made his mark as a player, achieving county honours and taking on administrative duties as well. His playing days cut short by injury, Bentley developed a career as a referee. By the time he was 25, he was secretary of Bolton Wanderers who, three years later in 1888, became founder members of the Football League. Bentley's reputation as a reporter saw him join the *Athletic News*, and he seems to have managed to balance his journalism with work, at various times, as an accountant, 'a collector of income tax at Bolton', a blossoming reputation as a referee of top class soccer matches, and administrative duties with both the Football League and Football Association.⁹⁹ Sporting excellence, it would seem, could be combined with success in journalism.

On a less formal level, the sportsman might enter into a reporting engagement as a short-term expedient. England cricketer Pelham Warner embarked on his first tour abroad as a 24-year-old in 1897. The son of the Attorney-General of Trinidad was a member of a squad of players assembled by Lord Hawke to

⁹⁸ *Sporting Chronicle*, Nov 7, 1896; "Tityrus" (J. A. H. Catton), **The Rise of the Leaguers** (Hulton and Co), Manchester, 1897, p.38.

⁹⁹ Census, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901; *Athletic News*, Sept 3, 1918, p.4 (temporarily incorporated within the pages of the *Sporting Chronicle*); *Bolton Evening News*, Sept 5, 1918, p.3; *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, Sept 6, 1918, p.3; *St Annes-On-The-Sea Express*, Sept 6, 1918, p.2; Alfred Gibson and William Pickford (eds), **Association Football and The Men Who Made It**, Vol III (Caxton Publishing), London, 1905, pp.149-152; C. E. Sutcliffe and F. Hargreaves, **History of the Lancashire Football Association 1878-1928**, (Yore Publications), Middlesex, 1992, pp.165-166, first published (Blackburn), 1928; Tony Mason, 'John James Bentley', **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography** (online) (Oxford University Press), 2004-06.

tour the West Indies. Warner was to later write that shortly before the party sailed from Southampton, *The Sportsman* newspaper approached Lord Hawke. The newspaper, Warner explained,

. . . asked our captain whether he could arrange for one of the team to send home fortnightly descriptions of the cricket, and Lord Hawke, turning to me, said 'Plummy, you're last from school. Why shouldn't you do it? And that is how I began to write cricket for public consumption. As it happened, I made a lot of runs, which was embarrassing, as may be imagined, but I made an arrangement with Leveson Gower, and whenever I was successful he wrote about me, and whenever he was I wrote about him; and things turned out all right, and we did not make the mistake of undue flattery.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the most famous sportsman-journalist of the period was international all-rounder C. B. Fry. By 1900, the 28-year-old Fry, an old boy of Repton School, could lay claim to a first-class honours degree from Oxford, was within a year of becoming a double England international at cricket and soccer, a gentleman/amateur who could boast a world record at the long jump. He wrote a weekly column for the *Athletic News* and was football and cricket correspondent for Fleet Street newspapers. Fry and others of his standing brought a certain glamour and prestige to the business of sports writing, and there must have been a little reflected glory for the men in the press corps they worked alongside. Presumably, men like Fry were hired at a premium rate of payment and might already have secured a handsome standard of living before dabbling in journalism. Reporter Roland Allen worked with Fry at an FA Cup Final. Allen had begun his editorial career as an office

¹⁰⁰ Pelham Warner, *The Autobiography of Sir Pelham Warner* (Harrap and Co), London, 1951, p.43.

boy on the *Birmingham Gazette*. He explained, 'I carried cans of beer on a broom handle into which hooks were screwed. I ran with reporters' copy from police courts and political meetings and football matches'. In time the apprentice rose to cover 'championships of rat baiting, minor football matches and boxing shows where ringside seats cost sixpence'. A move to Fleet Street followed, and one cup final day saw Allen invited to Fry's chauffeur-driven limousine where he was treated to a pre-match picnic lunch, freshly prepared in the kitchens of a leading London hotel. Allen recalled the meal was 'washed down with champagne to brighten and sharpen the intellect for the job of telling the world all about the football game'.¹⁰¹ Fry and Allen shared a picnic lunch, and the title of sports journalist, but I would suggest, little else. A newsroom colleague of Fry's encapsulated the appeal of the star contributor, writing in 1912,

'Fleet Street to a large extent relied on the work-a-day journalist who took his allotted seat in the Press box with its circumscribed view, who was neither asked nor expected to probe very deeply into the scientific side of the games he reported. He was there to describe things as he saw them in a chronological order, and he did his work well enough. But the introduction of the halfpenny morning paper, and with it new ideas, including the signed article, demanded original points of view.'¹⁰²

The newspaper industry's quest for novelty and star names appears to have reached something of a low point, at least in the eyes of full-time sports reporters, with the *Daily Mail's* initiative in 1904 to get county captains to

¹⁰¹ Roland Allen, *All In The Day's Sport* (W. H. Allen), London, 1946, p.7 and pp.121-123. Wignall, *Dull Moment*, pp.137-138, provides a fascinating commentary on Fry's *modus operandi* during cricket reporting duties for the *London Evening Standard*.

¹⁰² A. Wallis Myers, *C. B. Fry. The Man and His Methods* (Arrowsmith), Bristol, 1912, pp.127-127.

telegraph 150-word reports on the day's cricket for a fee of two guineas a match. Freddie Wilson, captain of Cambridge University, recalled how, what he described as the 'beer money' reports, were not taken too seriously by the county sides, with a rash of new expressions coined by the players such as the 'cow-shot', and the 'donkey-waggle' to keep things interesting.

It seemed legitimate to put in all the current "wheezes" which were floating about at the time, and most of the Captains took to smart phraseology in their articles. Our people used to suggest some weird efforts to me and altogether it was rather fun writing up the stuff.¹⁰³

The *Daily Mail* innovation was launched in the issue of May 10, under the headline 'A UNIQUE DEPARTURE. "DAILY MAIL" REPORTS BY LEADING CRICKETERS. EXPERT IMPRESSIONS FROM THE FIELD OF PLAY'. *Mail* sports editor John Buttery risked undermining the standing of the working journalist in the eyes of his paper's readers when he pronounced in the introductory article,

'A participator in a game of cricket is better placed than the spectator for noting the finer points of the game, and his conclusions are sometimes more valuable and always more interesting, when duly authenticated, than anonymous opinions, even when the latter are expressed by admittedly good judges.'¹⁰⁴

Within a few weeks of the enterprise starting the *Mail* was carrying what it termed 'a compendium for puzzled readers', compiled by cricketer-writer Gilbert Jessop, explaining some 40-odd expressions of cricketing slang that

¹⁰³ F. B. Wilson, *Sporting Pie* (Chapman and Hall), London, 1922, pp.169-171.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Mail*, May 10, 1904, p.6.

had found their way on to the sports pages and had left the public baffled.¹⁰⁵

There is a hint of a reporting novelty running slightly out of control, and the memory of the stunt was still raising the hackles of full-time sports writers many years later.

Pavilion odd-job man William Howard recalled how the Lancashire skipper of the time A. C. MacLaren would attempt to write his contribution for the press – possibly part of the *Daily Mail* initiative – in the 30 minutes before the 7pm deadline for wiring the copy.

Truly for the next half-hour things were a bit brisk in the dressing room. Usually after the close of play the players discussed the game, and it was no easy matter for Mr MacLaren to write his article while the conversation was going on. Sitting in a corner with pencil and paper, he would yell out “For God’s sake, shut up! How can I do my work with all this noise? And William, I think you might have written some of this for me; you could see that I was likely to be in the field all day”. Many times have I written a good portion of his article, and it was no surprise to me to have my matter severely criticised by Mr MacLaren; it was about the only thing I did get!¹⁰⁶

An arch critic of the system, V. A. S. Beanland condemned the efforts of the sportsmen caught up in what he called stunt journalism. ‘They made their exit, so far as the public was concerned, unwept, unhonoured, and unsung, because even the hoi polloi, who tolerated for a season or two the cricketer-journalist . . . demanded that the criticisms of their games should be done by men who knew what they were talking about, or rather writing about’. He

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Mail*, July 4, 1904, p.7.

¹⁰⁶ W. E. Howard, *Fifty Years’ Cricket Reminiscences of A Non-Player* (Lancashire County Cricket Ground, Old Trafford), Manchester, 1928, p.105.

condemned, 'the impostor who, without literary gifts, trades on his reputation as a player and writes the bilge that was our daily portion in the era'.

Beanland observed that some county sides would split the money for the report with a journalist willing to take on the task of writing a match summary on their behalf. He insisted,

. . . the absurdities created by the scheme were so manifest that the experiment was not unduly prolonged. It was obviously impossible for a player to comment unfavourably on members either of his own side or of the opposition, and the daily laudation of comrades and opponents became a little tiresome'.¹⁰⁷

The formation of the NUJ in 1907 provided a forum for a long-running debate on the issue of the sportsman-journalist, with pressure from the union's rank and file to improve work prospects for members by limiting the employment of outside casuals and 'player-reporters'. There was a realisation, too, that journalists were implicated in the problem through writing reports on behalf of sportsmen, or through sub-editors rewriting their efforts before publication. If the public saw local professional footballers turning their hand to reporting, with seeming success, the reputation of the full-time sports reporter would be diminished.¹⁰⁸ A letter to *The Journalist* in 1917 from a correspondent signed 'Inkstreeter', appears indicative of the attitude of many.

My experience as a sports sub-editor has convinced me that many a journalist proper would be bundled out of the profession neck and crop

¹⁰⁷ Beanland, *Great Games*, pp.15-21.

¹⁰⁸ *The Journalist*, Nov, 1923, p.193. The NUJ Central London Branch felt the issue was serious enough to suggest 'an informal conference' to examine the work of outside contributors in sports journalism in 1910, NUJ papers, MSS86/1/BR/CL/1, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

were he to write some of the poor-quality stuff received from these “outsiders”, who are paid much bigger money merely for their names, and have to be re-written in the office.¹⁰⁹

Beanland had edited sports pages for a weekly paper using articles signed by soccer and rugby league players and rated the work as ‘junk’.¹¹⁰

Percy Rudd, sports editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, giving a lecture to students taking the London University journalism course in 1922, commented,

I was told last season by a member of the Rugby Union Selection Committee that no one could adequately judge a player’s claims to international honours unless he had been an international himself. That’s a point of view which I believe to be entirely wrong. One might as well argue that no one should criticise an actor or a play unless he has himself acted or written plays in the highest company. It is, of course, an advantage to have played the game one is writing about, but one may have played it in very minor company and still be an able critic of its highest flights. On the other hand, the most brilliant player is sometimes a bad critic of others who take part in his own game. The truth is that criticism is a gift which all of us do not possess.¹¹¹

NUJ and IOJ efforts to persuade sports administrators to legislate against player involvement in reporting proved fruitless. In June, 1931, for example, the NUJ general secretary wrote to the FA and Football League clubs, ‘appealing to them to take steps to prevent footballers and those holding administrative posts in football clubs from competing with professional

¹⁰⁹ *The Journalist*, June, 1917, p.5.

¹¹⁰ Beanland, *Great Games*, p.23, and pp.17-18.

¹¹¹ Percy Rudd, ‘Sporting Journalism’, *The Journalist*, June, 1922, p.83.

journalists by writing reports and comments'.¹¹² The rival Institute of Journalists adopted a resolution in 1935 deploring the engagement of sportsmen to write reports on matches. But IOJ members were informed that the MCC felt, 'Control of the matter lies in the hands of the journals employing the writers'; the FA considered, 'the remedy is with the newspapers who encourage the people to whom you refer'; the Football Players' Union believed, 'it is a matter which rests entirely between yourselves and the newspaper proprietors'; and the Rugby Union, although sympathising with the IOJ stand, believed 'a great part of the blame lies with the newspapers who search out and importune prominent players to write articles'.¹¹³ Details of what pressure, if any, the NUJ, IOJ, and individual journalists brought to bear on newspaper owners and editorial managers concerning the employment of leading sportsmen as writers, appears lost to the historical record. The solution to what was perceived as a problem by some rank and file reporters, was, to an extent, in the hands of senior journalists, the sports editors. But in a keenly competitive popular press where novelty and celebrity were prime elements, no sports editor could dare risk ignoring the trend to employ sports stars, even if the end product required judicious attention from an anonymous staff man.

It would be wrong to believe the sportsman-journalist had few allies within the ranks of the newspaper full-timers. The fact that professional sportsmen found opportunities to work as reporters and columnists throughout the period of this study, and beyond, testifies to the popularity and, one would imagine,

¹¹² *The Journalist*, June, 1931, p.115.

¹¹³ *The Journal. The Organ of the Institute of Journalists*, March, 1935, p.40.

commercial success of the feature. Trevor Wignall, no fan of the sportsman-writer lacking talent, was prepared to laud those with reporting acumen. Writing of the *Evening Standard*, he claimed,

There were only three occasions when I had evidence that readers of that journal were willing to form queues to purchase copies. One was when it printed the short-stories of Damon Runyan, and again when it ran special editions with the names of people who had drawn horses in the Irish Sweep. Charles Fry was the third to perform this most difficult feat. There has never been more brilliant, more expert or more witty cricket reporting.¹¹⁴

Ernest Edwards, giving advice to East Lancashire journalists, was reported as saying,

. . . the fact that a professional footballer could not write rational English should not, in his opinion, prevent him from contributing to the newspapers. He knew of footballers who were teeming with bright ideas about the game which they could not express themselves, and he saw no reason why the journalist should not come to their aid. Sports newspapers would be much poorer without these collaborations between footballers and journalists.¹¹⁵

The right of the sportsman to take a seat at the press bench had a bearing on the reporter's self-image. The issue of sporting excellence appeared to touch an occupational nerve. Fry was particularly vocal in advocating the benefits of first-hand playing experience as an aid to sports reporting, but he was not alone. Ivan Sharpe, an amateur England soccer international who won his first

¹¹⁴ Wignall, *Yesterday*, p.45.

¹¹⁵ Ernest Edwards, 'Hints to beginners', *The Journalist*, April, 1930, p.101.

cap in 1910, was a full-time journalist. In his memoirs he declared of the twin role of sportsman-writer,

The player helps the journalist. Experience in the middle helps the critic to get into the skin of the fellow who, worried by ten, fifty, a hundred thousand spectators, misses a chance of scoring that looked so simple. It is never so easy as it seems. The looker-on does not see most of the game. The player sees twice as much.¹¹⁶

B. J. Evans, as well as being a full-time sports journalist, was a noted racing cyclist, a champion skater, a rugby player, a dabbler in cricket in the hours when he was not reporting play. He believed that being accepted as a reasonably adept sportsman helped in his relationship with the players, and he stressed the need for sporting prowess to complement journalistic ability in his book **How To Become A Sporting Journalist**. He suggested,

. . . no man is properly equipped to write about sport for a knowledgeable public, and impose his ideas on them, unless he has himself experienced the thrills, disappointments and hard work out there in the lime-lit "middle".¹¹⁷

In the foreword to Evans' book, Fry wrote of the author, '. . . he meant to specialise in sporting journalism, so what he did was to go in for all the sports his office hours permitted. In this way he obtained first-hand knowledge of what he was going to write about'. For Fry, Evans' sporting skill meant 'he was dealing in the genuine article, and was bound to infer knowledge and sincerity'.

¹¹⁶ Ivan Sharpe, **40 Years in Football** (Hutchinson's), London, 1952, p.17.

¹¹⁷ Evans, **Sporting Journalist**, p.12, and p.51.

Evans had first hand experience of working with top sportsmen seeking to make money in the world of journalism. He covered the MCC tour of Australia in 1936/37 as the chief sports writer of *The Star*, with instructions 'to collaborate' with former Test cricketer Jack Hobbs. Although Evans condemned the practice of 'ghosting', whereby a star sportsman would lend his name to an article written by a journalist, there were levels of co-operation that he deemed acceptable.

Jack Hobbs was not only one of the greatest cricketers of all time, but is a fluent talker on the game; a marvellous observer and judge, and one of the finest sportsmen I ever met. It just happened that he needed a trained journalist to put his words into the correct form for quick telephoning or cabling to the office. We collaborated in the best sense of the word. I led Jack along the lines for a "story" and gave the public Jack Hobbs, not B.J. Evans.

In an irony seemingly lost on Evans, he bemoaned the difficulty he encountered attempting to gain acceptance as the right man to cover the annual Oxford/Cambridge Boat Race, one of the plum jobs on the sporting calendar.

The journalist has a difficult time to convince the sporting editor, or the editor, that he is better fitted to report training and the race itself than one of those Old Blues who strut all over the towing path in funny little caps; talk secretively and condescendingly, and demand twenty guineas a column for their abstruse articles, so often couched in clumsy schoolboy English. Moreover, their copy is invariably late . . . ¹¹⁸

For the sportsman with a penchant for writing, the benefits of sports journalism appear obvious. It provided a source of extra income and, at the

¹¹⁸ Evans, *Sporting Journalist*, pp.7-8, p.56, and p.41.

end of his playing days, might extend his involvement with sport and allow him to trade on a reputation earned on the field of play. But the practical side of the journalist's trade, the job of composing a story, often at speed and in less than ideal circumstances, could prove difficult. A. Wallis Myers' study of Fry, revealed,

Very often, if you broke into his hotel at ten o'clock, when other cricketers were at play or the card table, C. B. Fry, in a loose flannel suit with the sleeves turned up, would be found in his bedroom turning out copy. To concentrate the mind on lucid composition after severe and protracted physical exercise . . . is a task the severity of which experience alone teaches.

Fry was initially 'not a rapid word-maker'.

Ideas flowed freely enough, but he experienced difficulty in harnessing his thoughts and driving them decorously over a sheet of foolscap. Whatever other journalistic qualities he may have possessed, he had not acquired the gentle art of "making bricks without straw".¹¹⁹

Wignall felt a certain satisfaction at the discomfort of ex-players thrust into the rush of a deadline-dominated business, observing,

It is another of the curiosities that men who attain high estate in sport rarely make good writers for the Press. A few are gifted enough to become fairly reasonable journeymen, but the vast majority have to depend on ghosts (writers), or on the vivid ballyhoo that accompanies their engagement. In cricket especially I have witnessed their tortures as they scratched out their contributions, and have felt a little glow of contentment at the reflection that the novices, with no roar of the crowd to hearten them, were finding my craft a trifle stiffer and more troublesome than they supposed.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Myers, *Fry*, pp.129-130.

¹²⁰ Wignall, *Yesterday*, p.45.

A close association with a particular sporting club during a playing career could have its disadvantages, too. Perhaps one of the most famous sportsmen to have turned to journalism in the inter-war years was England soccer international Charles Buchan who joined the staff of the *Daily News* when he left Arsenal in 1928. Buchan covered cricket and golf and, naturally soccer, where he admitted his past loyalties and associations prompted some fans to question his impartiality as a writer. He explained,

Whenever I went to games in which my old clubs, Sunderland and Arsenal, were concerned, I got an extra thrill. I tried hard to give an unbiased view of their games. But I still got hundreds of letters from readers, one half of them accusing me of wearing red-and-white coloured glasses, the other half asking what Sunderland and Arsenal had done to me to make me so bitter against them.¹²¹

There can be little doubt that on top of worries over the practicalities of the work, the sportsman-journalist would have been aware of the ever-present risk of controversy and confrontation associated with press reporting.¹²² There was bound to be a feeling of unease among men recruited late in life to the industry, who possessed a more ambivalent view of what was, and was not, suitable material for a newspaper to print, in contrast, perhaps, to others who had spent their working lives steeped in the demands of the job, and who had often risen from the ranks of the newsroom where different news values might apply. R. C. Robertson-Glasgow, born in 1901, educated at Charterhouse and

¹²¹ Buchan, *Lifetime in Football*, p117.

¹²² For an insight into the risks associated with sportsmen dabbling in journalism, see Cecil Parkin, *Cricket Triumphs and Troubles* (Nichols), Manchester, 1936, and David Foot, *Cricket's Unholy Trinity* (Stanley Paul), London, 1985. Parkin fell out of favour with the England cricket selectors in 1924 and blamed the demise of his international career, in part, on a misunderstanding over controversial comments ascribed to him in a 'ghosted' newspaper column.

Oxford, an opening bowler for Somerset and later cricket correspondent for the *Morning Post* and eventually *The Observer*, writing in 1948, recalled past days when, ' . . . cricket reporting used to be a solemn affair'. But he noted,

The pendulum has swung full distance. Dullness is feared and avoided. So, unfortunately, is fact. The News Room has invaded Sport, and, on the occasion of Test matches, the cricket correspondent is often reinforced by a columnist or news-hawk, who, with furrowed brow, scours hotels and pavilions on his dark and dubious assignments. The techniques of the game now ranks far below the "story", and you will often hear reporters, at the end of a full day's cricket, lamenting that "nothing has happened". No one has fallen dead while taking guard, or been arrested while placing the field.¹²³

Pelham Warner's views on a sportsman's involvement with journalism had certainly changed in old age. Writing in 1951, and by then president of the MCC, he was to recall,

I wrote weekly letters to the *Westminster Gazette* on my tours in Australia and South Africa, and no one made any fuss about it! To-day members of a touring team are not allowed to have any connexion with the Press – and rightly so – but in my time things were different. One was asked to write about cricket, and not to enter into any sort of personalities; and there was no band of cricketing correspondents from England accompanying the team.

Perhaps his views had also been influenced by the realisation, later in life, that his own involvement in reporting had risked serious repercussions. By 1904 Warner had been made a member of the influential MCC Committee. He later chaired the board of selectors assembling the international side to face

¹²³ R. C. Robertson Glasgow, *46 Not Out* (Hollis and Carter), London, 1948, pp.178-179.

Australia in 1926. Although journalism appeared to have proved no bar to Warner's rise through the cricketing establishment, there had been, as he later discovered, 'a long and animated discussion' as to whether a man working as a cricket correspondent should be in charge of international team selection.¹²⁴

3:7 Conclusion

Before the rapid expansion of a popular press aware of the potential of sports news as a circulation aid, the journalist seeking to specialise in sports reporting found a limited market for his work. As illustrated in the opening section of this chapter, the men regarded as the leading exponents of the craft in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and beyond, were to be found on a handful of specialist titles. Their expertise lay in the turf, in pedestrianism, athletics, the prize ring, and cricket. The growth of football and rugby and a whole array of 'modern' sports had yet to produce their own 'experts'.

For the young men employed by the general press and charged with the responsibility of charting the progress of the newly-codified sports and pastimes enjoying a new wave of popularity, sports reporting could offer variety, excitement and the thrill of mixing with the professional sportsman. The reporter given the task of recording the actions of a new generation of local sporting heroes could claim a position of note in that same community. The sports journalist could escape the drudgery of verbatim news reporting. There was an opportunity for original composition. There may well have been

¹²⁴ Warner, *Autobiography*, p.67, and pp.118-119.

a desire on the part of certain journalists to distance themselves, through sport, from the less savoury aspects of news reporting, from the risk of confrontation and controversy. Chalaby, considering the growth of sports journalism, writes, '... sport is a consensual issue and journalists do not risk offending anyone while covering a sporting event'.¹²⁵ The sentiment is open to debate, bearing in mind the passions sport, at all levels, can generate. But the prospect of a disagreement over the reporting of a sports fixture, as opposed to controversy over coverage of contentious civil court proceedings, might seem the lesser of two evils.

But for every willing recruit to sports reporting there would as likely be a man press-ganged into the work to make up for a shortfall of enthusiasts in an industry struggling to cope with sport's new popularity. A key point to emerge in this chapter, and earlier ones, is that sport, for the most part, was in the hands of young men. It appears to have been standard procedure on the provincial press to channel sports news into the hands of the younger staff, with more experienced men probably relieved to escape another responsibility. Whilst that might mean a fresh perspective and a certain energy, the trend also went hand in hand with a lack of reporting experience that enthusiasm could only partly remedy. 'Sports reporting was beset by a problem of style, not in itself peculiar to the genre, but exacerbated by a scope for, and an expectation of, originality. The problem was perhaps compounded by internal condescension over sport's worth among more experienced staff, and the wages issue and the part-time nature of much

¹²⁵ Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, p.93.

sports reporting, highlighted in Chapter Two, would support that hypothesis. There was a concerted attempt to improve standards, to introduce clarity and personality into sports reporting. But the conundrum remains as to how an occupation attracting many applicants, able to pick and choose boys eager to escape the atmosphere and restrictions of the counting house, should have seemingly failed so lamentably in terms of the literary calibre of rank and file reporters, at least assessed by a later generation. Perhaps the answer lies, in part, in the type of education common among the lower-middle class recruits to the occupation, the syllabus undertaken and the scope within that syllabus for original composition. It is an issue deserving of further consideration.

For the historian seeking examples of group cohesion and of a budding associational culture among sports journalists, the press benches at sports fixtures offer scope for study. The exploratory account offered here, reveals limited evidence of co-operation and group solidarity. More direct signs of mutual help appear dependent on friendships and personal ties rather than on a sense of occupational unity. But the findings on this point are provisional and await comparison with further research. The same is true of the comparative work on the travelling sports reporter and the commercial traveller. Little research has been conducted into the lifestyle of the journalist on the road, let alone the sporting journalist. The above section points to a limited support system, perhaps centring on shared entertainment and leisure, in comparison with the more long-standing framework supporting the salesman away from home.

Examination of the place of the sportsman-journalist in newspaper sport reveals, on the part of a section of sports writers, concerns over diminished work opportunities, a perceived threat to status, and a debate over the merits, or otherwise, of personal sporting prowess, or at least experience of play. For others, the recruitment of sports stars was welcome, boosting the standing and image of reporting and underpinning a belief that sporting ability of some kind was a necessary component of the reporter's make-up. Research, so far, suggests that the split, not unnaturally, divided journalists along the lines of those who could claim some form of sporting prowess and those who could not.

When weighed alongside the question of sports reporters' pay rates, the casual nature of much early sports journalism, and the editorial sporting divide between the old and the young, together with serious concerns over the standard of sports reporting, then the issue of sporting ability confirms an occupation subject to considerable internal strains and tensions. Overall, the chapter has identified signs of the emergence of a coherent occupational grouping, with some attempt to combat the criticisms of style and approach, but the business of sports reporting was still beset by many problems.

The occupational strains and tensions outlined above, awaited the 15-year-old James Catton as he began his career in journalism as an apprentice reporter in 1875. Catton's experiences earning a living as a sports journalist in an industry coming to terms with new demands and new opportunities, and the manner in which he made a success of his choice of career, will be examined next.

Chapter Four

James Catton 1860-1901

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**4:3 ‘The county went frantic on football’: A start in journalism
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sports editor – Page 224**

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drinking – Page 257**

4:8 Conclusion – Page 259

4:1 Introduction

This chapter will be used to introduce James Catton to the thesis narrative in an attempt to examine the development of sports journalism in the context of one man's career in newspapers. A detailed individual study should allow closer scrutiny of general issues. Catton's family background and early life will be traced in order to attempt an assessment of the motives behind his move into reporting. Catton's early exposure to the popular sports of the day will be examined to gauge what influence boyhood pastimes might have played in the development of his livelihood. Catton's introduction to journalism, and sports reporting, will be featured, together with the progress of his career in Preston, Nottingham and Manchester, and the opportunities that sports journalism offered. The career-defining decision to specialise in sports writing will be highlighted, together with the practical issues of fulfilling that vocation. Throughout the chapter, attention will be paid to Catton's family circumstances to present as full a picture as possible of the lifestyle of a Victorian sports journalist. Wherever necessary, occupational trends and issues highlighted in general in earlier chapters will be reviewed with the focus on how they affected James Catton. In particular, the chapter will close with two sections examining the press box and technology, and the problem of journalism's drinking culture, with specific reference to Catton's career and views. Although the themes expand beyond the general chronological framework of the chapter, their main relevance relates to Catton's early career.

4:2 'A memory of boyhood': Family life and school days

James Alfred Henry Catton was born in Greenwich, Kent, on April 6, 1860, the son of Thomas and Emma Catton. He appears to have been an only child. His father was a 'Classical and Mathematical Tutor', and, in keeping with middle-class social mores of the time, his mother, according to successive Census records, appears not to have worked outside the home.¹

Thomas Catton, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin,² was born in Leigh, Lancashire, and his wife Emma in rural Oxfordshire, but they are both listed as living in London at the time of their marriage in Southwark in 1858.

Thomas, aged about 25, is described as a 'student in divinity' on the marriage certificate. Emma was about 24. Why the couple did not wait until Thomas had finished his studies, and how he came to complete his university education in Dublin whilst supporting a wife in London is open to conjecture. But the couple appear settled in London from the time of their son's birth until he reached the age of 10. They had moved from Greenwich to Lewisham by the time he was one, and had made at least one further move, to the neighbourhood of Lord's cricket ground by 1870.³ Based on the occupations of neighbours at the two earlier addresses, the family lived in a reasonably well-to-do home environment, among retired businessmen, men of 'independent' means, and skilled professionals such as an engineer, and a

¹ Catton birth certificate.

² 1861 Census. Catton senior is not recorded as having attended the university in alumni lists up to 1860. George Burtchaell and Thomas Sadleir (eds), suggest in **Alumni Dublinenses (1593-1860)** (Alex Thom), Dublin, 1935, '... from time to time men became members of the University without submitting to the Entrance Examination. To this category belonged those who were examined privately for entrance', pp.VII-VIII.

³ 1861 Census; marriage certificate; 1871 Census; J. A. H. Catton ("Tityrus"), **Wickets and Goals. Stories of Play** (Chapman and Hall), London, 1926, p.3.

sea captain, together with neighbours of more modest means, including a clerk, lodging house keeper, baker and gardener. The household included Emma's 12-year-old niece, described as a nursemaid. Thomas' teaching appointments in the capital included a spell as second master at Tower Hill Grammar School.⁴ But he appears to have been prepared to move at seemingly regular intervals to take up positions at a variety of minor private schools. Thomas was the eldest son of an itinerant Methodist minister and had been educated, between the ages of about eight and 14, as a boarder at Woodhouse Grove, near Leeds, a school for the sons of Wesleyan ministers, also attended by his three younger brothers.⁵ By contrast, his wife Emma was the daughter of a 'journeyman miller' who found work in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. At age 17 she was sharing a home with an older woman with both classed as brush makers. On his mother's side of the family, James Catton's relations included a joiner, ostler, dressmaker and servant.⁶ By the time Catton was 10, his paternal uncles included two graduates from Cambridge University, one working as a 'classical master' and soon to take up appointment as Rector of a country parish in Devon, and one a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, a scientist who had worked in the natural philosophy department at Edinburgh University. A third uncle was a Wesleyan minister.⁷

⁴ *Harrogate Herald*, Aug 17, 1881, p.1.

⁵ J. T. Slugg, **Woodhouse Grove School: Memorial and Reminiscences** (T. Woolmer), London, 1885, p.249, and **The History of Kingswood School Together with Registers of Kingswood School and Woodhouse Grove School**, by Three Old Boys, (Charles Kelly), London, 1898, p.138.

⁶ Census, 1851, 1861, 1871.

⁷ J. A. Venn (ed) **Alumni Cantabrigienses, Part II, Vol I** (Cambridge University Press), 1940, p.540; **Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Church Conference, Bradford** (Wesleyan Conference Office), London, 1910, obituaries section, p.134, (held at Manchester University); *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, July 17, 1900, p.8.

At an early age it would seem Thomas and Emma sent their son away to be schooled privately, at Abington House School, Northampton.⁸ Census records reveal a boarding school boasting a headmaster, several assistant masters, and 44 pupils in 1861, and 80 pupils in 1871, all boys, drawn from across England, but primarily the east Midlands. How Catton's parents settled upon a choice of school for their son is beyond the historical record but, judging from the academic success of Thomas and his brothers, a sound education was obviously valued and there may have been expectations of the boy enjoying an extended education. Catton was to later mention a career in medicine as an early consideration.⁹ The considerable literary skill exhibited by Catton in his later journalistic work, involving frequent references to the Classics, a mastery of figures and statistics, a voracious appetite for literature, and an implied command of foreign languages, all suggest a thorough academic grounding. Indeed, Catton's selection of a by-line as a mature writer, the classical figure 'Tityrus', speaks volumes for his feelings for his schooldays. It was a name that he volunteered to be associated with on a daily basis, to represent his means of making a living, and it was chosen, as he later explained, 'to enshrine a memory of boyhood'.¹⁰ Catton wrote of having 'inherited the family failing for juggling with words',¹¹ and may well have been referring to his paternal grandfather the Rev James Catton, a Wesleyan minister who passed away while Catton was just three. In a 40-year ministry in which he had moved across the length and breadth of the country to take

⁸ *Cricket. A Weekly Record of the Game*, Sept 10, 1908, p.401. Catton is the subject of an interview and talks of school activities in 'the mid-sixties', referring to it as 'Kingston's School' (the headmaster was a William Kingston).

⁹ Census, 1861, 1871; *Cricket*, Sept 10, 1908, p.402.

¹⁰ *Athletic News*, June 19, 1922, p.4.

¹¹ *Cricket*, 1908, p.402.

up a bewildering sequence of appointments¹², he had had three works published, a theological treatise and poem¹³, and a first-hand account of the history and customs of the Shetland Islands, based on a three-year appointment in Lerwick.¹⁴ The book, written with a light touch, is informative, colourful and at times quite dramatic. It is inconceivable that the works were not a part of Thomas Catton's home library or that a young James Catton did not see them. To what extent they might have fired a young boy to contemplate a career in print is less certain.

In 1870 the family moved to Hereford. Thomas Catton was still earning a living as an assistant master at a succession of small private schools. The 1871 Census lists Catton senior, by now in his late 30s, as a resident 'tutor' at a small school in Worcestershire. He is described as 'unmarried', with his wife and son by now living some miles distant in Hereford, once again in a mixed residential area, with neighbours including a retired farmer, a house painter, staff sergeant in the local militia, a paper hanger, architect and railway engine driver. The household does not include a servant.¹⁵ Many masters at private schools of the period are said to have 'struggled along on the margin of success and failure. Their calling lacked prestige and professional status'. Resident assistants in boarding schools were considered 'underpaid', with the more experienced earning between £20 and £100 a year, often in the hope of

¹² **Minutes of the Methodist Conferences**, Vols VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, and XVI (London), various dates, held at Manchester University Library.

¹³ James Catton, 'Eden: A Theological Poem' (Darlington), 1837, and 'An Essay on the Pastoral Office, containing a defence of Wesleyan Methodism' (Mason), London, 1840, written as part of an essay competition offering a prize of £100.

¹⁴ James Catton, Rev, **The History and Description of the Shetland Islands; with an account of the Manners, Customs, Circumstances, Superstitions and Religion of the Inhabitants** (P. L. Tuxford), Wainfleet, 1838.

¹⁵ Census, 1871.

one day keeping a school of their own. They moved jobs to compensate for a reluctance among employers to increase their pay.¹⁶ It is a picture of modest means with, apparently, the couple forced to live apart and with Thomas seemingly passing himself off as a single man to secure a residential post.

The move to the West Country was accompanied by a change of school for James. Sandicroft College, Great Budworth, north Cheshire, was home to between 30 and 40 boarders, ranging in age from seven to 17, supervised by a headmaster and three or four assistant masters, including, in 1871, a Prussian-born teacher of modern languages. The boys were drawn from across the British Isles, with a handful from the colonies.¹⁷ A prospectus for the school survives, dated June, 1875, and printed to coincide with a change of headmaster.¹⁸ Parents were informed of a course of study offered for, 'Boys intended for a University life, or for one of the learned professions', which was based on 'the traditions of the Public Schools', with a syllabus including Latin, Greek, mathematics, logic and history. Boys 'designed for commercial pursuits, and who will probably leave School early', were recommended to

¹⁶ John Roach, *A History of Secondary Education in England 1800-1870* (Longman), London, 1986, pp.135-137.

¹⁷ Catton can be placed at the college with some certainty as he refers in *Wickets and Goals*, p.137, to having been 'schoolfellows' with the brothers Jack and Fred Hargreaves. In the *Athletic News*, Jan 19, 1903, p.1, Catton refers to sporting recollections of the Hargreaves brothers during their time at 'Sandycroft College' near Marbury Hall, Northwich, Cheshire, which is adjacent to Great Budworth. The Hargreaves are recorded as scholars at Blackburn Grammar School in their home town in 1870 but then disappear from the school lists (conversation with school archivist). The brothers began a prolonged period of study at Malvern College in 1875, the year Catton joined the *Preston Herald*, according to the *Malvern College Register 1865-1924* (The Old Malvernian Society), London, 1925. At some period in the years between 1871 and 1875, Catton and the Hargreaves must have attended the Cheshire college together. The college is listed in the 1861 and 1871 Censuses. The building was listed as uninhabited in the 1881 Census.

¹⁸ *Prospectus, Knutsford College, Junior Department, Sandicroft*, DDCL/3364, held by East Riding Archives Service, Beverley. The college appears to have undergone a change of name to coincide with the change of management. But the building, again listed as Sandicroft College, was later up for sale throughout the second half of 1877, advertised as 'Gentleman's Residence or Large School', *The Times*, Jul 25, p.14, Dec 5, p.14.

abandon Greek and the higher Classical course. 'English Composition and French are compulsory subjects, and are taught throughout the School', states the prospectus. A sliding scale of charges is provided, with those parents prepared to 'agree upon a fixed price beforehand' offered a discount charge amounting to 70 guineas a year.¹⁹ Catton's parents, it would seem, were investing a significant portion of their income in their son's education.

For someone who was to spend much of his working life writing about sport, it is perhaps opportune to consider what, if any sporting influences the young Catton was exposed to. The evidence is readily to hand in Catton's book, **Wickets and Goals**, written in his 60s and, as the sub-title explains, a compendium of 'Stories of Play'. As such, and in keeping with similar works of the time, it provides few details of Catton's personal life. But he does find time to recount a cherished memory of childhood, of his father taking him, as a reward for progress at school, to Lord's cricket ground when he was about 10, to see W. G. Grace play. It seems Catton's father took a keen interest in his son's sporting education. Not only did talk at the family breakfast table centre on 'cricket and the Turf', but his father, 'used to turn to the cricket reports in the newspapers before any other portion'. In fact, Catton was to write, 'The game was part of our family life', and he recalled the 'thrill' and 'delight' of using a 'cane-handled spliced bat' for the first time.

My father used to bowl lobs to me, and he was, in his old-fashioned way, horrified if, boy-like, I hit an off-ball across the wicket to the on, and he

¹⁹ There is a possibility that the change in management at the college was accompanied by changes in the fee structure and curriculum. I would suggest, though, that given the competitive nature of mid-Victorian educational provision, and the stasis surrounding teaching methods and materials, any changes would have been minor.

was always insistent that I should never move my right foot until I was through with the stroke.

His father's passion for cricket extended to writing a poem to mark the death in 1880 of Fred Grace, younger brother of W. G., verse that appears to have gained some circulation.

It seems no coincidence that sport appears to have been a feature of Catton's school days. Abington House School was run by William Kingston whose four sons all played both cricket and rugby for Northamptonshire. By inference, it would suggest Kingston was a sports enthusiast himself, a point confirmed by the employment of professional cricketer Tom Plumb to teach the pupils the finer points of the game. Catton believed Plumb 'had first taught me how to hold a bat', when he was about six. The connection with cricket was not broken by the move to Hereford, with Catton admitting, 'I was always finding my way down to Widemarsh Common, playing all the boys' cricket I could and regularly watching the county matches with Worcestershire and others'. The move also saw the young Catton first introduced to the game of rugby.²⁰

The sporting theme was continued at school in Cheshire. The headmaster during Catton's stay was committed to 'strengthening the bodies, even of the weakly, by every necessary physical comfort and inducement to the practise

²⁰ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.2-4, p.135; *Cricket*, 1908, p.401; Census, 1861 and 1871; *The Times*, Feb 20, 1959, obituary of George Kingston. Plumb, who died in Northampton workhouse in 1905, had been a talented wicketkeeper, 'when at his best he had no superior against fast bowling', *The Times*, March 30, 1905, p.9.

of athletic sports'.²¹ The prospectus for 1875, mentioned earlier, included facilities for football, cricket and other games on the college grounds, with sport a compulsory element of the boys' schooling, at a charge of five shillings a term. 'Bathing in the beautiful Budworth Mere, which is within sight of the School', was also a feature.²² Sandicroft College completed Catton's education as far as the popular games of the period were concerned.

Someone on the staff taught the boys soccer. In 1903, marking the death of Jack Hargreaves, a former Blackburn Rovers and England international footballer, Catton noted that Jack and his brother Fred, former school fellows of his, 'first learned the game' at Sandicroft. 'While Fred played back, Johnnie as he was called at school, was then a right wing forward, blessed with wondrous footcraft'.²³

Catton claimed no great ability at cricket as a boy, although he 'got enjoyment out of it until early manhood, when the days never seemed long enough for the calls of journalistic work'. Throughout his writing, Catton mentions only one organised cricket match that he played in during his apprenticeship in Preston.²⁴ What is certain, though, is that Catton already had 'an inborn love of men's games', before he embarked on a career in newspaper work.²⁵

²¹ The headmaster, Henry Plumer Stedman, outlined his philosophy on the question of boys' education in a letter to *The Times* in response to a debate over a Royal Commission 'to enquire into the state of Middle-class Education'; Census, 1861 and 1871, *The Times*, Nov 18, p.6, Nov 22, p.5, both 1864.

²² **Prospectus, Knutsford College.**

²³ *Athletic News*, Jan 19, 1903, p.1. Obituaries of the two brothers in their home-town press omitted mention of Sandicroft College, remarking only on their football links with the more prestigious and extant Malvern College, *Blackburn Times*, April 10, 1897, p.5, and Jan 17, 1903, p.11.

²⁴ Catton, **Wickets and Goals**, pp.231-232. The match was, I believe, a Preston Press XI against local opposition. The town's pressmen tended to play a handful of matches each summer, judging from brief newspaper reports.

²⁵ Catton, **Wickets and Goals**, p.4, and p.136.

Before moving on from this review of Catton's childhood and early adolescence it is necessary to record two traumas to have struck the family in those years. Catton appears to have stopped growing at an early age. In an irony not lost on him in later life as he recorded the deeds of the country's finest athletes, he had ceased to grow after originally impressing as 'a budding giant'. The consternation created in family circles by his lack of height – he was 4ft 10.5ins tall – is revealed in a newspaper feature he wrote in his early 30s. It's a remarkably revealing piece, written in light-hearted vein, although one that does not disguise a deep element of hurt at his condition, and the taunts, stares and social awkwardness he had to put up with for the rest of his life. In 'The Sorrows Of A Small Man', he confides with the reader,

My only claim on your attention is that I am such a small, diminutive, stunted, dwarfish, and infinitesimal being. These are a few of the choice epithets which have been bestowed upon me. Indeed, I have been called everything, from Tom Thumb, down to a mannikin and a pigmy.²⁶

He surprisingly adds, with barely concealed animosity,

When I reached my teens . . . I shall never forget the open and avowed disappointment of my cousins and my aunts, whom I had not visited for several years when they saw how I had suspended progress. Their surprise was most painful to me, and never shall I forgive them.

The second family trauma saw his father jailed in autumn 1873. In a seemingly bizarre incident, the peripatetic schoolmaster, en route to a new appointment in Suffolk, was arrested in the house of a Cambridge University tutor in the early hours of the morning, having seemingly broken in and 'set several articles on fire'. Space prevents a detailed account of the court case,

²⁶ *Sunday Chronicle*, May 8, 1892, p.2.

reported widely. Suffice to say that Thomas denied the offence, blaming his 'unaccountable conduct' on the fact he must have been drugged, claiming he was also the victim of a robbery, having lost his coat and £10. The finer details of the case appear confused, due to the disjointed nature of the press coverage. But Cambridge magistrates ordered Thomas to pay £2 damages, a £1 fine and costs. In default of payment he was jailed for a month. Incidental details that do emerge from the incident reveal that Thomas was a clever man, having earned the appointment at a private school in Suffolk in the face of competition from 115 applicants. He described himself as 'a connoisseur in old books, and a teacher of men who had distinguished themselves as scholars'. He was also short of money. On top of the claimed robbery, he had lost £10 in a recent action in the civil courts. A telegram to his solicitor had gone unanswered, with Thomas telling the magistrates the lawyer would not work for nothing. Reports of the case paint him as something of a pompous figure.²⁷

There is no way of ascertaining if the incident was kept from James, then 13. It was term time so he might well have been at school and unaware of the crisis. Perhaps if he had known of it, and had read the newspaper reports, his desire to be a journalist might have been quashed. The family financial predicament is relevant though. The incident in Cambridge saw Thomas left seemingly penniless, with a loss of income, an appointment, and reputation. How long it took him to recover, financially and psychologically is unknowable. Although James' education continued for at least another year, it came to

²⁷ *Cambridge Express and Eastern Counties Weekly News*, Sept 27, 1873, p.8, and *The Times*, Sept 20 and Sept 25, p.12, 1873.

what might be considered a premature end. He entered journalism shortly after his 15th birthday, but it is unclear if he was still at school when he applied for the newspaper job in Preston. Bearing in mind James' opinion that he had at one time been destined for a career in medicine, together with the apparent appreciation of the advantages of a university education on his father's side of the family, the decision to leave school and take up a reporting apprenticeship seems surprising. Catton provided a clue as to the attraction of the press for a young boy when he wrote, 'Early in life I chose the calling of a journalist, being lured by the glory of seeing one's scribble in print'.²⁸ A close colleague in later life suggested of Catton, 'he was intended for the medical profession, but longed to be a journalist'.²⁹ Perhaps his father's problems provided James with an excuse to press his case for a career change.

With the 1870s' newspaper industry offering an at-times-precarious livelihood, somewhat dubious prospects and a questionable social standing, James may well have needed to use all his nascent powers of persuasion to secure parental approval for the career shift. Matters are rarely that clear, though, and the change of management at Sandicroft College in early 1875 combined with straitened family circumstances brought about by the Cambridge incident might have been significant factors in the career move.

By 1881 Thomas Catton and Emma had settled in Harrogate, north Yorkshire, not many miles from the Wesleyan school where he was taught as a boy.

²⁸ *Athletic News*, Sept 15, 1924, p.1

²⁹ Catton obituary, *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8. The obituary is one of the more detailed of several that were printed at the time of Catton's death, and appears to have been written by a colleague with a detailed knowledge of Catton's career.

Thomas was running his own day school and advertising for pupils in 'self-improvement' and a range of academic subjects, on terms of 3s a week.³⁰

4:3 'The county went frantic on football': A start in journalism

In 1875, fifteen-year-old James Catton joined the staff of the bi-weekly *Preston Herald* newspaper in Lancashire. The *Herald* was advertising in its own columns in May of that year for 'a well-educated Youth as Apprentice to Newspaper Reporting' and Catton, starting out on the bottom rung of the editorial ladder, embarked on what was to prove a lifetime's unbroken career in journalism.³¹ There is no evidence to suggest Catton had any previous connection with Preston. The *Herald* boasted a wide geographical circulation, including south Lancashire, and it may well be that a copy of the job advertisement found its way to north Cheshire.

The *Herald* was published twice a week, on Wednesdays, priced 1d, and Saturdays, priced 2d. It claimed, without providing any figures, to have 'the largest circulation' of any newspaper in an area roughly outlined by the modern county boundary, with its chief office in Fishergate, Preston, and branch offices and correspondents in several towns, particularly the cotton industry belt of north east Lancashire.³² Judging from the news content, its claim to be a 'county paper' with a wide geographical circulation seems

³⁰ Census, 1881; *Harrogate Herald*, Aug 17, 1881, p.1. The couple had taken in a border, but no live-in servant is listed.

³¹ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.135; *Preston Herald*, May 26, 29, June 2, 1875, all p.8. At no time does Catton reveal the length of indentures he signed, but as he left Preston in 1883, 'at a very early date' after completing his apprenticeship, *Sunday Chronicle*, May 8, 1892, p.2, it is safe to assume it was for seven years and not five.

³² *Directory and Topography of North-East Lancashire* (P. Mannex and Co), Preston, 1876, and *Directory of Preston and District* (P. Mannex and Co), Preston, 1877.

justified. The *Herald*, first published in 1855, was a relative newcomer in a competitive newspaper market, with the town served by weekly rivals the *Chronicle*, the *Pilot*, and the *Guardian*. The *Guardian* counter-claimed to have a weekly sale of 30,000, 'several Thousands more than the combined Sale' of its three rivals. The *Chronicle* advertised its worth as the 'Oldest, Best, and Most Independent Preston Newspaper'. The impetus to be first with the news must have been a constant in the working lives of the journalists employed on all four titles.

As a teenage apprentice reporter Catton would have become immured in a round of news assignments featuring county town life, albeit with an early taste of the competitive element engendered by the presence of rival titles. There is no doubt that Catton's working week eventually came to involve the reporting of the law courts, municipal business, inquests, industrial matters, agricultural concerns, social engagements, fires and accidents, cultural events and political meetings. With limited staffing levels a feature of provincial journalism, there would be opportunity to cover important stories. In common with the press of the time, the reports were printed without by-lines making the identification of individual writers difficult. Catton writes of a regular municipal assignment – a twice-weekly meeting with a young assistant in the town clerk's office to check on 'Corporation business'.³³ He also covered a story on the Lancashire cotton trade when he was about 17 which allegedly led to a Parliamentary debate and involved the young journalist meeting the politician

³³ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.137.

W. E. Gladstone.³⁴ Catton also provides a tantalising glimpse of a story that placed him in 'peril' during the east Lancashire cotton trade riots of 1878 when 'Dragoons and Lancers were patrolling some high roads', and the mansion of a Blackburn cotton master was burned down by an angry mob.³⁵ A mill was also damaged, and a local worthy wounded in the late-night disturbances, with between 3,000 and 5,000 people on the streets, some of them armed, the Riot Act read and troops summoned from their Preston barracks.³⁶

In later life Catton was, naturally, more forthcoming about his sports reporting assignments during his stay in Preston, and it would appear that he lost no time in turning his hand to the coverage of games. Recalling his apprenticeship, he considered that life in Preston 'developed' his love of sport.³⁷ The sporting content of the *Herald* was negligible when Catton began his apprenticeship, reflecting the paucity of organised fixtures to report locally, and a probable uncertainty surrounding the value of sport as a legitimate reader service, especially of the standard seemingly played in the town at the time. Catton worked under the editorship of George Boyden.³⁸ Boyden, originally apprenticed as a compositor, had been a newspaper editor in Bristol and was later to become an editor and proprietor in the West Midlands in 1880.³⁹ As a young man in the early 1860s he was said to have made an impression in the cricket matches played on Durdham Down, in Clifton,

³⁴ Catton 'appreciation' on his death, by 'An old journalistic colleague', *The Times*, Aug 25, 1936, p.5.

³⁵ Part of a series of Catton reminiscences, *Athletic News*, Dec 8, 1924, p.4.

³⁶ *Preston Herald*, May 15, 1878, p.4, *Preston Herald*, May 18, 1878, p.10, and J. E. King, 'We Could Eat The Police!': Popular Violence In The North Lancashire Cotton Strike of 1878', in *Victorian Studies*, Vol 28, No3, Spring 1985, pp.447-449.

³⁷ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.136.

³⁸ Catton obituary, *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8.

³⁹ Census, 1871; obituary, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald*, Aug 22, 1924, p.8.

Bristol. A correspondent to the press at the time of his death in 1924 recalled him as 'a very swift underhand bowler, and the way in which he rattled out the majority of several elevens against whom his club played I shall never forget. He was the fastest bowler of his style that I can remember . . .'⁴⁰ It's a stray aside that says a little about Boyden, but one that perhaps could speak volumes as to the *Herald* editor's possible affinity with a new sports-loving recruit to his editorial staff and his attitude to the growing popularity of organised sport in Lancashire as the decade progressed. But for Catton, the playing of sport had become a thing of the past due to weekend work commitments, as noted in the section above. Catton's round of news engagements was leavened by a spot of Saturday sports reporting. Based on his obvious interest in sport prior to taking up the apprenticeship, it would be fair to assume that he was not averse to shifts on the touchlines and would not have needed too much encouragement. It fell to Catton to cover the rugby matches played by Preston Grasshoppers, striking up a relationship with some of the players to aid him in his duties, and he took on some cricket reporting in the summer.⁴¹ The fact Catton needed advice in covering the rugby matches suggests his own rawness in sports reporting and also that of the sport, and possibly the variety of its rules as the game developed its modern features. On a similar note, William Pickford played football for a season in Bolton in 1880-81 and had never seen the rules of the game until the following season, when

. . . one day, being dissatisfied with a referee's decision, I went to Mr Fairhurst, the sub-editor, and asked him. Evidently he did not know what

⁴⁰ *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald*, Aug 29, 1924, p.5.

⁴¹ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.135-136.

“offside” was for he referred me to the “Football Annual” on a shelf nearby. I am afraid I found it difficult to understand.⁴²

Catton’s time at the *Herald* covered a period of fairly irregular seasons, with a mixed diet of fixtures receiving limited press coverage. But it is worth noting that, at the time, rugby was the chief winter sport played in the town and the Grasshoppers were the leading rugby club, so Catton had been handed a task with some responsibility. But the popularity of football in neighbouring towns like Blackburn and Darwen soon spread to Preston, and the *Herald* began to give coverage to senior football clubs outside the town. Catton believed the figures behind the spread of the new football craze were ‘old Public School boys at Turton, Eagley, and Bolton, as well as at Darwen and Blackburn’.⁴³ It seems that Lancashire provided Catton with his first taste of football played at a senior standard. Preston North End pioneered the game in the town, although Catton recalled the struggles of the club captain, Harry Cartmel, to establish the sport,

. . . but there were many obstacles in the path of the club, and I remember how desperately he used to try and secure the support of the local press, which just tolerated football in an off-hand kind of way at that date.⁴⁴

⁴² W. Pickford, *A Few Recollections of Sport* (Bournemouth Guardian) 1939, p.12. Within three years of the conversation, Fairhurst was in charge of the *Bolton Evening News*’ football edition.

⁴³ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.136. See also, Dave Russell, *Football and the English. A Social History of Association Football in England 1863-1995* (Carnegie Publishing), Preston, 1997, p.18, and, in particular, Robert W. Lewis, ‘The Genesis of Professional Football: Bolton-Blackburn-Darwen, the Centre of Innovation 1878-85’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol14, April, 1997, No1, pp.21-47. Lewis outlines the important role played by clubs from a relatively small geographical area in the spread of the game and the rise of professionalism.

⁴⁴ “Tityrus” (J. A. H. Catton), *The Rise of the Leaguers. A History of the Football League* (Sporting Chronicle Office), London, 1897, p.95.

Catton, too, admitted, 'I was then very dubious about the success of the game in Preston', despite mixing with some of the football enthusiasts. But organised team sports began to grow in popularity, and even Catton's regular twice-a-week interviews with the assistant to the town clerk – an 'inspiring force' in football's adoption in the town – 'always drifted to Association football'.⁴⁵ Catton was learning the craft of sports reporting in the hot-bed of Lancashire football, the forcing house of the modern professional game, where he mixed with the sport's formative characters like William Sudell, the architect of North End's adoption of professionalism and of their playing success in the late 1880s. As already mentioned, Blackburn Rovers players and soon-to-be internationals the Hargreaves brothers were former 'schoolfellows'. The foreman of the composing room at the *Herald*, Tom M'Neil from Edinburgh and his brother Jock, also a work colleague, played a hand in North End recruiting talented footballers from Scotland.⁴⁶ Catton also got to know several players associated with Lancashire cricket. He was immersing himself in the sporting sub-culture of central Lancashire. He was in at the beginning, enjoying a privileged position, witnessing first hand the growth of a new sporting craze, mixing freely with its first adherents, with a chance to take his first tentative steps into sports journalism, making contacts and enjoying experiences that would last a lifetime and prove grist to the journalistic mill for a half century and more. Catton was getting a feel for the heightened sense of urban sporting rivalry spawned by the football code among the Lancashire mill towns, the foundation, in fact, of the Football League in the next decade.

⁴⁵ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.137.

⁴⁶ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.138.

The numerous clubs which sprang up in Lancashire between 1874 and 1880 found the people flocking to their grounds, especially for Cup Ties, and for matches between neighbouring towns and villages with hereditary territorial rivalry whether born of commerce or sport,' observed Catton later. 'There were all sorts of little feuds and personal vendettas to lend a deplorable zest to a noble man-to-man game. The county went frantic on football . . .'⁴⁷

The reports of Preston Grasshoppers fixtures over the period of Catton's apprenticeship – both rugby and football – appear the standard fare of the age when weighed against the general editorial content of the paper, neither outstanding nor unduly poor, but certainly not indulging in the 'comic' metaphors highlighted in earlier chapters. There is little sign of any innovation in composition, vocabulary, or style. But neither are they unduly laboured, and they are occasionally leavened by a telling turn of phrase or aside. Bearing in mind that Catton does not mention in his later journalism specific rugby matches which he covered, there is a risk, I feel, of attributing the work of other journalists to Catton at this time if too detailed a use is made of the Grasshoppers reports. The only sports report of the time it is safe to attribute definitely to Catton, based on his later references to the game, is the first of two ground-breaking home football matches played by the fledgling Preston North End against their well established and formidable neighbours Blackburn Rovers in 1881 and 1882. In the 1881 report Catton labours to add variety to his writing by finding alternative means of describing the football, opting for 'the leather', 'the sphere', and 'the globe'. A goal is described as 'a point', and the result – a 16-0 victory for Rovers is not revealed until the 55th line of a 70-line match report. An example of the way play is reported, reads,

⁴⁷ J. A. H. Catton, *The Real Football. A Sketch of the Development of the Association Game* (Sands and Co), London, 1900, p.56.

The Rovers then exhibited some first-rate play passing with great dexterity. Douglas soon contrived to gain another goal. After the leather had been taken up the field by Bateman and Cartmel, it was skilfully dribbled back again by Brown, who obtained another goal. M'Intyre soon sent the globe through the posts again . . .

But Catton adds a little sense of the drama of the occasion, noting the 'astonishment of the onlookers' when the home keeper is beaten by a shot between his legs, and the manner in which the Rovers' passing had 'completely nonplussed the home team'. And as he concludes his report he is prepared to be critical of the home team,

. . . Cartmel and Bateman made several good runs, but not being properly supported, their isolated efforts were useless, and the rest of the team, as far as football is concerned, have yet to learn that unity is strength.⁴⁸

It is worthwhile at this point to attempt to trace Catton's personal situation during his stay in Preston. The sources, although scarce and fragmented, serve to reveal a little of his life away from work and away from his parents. Surprisingly, within a matter of weeks of arriving in the town, the apprentice had been baptised in a Church of England ceremony at Christ Church, Preston, seemingly with compositor/reporter Frank Coupe as one of his sponsors.⁴⁹ Considering his father's Methodist background and the timing of the service, soon after departing the family home for good, the action is suggestive of a young man asserting his independence, although his early

⁴⁸ *Preston Herald*, March 30, 1881, p.2. Eighteen months later, in September, 1882, the return fixture – a 13-2 win for the Rovers – saw the result relegated to line 90 of a 102-line report. The two reports feature slightly different sporting vocabularies and turns of phrase which suggest they may have been the work of different writers, or of one writer developing a significant change in style.

⁴⁹ Lancashire Record Office, Preston, Register for Christ Church, PR 2952/1/1-3, 8-9. Coupe's name is just discernible.

wage of perhaps 5s or 6s a week in his first year, based on industry-wide evidence, with lodgings to pay, would have necessitated continued parental support.⁵⁰ Catton next turns up in the church registers in 1879 when, as a 19-year-old, he marries Mary Ellen Cornwell, 24, the daughter of a gardener.⁵¹ Catton gives his age as 21 on the marriage certificate and lists his occupation as 'reporter'. Bearing in mind he was still an apprentice, there may have been the risk of some difficulty arising had he listed his true age and employment status. Catton gives his address as Hudson Street, where it seems he had been lodging with a widow and her daughter, a schoolmistress.⁵² Catton's wife, the sister of a fellow reporter, was a 'gold wire drawer', a skilled position in the town's specialist thread-making industry.⁵³ A few months later the couple, who were lodging with Mary's widowed mother and her two teenage children, had their first child baptised,⁵⁴ and a second daughter was baptised in March 1881. Despite her marriage in 1879, and the birth of two children, Mary is still listed in the town's 1880 and 1881 directories as a gold wire drawer living at her mother's home. By March, 1881, at the latest, the young

⁵⁰ Bernard Falk, upon starting in journalism as a 5s a week apprentice, relied on 'an allowance of 2s6d' from his parents, 'and a parcel of cooked meats'. His lodgings cost 2s6d a week 'for bed – sometimes shared with a male relative of the landladies – and 2s for breakfast of tea and bread and butter. Extras, such as eggs and sardines, etc., were paid for as ordered, which was not often', Bernard Falk, *He Laughed in Fleet Street* (Hutchinson), London, 1937, pp.22-23.

⁵¹ Catton marriage certificate.

⁵² *Directory of Preston, Lancaster and Districts* (P. Mannex and Co), Preston, 1881; Census, 1881.

⁵³ Census, 1881; Mannex Directory, 1877; Mannex Directory, 1881. It seems Mary was employed at the Gold Thread Manufacturing Works owned by Stephen Simpson, a short walk from the family home where, among the skilled jobs at the works, gold and silver wire were flattened to be woven and embroidered into a variety of luxury items, including altar cloths, banners and tassels, see Col Stephen Simpson, *History of the Firm of Stephen Simpson 1829-1929* (G Toulmin and Sons), Preston, no date, held in Lancashire Record Office, Preston, and *Preston Chronicle*, Sept 20, 1884, for an article on the works.

⁵⁴ Lancashire Record Office, Preston, Register of Baptisms, St James Church, PR2901/1/2.

family had set up home on their own.⁵⁵ The fact that Catton and his bride had started married life with his in-laws, and the suggestion that his wife had continued in her job not only after marriage but after the birth of at least one child, paints a picture of a couple struggling to find their feet financially, especially when one considers the wage of probably well under £1 that Catton was earning at the time. The area the couple lived in, just a brief walk from the town centre, appears to have represented a meeting point of the lower-middle and upper-working classes, with close neighbours variously employed as a joiner, librarian, newspaper reporter, draper's assistant, fruiterer, retired warehouseman, artist, prison warder, railway porter, pensioner, draper and cotton spinner.⁵⁶

4:4 'A cleaner business': Moving on and promotion to sports editor

By 1883, Catton was working on the *Nottingham Daily Guardian*. The means of improving one's lot on the provincial weekly press invariably meant moving on, preferably to a daily paper offering a slightly better wage and, in terms of job satisfaction, the prospect of a more demanding and immediate edition structure. From the point of view of a young, ambitious, and recently qualified reporter, the impetus for change was probably heightened by a desire to distance oneself from the scene of juvenile attempts at journalism, from the inevitable taint of earlier mistakes and the lingering mark of the office junior. It was hardly surprising, then, for Catton to feel a little undervalued once he was

⁵⁵ Catton's address in the register entry for his second child is given as Hudson Street, close to where he had been lodging prior to his marriage. There may have been an element of time delay in the directory listing for Mary Catton after her marriage, but the couple's financial situation would suggest a need for two incomes.

⁵⁶ Census, 1881.

free of his indentures. He was to later write, 'When my apprenticeship was finished I secured, at a very early date, another situation. A journalist is never honoured in his original office'.⁵⁷ Away from the world of work, one cannot help but wonder if the young father-of-two also felt a need to assert his independence on a more personal level. After the social hiatus of the previous few years when he had married and become a father inside the space of a few weeks, endured an economically enforced sojourn in the home of his mother-in-law, and fathered a second child, all while still serving his indentures, the prospect of a fresh start may have had added appeal.

The move to Nottingham came in response to a job advert, and Catton was particularly keen to ensure his short stature did not stand in the way of advancement.

It has always been a source of grief to me when I have had to see people for the first time. I can't very well tell them I am so little beforehand. I can't even suggest it, and the naked truth has to strike people as they rapidly scan me from head to foot. I often wonder what their reflections are, and intimate friends have frequently said in after years "I shall never forget the first time I saw you," and then they burst into laughter. You see it is so funny for them . . . Oh, I was glad when my editor, in writing to my future employer, said, "He's rather under the ordinary stature, but what he lacks in height he atones for in activity." That was a funny testimonial. I had asked my editor to refer to my height because the advertisement said – "Wanted, a Reporter, of gentlemanly appearance". I desired my editor to pave the way. He did so . . .⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Sunday Chronicle*, May 8, 1892, p.2.

⁵⁸ *Sunday Chronicle*, May 8, 1892, p.2.

The wording of the job vacancy to include the phrase 'of gentlemanly appearance', speaks volumes for the social uncertainty surrounding newspaper reporting at the time, with the industry's over-riding need for respectability hindered, in part, by an uncertain ability to attract the straightforwardly respectable, and a public perception of the reporter as operating beyond the bounds of conventional respectability. Viewed at this distance in time, the move to the Midlands appears perfectly reasonable from a professional point of view, with Nottingham boasting a busy newspaper scene. There is a slight possibility that Catton may have had relatives in Nottingham, as his paternal grandfather, James, was born there and entered the Methodist ministry in the city in the 1820s.⁵⁹ Potential family support, if available, might have influenced Catton's move.

Catton joined the paper at around the same time as Lancashire reporter Hartley Aspden. Aspden, as mentioned in Chapter Two, was a similar age but with slightly less full-time reporting experience, and he joined the Nottingham paper from a Cheshire group of titles on a wage of £2 a week, a figure which must have been close to Catton's starting pay.⁶⁰

In an 1885 trade directory for the city, Catton recorded his occupation as 'newspaper reporter'.⁶¹ By 1889 he was listing himself in less specific terms as 'journalist', and by the 1891 Census Catton was describing himself as a

⁵⁹ **Minutes of the Methodist Conferences**, Vol XVI (Wesleyan Conference Office), London, 1868, p.7.

⁶⁰ Hartley Aspden, **Fifty Years A Journalist** (Advertiser and Times Printers), Clitheroe, 1929, p.16.

⁶¹ **William White Directory of Nottinghamshire**, 1885-86.

'sporting editor'.⁶² It is clear in his reminiscences regarding Nottingham's football and cricket personalities of the 1880s that very soon after having arrived he was immersing himself in the city's vibrant sporting sub culture, covering both football and cricket stories, on top of general news assignments.⁶³ Indeed, Catton was fascinated by all sports, and reminisced that 'at that time I never missed a chance of either boxing or a fight with bare knuckles in some secluded spot away down the valley of the Trent'.⁶⁴ If Catton's move to the East Midlands was based purely on the timely appearance of a random job vacancy, for a journalist with a growing interest in sport, the move could hardly have been better planned. The 23-year-old was swapping one area with a fast-developing sporting tradition, central Lancashire, for another. Nottingham boasted a buoyant football scene, first-class cricket, and an array of other sports. In fact, what seems to have been the family's first home in the city, in Queen's Walk, just south of the centre, was a mere boundary stroke away from the Meadows cricket ground where a generation of Nottingham sportsmen perfected their cricketing skills. The location boasted a slightly more well-to-do air than Catton's Preston address, with neighbours including a schoolmaster, clerks, warehousemen, engineer, colliery agent, brass finisher, and traveller.⁶⁵

Once again, Catton was making important contacts in sporting circles that were to last a lifetime. With first class cricket on his doorstep at Trent Bridge,

⁶² C. N. Wright *Directory, Nottingham, 1889*.

⁶³ Roy Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town. Victorian Nottingham 1815-1900* (Frank Cass), London, 1966, pp.375-377, outlines the city's sporting scene.

⁶⁴ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.16. There is no evidence to suggest Catton's interest extended to actual participation.

⁶⁵ *White Directory, 1885-86*.

Catton saw the best players the game had to offer, adding further to his stock of sporting anecdote and experience. And with Notts County a founder member of the Football League in 1888, and the city and county home to several other senior clubs, Catton was privy once again to tales of cup-tie exploits, derby rivalries, and behind-the-scenes debates over what shape the developing Association code should take. Catton, then aged 25, attended and reported on the historic mass meeting of soccer representatives at the Freemasons Tavern, London, in January, 1885, held to debate the issue of professionalism in the game, an important topic for the county's football clubs, and one naturally of interest to the city press. He was again in a privileged position, charting each move toward an infrastructure and rules we now take as standard, and not just on the soccer field but across a number of sports taking on a more modern aspect. Football history was made as leading figures on both sides of the professional argument met in London to air their opinions and garner support. The final vote went against those calling for official recognition of professionalism. Catton reported in the following day's *Daily Guardian*,

The whole evening's business was lost, and football stands where it did. According to the ruling of the meeting there are no professionals among football players, and the future of the pastime remains in the hands of the association as before, but doubtless, something will yet be done to strengthen their hands with respect to this question.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, Jan 20, 1885, p.7. Although the lengthy report does not carry Catton's byline, he later wrote of how he would never forget the meeting and of his first-hand impressions of the leading figures involved, *Wickets and Goals*, 1926, pp.140-141.

By late July the decision had been reversed and the acceptance of professional players was to usher in a new era for the game.⁶⁷ Catton was even on hand to see what he considered to be the first occasion goal nets were used 'in a public match'.⁶⁸

A rare spotlight is shone on the Nottingham newspaper scene at the time Catton lived in the city with the arrival in January, 1883, of J. M. Barrie as a leader writer on the *Nottingham Journal*.⁶⁹ Barrie's later literary fame prompted contemporaries to examine his early journalistic career in the East Midlands, and Barrie himself used the city and its newspaper scene as a setting for his 1888 novel, *When A Man's Single*.⁷⁰ The city boasted three morning dailies, the *Guardian*, *Journal*, and the *Nottingham and Midland Counties Daily Express*. J. A. Hammerton, who edited the *Express* in the 1890s, described the *Guardian* and *Express* as 'efficiently conducted' titles, with the *Journal* dismissed as 'a third-rate provincial newspaper'. The city's crowded press scene – as well as the three mornings there was an evening and two weeklies – spawned a 'hard drinking', 'convivial crew', known as the Kettle Club, made up of local journalists who met in a small pub near the *Express* office in a 'low pot-house atmosphere . . . where the reporters foregathered at all hours of the day and night, and where much of their copy was written'.⁷¹ Whether Catton joined the more Bohemian element among his

⁶⁷ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.159-160.

⁶⁸ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, Jan 13, 1891, p.7.

⁶⁹ Janet Dunbar, *J. M. Barrie. The man behind the image* (Collins), London, 1970, pp.51-53.

⁷⁰ J. M. Barrie, *When A Man's Single. A Tale of Literary Life* (Hodder and Stoughton), London, 1888.

⁷¹ J. A. Hammerton, *Barrie. The Story of a Genius* (Sampson, Long, Marston), London, 1929, pp.84-104. For the 'curious little club' that 'disgusted' J. M. Barrie, see also H. G. Hibbert, *Fifty Years of a Londoner's Life* (Grant Richards), London, 1916, p.20.

press colleagues at the Kettle Club is not recorded. Barrie, as a graduate, joined the *Journal* on a wage of £12 a month. H. G. Hibbert, who went on to make a name for himself as a London theatre reviewer, joined the *Journal* shortly before Barrie, as a sub-editor,⁷² earning a wage of around 37s a week. Hibbert, too, notes the relative success of the *Guardian* in comparison with the *Journal*.⁷³

Catton was promoted to 'sporting editor', a job title becoming more commonplace across the industry as both watching and playing sport grew in popularity.⁷⁴ The job would have involved him taking responsibility for the paper's sporting content, reporting the major sports events himself, co-ordinating and editing the efforts of correspondents attached to local clubs, and generally maintaining a daily presence of news, comment, and gossip. Sports reporting, possibly full-time, would have involved Catton in a significant amount of travelling, in particular as he followed the fortunes of the city's leading football clubs. There is no suggestion that Catton covered away matches regularly, but he does appear to have travelled considerable distances to cover cup ties, in particular.

The move to full-time sports reporting was, in itself, an important career decision, reflecting, no doubt, a love of sport, an affinity with sportsmen, an opportunity for advancement, and a possible desire to refine a creative writing style. But a remark made in later years imbues the switch with a deeper

⁷² Hammerton, *Barrie*, pp.96-97.

⁷³ Hibbert, *Fifty Years*, pp.16-18.

⁷⁴ It would seem Catton was appointed sporting editor to succeed William Mounsey, who moved to take up a job in Manchester in the mid-1880s, probably 1886, the time Catton began writing for the *Athletic News* in a freelance capacity.

significance. At the time of his retirement from the *Athletic News*, Catton told guests at a luncheon in his honour that he made the move in the 1880s because, 'he preferred sport to general news, as he considered that it was a cleaner business'.⁷⁵ The brief explanation encapsulates a perennial occupational dilemma for journalists working in an age obsessed with the issue of respectability. As outlined in the preceding chapter, reporting was burdened by an uncertain status, especially in the eyes of polite society. In this instance, there is surely a sense of sport being seen as a less confrontational, less controversial strand of journalism than 'general news' with all that that could encompass.

With promotion to sporting editor, Catton's wage would have risen and he had begun to supplement his income with match reports for the *Athletic News*, at that time printed on a Tuesday, starting in 1886 under the by-line 'Ubique'.⁷⁶ He also refers to an article he wrote on the issue of football substitutes for the *Pall Mall Gazette* at around the same time, and it is clear that Catton was making the most of any freelance opportunities that presented themselves.⁷⁷ His contributions to the Manchester sports paper appeared on a more or less weekly basis. It seems natural to conclude that the commencement of Catton's work for the *Athletic News* in 1886 followed his promotion to sporting editor, on the grounds that the lucrative sports lineage work would go hand in hand with the appointment. Probably no provincial newspaper of the time would have employed more than one member of staff, full-time, covering

⁷⁵ *Newspaper World*, March 21, 1925, p.15.

⁷⁶ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.165.

⁷⁷ *All Sports Illustrated Weekly*, Oct 31, 1925, p.6. An exhaustive search of the *Pall Mall Gazette* files for the period has yet to identify the article.

sport. Catton appears to have provided the *Athletic News* with a comprehensive account of sporting events from Nottingham and the wider county, often a summary of a week's sports stories culled from the pages of the *Daily Guardian* and, as such, it must have been obvious to Catton's employers that he was the author. The writing style, I believe, confirms it to be the work of one hand, unless it was very heavily edited in the Manchester office, and the news, comment, and reports are written in a first-person style. A brief examination of the early months of 1888, for example, reveals 'Ubique' covering stories on football, rugby, cricket, cycling, rowing, lacrosse, and general sporting gossip involving clubs, officials and players. I have yet to find any records of the *Athletic News*' rate of pay for lineage, but have no reason to believe that it differed significantly from the generally-accepted industry standard of a penny per line of type used.⁷⁸ Catton's notes were a regular feature alongside similar contributions from Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Scotland, Lincolnshire, the West Midlands and the south of England. Judging from the length of many of his columns, varying from 157 to 263 lines, with an average over a seven-week sample of 230, I would suggest Catton was supplementing his regular wage with earnings of about £1 a week from Manchester.⁷⁹

By 1889, the Catton family had improved their home circumstances with a move to Woodborough Road, in the northern suburbs of the city, an address that boasted private schools, music teachers, a chief librarian, and warehouse

⁷⁸ Contemporary evidence suggests the rate of 1d a line could vary slightly. It may well have been the case that a regular contributor such as Catton was on a fixed retainer averaging less than 1d a line, with lineage security providing the incentive to write at length.

⁷⁹ *Athletic News*, Jan 10, p.6; Jan 24, p.2; Feb 28, p.2; March 6, p.2; March 13, p.2; May 1, p.3; May 22, p.2, all 1888.

managers as neighbours.⁸⁰ The 1891 Census reveals a growing family, with four children aged 11, 10, five, and four, together with a live-in domestic servant.

There can be little doubt that Catton was making a name for himself, in Nottingham and beyond, as a reliable, well informed, and forthright reporter. He appears to have been establishing a reputation as a stylish writer, although the issues of writing ability and style are ones I intend to return to later in this work. Judging from the type of material he was contributing to the *Athletic News* in 1888, the 27-year-old Catton comes across as confident, with a willingness to speak his mind and give an opinion. In a report on an FA Cup match between Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United, its length reflecting the fierce rivalry and standing in the game of the two clubs, 'Ubique' takes time to assess individual player's performances, with a seemingly knowledgeable insight, together with their potential, but with a reluctance to be overly-critical about an individual display.

The passing of the Sheffield forwards was not up to the mark, nor was their shooting at goal so accurate as it might have been. Winterbottom and Ingram were the most prominent pair. They thoroughly understood each other and both knew how and when to shoot – Ingram being a very dangerous man within a reasonable distance of goal. Carl Hillier, the centre-forward, was the weakest man in the Wednesday team, and I shall say no more of him. Cawley and Mosforth were moderate, and the old International, who has donned his war-paint ten times for his country, did very well in his own style, but surely it is time the little wonder dropped gallery touches.⁸¹

⁸⁰ C. N. Wright Directory, 1889.

⁸¹ *Athletic News*, Jan 10, p.6, 1888. For early rivalry between the two clubs prior to the formation of the Football League, see Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.214-215.

He reports Notts County being 'hopelessly and utterly beaten' in a shock result against junior opposition, he calls for improvements to 'dreadful' cricket facilities in the city, and he berates a sports club for its 'tardy and paltry' recognition of the work of an official.⁸² He dismisses a letter of complaint by telling the correspondent that his threat to deny the column information in future will be the sender's loss and not the paper's, and insults him further through literary allusion, '... he resembles two monarchs of fiction. Like King Gama, he has nothing in the world to grumble at; and, like Othello, his occupation is gone'.⁸³ In contrast to the derivative and hackneyed sporting vocabulary complained of in the previous chapter, the literary allusions have a scholarly appeal. Catton threatens to stir up controversy in rugby circles over the issue of professionalism, giving full backing to a rugby tour of Australia organised, in part, by leading Nottingham sportsmen.⁸⁴

But it would be misleading to credit Catton with being a reporter significantly ahead of his time in 1888. He was developing into a notable master of his craft, but he was still a servant to many of the conventions of his trade. His introduction to the Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United cup match mentioned above, appears, to the modern reader, unnecessarily verbose and oblique.

An old English proverb avows that it is a long lane which has no turning, and surely Sheffield Wednesday had exemplification of its truth at Nottingham on Saturday, when they had the satisfaction of defeating Notts Forest in the fifth round of the National Cup by so many as four goals to two. The previous sentence is prompted by the fact that the

⁸² *Athletic News*, Jan 24, 1888, p.2.

⁸³ *Athletic News*, May 22, 1888, p.2.

⁸⁴ *Athletic News*, March 13, 1888, p.2.

Forest have consistently sent the Wednesday team back to the cutlery town crestfallen and beaten for three years. Never since November 15, 1884, have the “blades” conquered the “reds,” which is why I remark all about the aforesaid long lane. But, while I am cantering along in this easy style, I feel that I must pull the reins, and review my facts like all good historians – chronologically.⁸⁵

Catton’s football and cricket reports for the *Daily Guardian* offer little out of the ordinary for the time, following a standard format with an introductory description of the weather, the state of the pitch and the ground, the arrival of the visiting team, the build-up of fans, and incidental points concerning the fixture, before a blow by blow, timetable report of the action.⁸⁶ Mason highlights one of ‘Ubique’s’ reports for the *Athletic News* from 1890, a particularly florid account of a Nottingham derby, as a prime example of the literary excess associated with some sports reporting of the time, with reports ‘. . . put together by men of some literary aspirations who had drunk deeply of the Greek classics and Shakespeare whom they were particularly fond of quoting’.⁸⁷ The reporters were ‘keen to avoid repetition and the frequent use of common or garden words’.

4:5 ‘Tityrus the Tiny’: Catton joins the Hulton group

Catton’s next move was to take him back to Lancashire. In late 1891 he joined the *Sunday Chronicle* in Manchester at the start of a 33-year association with

⁸⁵ *Athletic News*, Jan 10, 1888, p.6.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Catton’s report of the 1884 cup tie between Notts County and Blackburn Rovers, *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, March 3, 1884, p.7. Catton confirms he was at the match in *Wickets and Goals*, p.216. The result is given in line 41 of a report stretching over a column-and-a-quarter.

⁸⁷ Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society* (Harvester Press), Brighton, 1980, pp.189-190.

the stable of newspaper titles created by the press entrepreneur Edward Hulton.⁸⁸ He soon adopted the pen name 'Tityrus', in keeping with an industry-wide imposition of anonymous reporting. The *Sunday Chronicle* of June 19, 1892, describes 'Tityrus' as the paper's sub-editor, although the sister paper, the *Sporting Chronicle*, in its Catton obituary, describes his initial post with the Hulton group as 'the first news editor and contributor to the *Sunday Chronicle*'.⁸⁹ The obituary was written some 45 years after Catton's arrival in Manchester but, judging by the writer's use of specific dates, seemingly with recourse to personnel files or office lore. There was, undoubtedly, a certain fluidity of meaning connected with newspaper job titles on the late-Victorian press. The suggestion that Catton at some stage assumed a newly-created title and job responsibilities is indicative of the way the press was evolving at the time, as new roles were created to meet the changing expectations of a growing newspaper readership and the demands of a maturing press. The move would have undoubtedly involved a rise in pay. No details of Catton's wages in Manchester have survived, and the earnings of a sub-editor on the daily provincial press appear to have ranged widely, from around £75 up to £400 a year.⁹⁰ Hulton was paying one of his star *Sunday Chronicle* writers, Robert Blatchford, £1,000 a year in 1891, with Alex Thompson, a particularly valued employee, and the paper's managing editor, on £900.⁹¹ Apprentice reporter Bernard Falk joined the Hulton group a few years after Catton on 10s

⁸⁸ Catton's arrival is dated November 16, 1891, in his *Sporting Chronicle* obituary for 1936.

⁸⁹ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8.

⁹⁰ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (Croom Helm), London, 1976, p.110.

⁹¹ Robert Blatchford, *My Eighty Years* (Cassell and Co), London, 1931, p.193; Alex M. Thompson, *Here I Lie. The Memorial of an Old Journalist* (Routledge), London, 1937, p.62.

a week, increasing at the end of five years to £3.⁹² There is every reason to presume that Catton's pay was somewhere in the mid range of these extremes. The title, sub-editor, appears, at the time, to have covered something of a catch-all role as a senior, office-bound editorial organiser, with responsibility for meeting deadlines, supervising the news content and editing reporters' stories. The news editor, a title which appears to have gained a wider usage in later years, as editorial departments refined their working arrangements, took on many of the administrative duties at one time performed by the chief reporter. It is not unlikely that the two roles were combined on a Sunday newspaper at this time. But perhaps of more significance is the fact that a sports enthusiast like Catton had to take a step away from full-time sports reporting in order to advance his career, admittedly with a newspaper group which put sport at the forefront of its coverage, and in a city with a reputation as a sporting hot-bed. The market for full-time sports journalists was a small one, even as late as 1891, despite the growing acceptance of sports reporting as a legitimate and popular element of newspapers. In a sense Catton, as a sports editor in Nottingham, had advanced as far as he could in the field of sports journalism on the provincial general press. Aged 31, the means of improving his situation meant a change of direction, if only temporarily.

An examination of the *Sunday Chronicle* files for 1892, Catton's first full year on the payroll, reveals an irregular series of signed articles by 'Tityrus' on a wide variety of themes, both serious and light-hearted. It would appear he was

⁹² Falk, *He Laughed*, p.23. Falk had originally begun his apprenticeship on a weekly paper in Flixton. The fact he was able to move whilst still an apprentice serves to underline the *ad hoc*, informal nature of much editorial training at the time.

combining the production role of sub-editor with feature writing. It is impossible to estimate what, if any, general news reporting assignments Catton was carrying out. But there is no evidence of sports reporting under the "Tityrus" by-line. In January, Catton's assignments included lengthy pieces on an opera company appearing at the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool, and an interview with Italian dancer Signorina Maria Giuri who was playing the lead role in a 'fairy pantomime' at the Manchester Palace of Varieties. Catton described the star as '... the most dainty, delightful dancing doll that ever pirouetted in front of the footlights'. As 'the fair Diva' only spoke Italian and French, Catton enlisted the aid of a Russian linguist at the theatre to interpret, aided by his own 'gossamer recollections of French cramming'. The interview 'was great larks – something like the sound of a circular saw mixed with the babel of a betting ring', he wrote. In April, Catton turned his hand to a little humorous verse. May saw Catton produce a couple of 'Notions and Notes' columns featuring anecdotes and titbits, together with the already-mentioned piece on his lack of inches, and a dressing-room interview with an Australian music hall singer appearing in Manchester. June and July saw rather more heavyweight articles on Gladstone and agitation for an eight hours' working day, a feature on 'Political Orators', and 'The Party Agent', leavened with an interview with Lieutenant Walter Cole, 'the king of ventriloquists', who was appearing at the Palace of Varieties.⁹³ By October he was writing a feature on a Manchester-based hotel jobs agency, together with an interview with the city's brass band maestro John Gladney. Throughout these articles, Catton comes across as an intelligent, well read journalist, with an eye for humour,

⁹³ *Sunday Chronicle*, Jan 17, Jan 24, April 17, Sept 4, Sept 11, all 1892, all p.2.

self-deprecation, and irony. His writing style is engaging and accessible. He also conducted unsuccessful *Sunday Chronicle* negotiations in Dublin with Irish nationalist Michael Davitt over the possibility of an autobiographical series.⁹⁴ Catton appears a journalist with the talent to turn his hand to a wide variety of assignments, and an eventual return to full-time sports reporting appears far from a foregone conclusion at this point in his career.

Catton also appears to have made a favourable impression with his colleagues, judging by his occasional, light-hearted mention in a variety of columns. 'Bayard', the *Sunday Chronicle* theatre critic, refers to 'Tityrus the Tiny' several times in his reviews, and the 'Special Commissioner' writes of 'The stalwart Tityrus – my guide, philosopher, and friend (pocket edition)', in an article illustrated by a drawing of two men, one depicted as being tiny.⁹⁵ Catton's willingness to make light of his size appears to have struck a note with his colleagues.

On their arrival in the city, the Catton family set up home in Bury New Road, Cheetham. The house, on a horse-drawn tram route, fronted one of the busy main roads heading north out of central Manchester, and offered Catton the option of, perhaps, a 20-minute walk to work or a tram ride. A home within walking distance of the city centre was in all likelihood a significant advantage for a journalist working uncertain hours, probably late into the night and unsure of the availability of public transport. Catton's near neighbours during a stay at the address of eight or nine years, once again included lower-middle-

⁹⁴ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.1-2. Catton wrote that he and Davitt already knew each other, once again pointing to the variety of assignments Catton had encountered in his newspaper career up to that date.

⁹⁵ *Sunday Chronicle*, March 6, 1892, p.2.

class families, predominantly involved in the commercial life of the city, among them a manager, millwright, confectioner, painter, cloth dealer, and piano dealer, general dealer, tailor, furniture remover, and slipper manufacturer. What is perhaps surprising is the commercial feel of the neighbourhood, with a coach builders' and leather merchant's nearby, a tobacconist, and a beer retailer.⁹⁶ Maps of the time show the Catton family's terraced home backing on to fields and open land marked with old clay pits and home to several brick works. At the time of Catton's arrival in Manchester, several of the city's journalists had set up home in the Hightown district, close by suburban Higher Broughton, and separated from Catton's more central Bury New Road address by the range of brick works and fields mentioned above. A newspaper review of Manchester's suburban development noted the Hightown area in the late 1880s was,

... the favourite residence of Manchester journalists. At one time no fewer than twenty at once had a house there. The list included three sub-editors, two leader-writers, three chief reporters, two editors in embryo, and four who are either now newspaper proprietors or directors of London newspaper companies. Other newspaper employees could be numbered by the score.

'Out of the noise and bustle of the main thoroughfares', Hightown was described as being one of the last districts 'to succumb to the tram'.⁹⁷ It is fair to speculate that issues of cost played a part in Catton opting for a somewhat busier neighbourhood than many of his new colleagues. Catton had arrived in the city, the father of four children aged from four to 11.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Slaters Manchester, Salford and Suburban Directory* 1893, 1897 and 1899.

⁹⁷ *Manchester City News*, Jan 20, 1906, p.5.

⁹⁸ Census, 1891.

A possible insight into the means by which Catton secured a job with the Hulton group in Manchester arises through his relationship with sports journalist W. H. (Harry) Mounsey. It seems probable that Catton and Mounsey knew each other before the former joined the Withy Grove enterprise. Mounsey, some nine years older than Catton, spent 20 years with Hulton, starting on the *Sporting Chronicle* in the mid-1870s and remaining in Manchester apart from 'an interval of three years' as sporting editor of the *Guardian* in Nottingham.⁹⁹ The pair were probably work colleagues in the Midlands in the early 1880s. Bearing in mind the time-lag surrounding the insertion and removal of street directory names, Mounsey is listed as resident in Manchester from 1886 onward, but there appears no mention of him for the early 1880s.¹⁰⁰ Catton may well have succeeded Mounsey as sporting editor in Nottingham. If so, with Mounsey returning to Manchester, he would be in a position to smooth Catton's introduction to the lineage pool on the *Athletic News*, paving the way for his 'Ubique' contributions, and possibly alerting him to the *Sunday Chronicle* vacancy in 1893, with his 'Ubique' by-line acting as a significant reference.

Family ties should not be discounted when decisions concerning a move to a new city came to be taken in any period, and particularly so at a time when kinship support could be a key survival factor should a personal economic crisis arise. The Catton family's move to Manchester may have been eased

⁹⁹ Mounsey obituary, *Sporting Chronicle*, Sept 3, 1894, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Manchester street directories, various dates. Mounsey is resident in Manchester in the 1871 and 1891 Census records, but I can find no record of him anywhere for the 1881 Census.

by the presence in the city of one of his uncles. James Wilkinson Catton had been rector of St Paul's Church in the working-class district of New Cross for five years when his nephew arrived.¹⁰¹ A return to Lancashire would also have made contact with his wife Mary's family easier, although it seems ironic that Catton's wife's brother, Thomas Cornwell, also a journalist, moved to work in Nottingham at the time, arriving between 1891 and 1893.¹⁰² Once again, there is the distinct possibility that personal contacts, in the shape of Catton, may have paved the way for Cornwell's move to Nottingham.

If Catton made use of professional contacts to secure a move to Manchester, he was utilising just one of several informal means of accessing the job market. Brown noted Victorian journalists' '... extreme mobility, in a fast-expanding market. Many men moved from job to job at bewilderingly frequent intervals, and were able to find work at considerable distances from their existing employment'.¹⁰³

Research points to chance acquaintances, the recommendations of friends already on a payroll, letters of enquiry, a blossoming reputation, trade contacts, and being in the right place at the right time, as among the prime

¹⁰¹ Obituary notices, *Manchester City News*, July 21, 1900, p.8, and *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, July 17, 1900, p.8. Prior to his arrival in Manchester, the Rev Catton had taught in the south of England and Tasmania, and had then studied on various scholarships at Cambridge University, before ordination and a 15-year spell in the South West. Just how helpful to Catton the clergyman's presence was is open to speculation. At the time, the Rev. Catton was a recently discharged bankrupt. His living at St Paul's had been sequestered to pay off more than £1,800 of debts incurred through household expenses, losses in farming seemingly incurred during his stay in rural parishes in the South West, and interest on loans, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, June 11, 1888, p6, and *Manchester Guardian*, June 11, 1888, p.7. Perhaps there was an element of the journalist supporting the clergyman.

¹⁰² Census, 1901. Cornwell had a daughter, aged 10, born in Preston, and one aged eight born in Nottingham.

¹⁰³ Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Clarendon Press), Oxford, 1985, pp.81-82.

means of advancement for a reporter. The nature of sports reporting, with the opportunity for travel, however occasional, would have exposed some reporters to job opportunities and useful contacts in a much wider geographical area than might normally have been the case. However, job adverts, in particular, in the London-based *Daily News*, were the chief factor in facilitating employment mobility in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The *Daily News* would have had, like other London papers, a wide circulation, taken by many provincial newspaper offices as a source of London news. In 1895, the guide, **How To Become A Journalist**, explained that the *Daily News* was 'a recognised medium for advertisements relating to Press work', a point confirmed by the official history of the National Union of Journalists for the early decades of the next century.¹⁰⁴ The *Daily News* was still regarded as the prime source of job vacancies for editorial work and compositors, and for journalists' 'employment wanted' ads, in 1913, and the same was true in 1925, too.¹⁰⁵ A brief examination of the *Daily News*' 'Situations Vacant' and 'Situations Wanted' columns at the time of Catton's move to Nottingham, and later return to Lancashire, confirms the paper's standing as a medium for press employment. The paper carried 28 examples in one edition in January, 1891, covering editorial, printing and commercial newspaper work, with similar numbers in March. Press advertisements are listed first in the jobs columns, given precedence over all other lines of work.

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Phillips, **How to Become a Journalist. A Practical Guide to Newspaper Work** (Sampson Low, Marston), London, 1895, p.148, and F. J. Mansfield, "Gentlemen, The Press!" **Chronicles of a Crusade (Official history of the National Union of Journalists)** (W. H. Allen), London, 1943, p.22.

¹⁰⁵ G. Binney Dibblee, **The Newspaper** (Williams and Norgate), London, 1913, p.125; Alfred Kingston, **Pitman's Popular Guide to Journalism. A practical handbook for all engaged in or seeking to qualify for professional work on the newspaper press** (Pitman), London, 1925, pp.21-22.

The appearance of a job advert offering particularly low wages but demanding impressive credentials could be sure to raise union hackles.¹⁰⁶

The means of proving one's suitability for a job vacancy, or at least of securing an interview, would likely have followed the course taken by J. M. Barrie. He kept a scrapbook of cuttings of his work on the *Nottingham Daily Journal* in the mid-1880s, and probably lineage articles used by the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *St James's Gazette*, and offered to send the scrapbook in support of a job application made to the *Liverpool Post and Echo*.¹⁰⁷

To further emphasise the likelihood of editorial contacts opening the way for a job move, it seems Catton's successor as *Daily Guardian* sporting editor in 1891 was Blackburn-born James Burrow. By 1917, Burrow had been sporting editor in Nottingham for 'over twenty-five years' – placing his promotion to about 1892 – after he had first served an apprenticeship on the *Blackburn Times* and *Preston Guardian*.¹⁰⁸ Aged 27, he was a chief reporter in

¹⁰⁶ *Daily News*, Jan 31, and March 17, both 1883, Jan 28, p.8, March 30, p.8, Feb 24, p.8, all 1891; Mansfield, *The Press*, p.119; Minute Book of the Executive Council, National Union of Journalists, union sub-committee meeting, Jan 29, 1908, at Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. The NUJ acknowledged the *Daily News*' reputation as a focus for editorial jobs, and pressed, unsuccessfully, to get the paper to agree a system whereby journalists replying to job vacancy box numbers on unspecified titles could be assured their application would not be forwarded if the potential employer was their own proprietor. As an alternative to the situations vacant column, the union tried to utilise members' local knowledge and the branch infrastructure to gain some control of the job market. The circulation of likely job vacancies among out of work journalists, or those under notice of redundancy, was an early goal from the union's foundation in 1907. It was aired at the union's first conference that year, and by 1909 an 'Employment Bureau' was in the process of being set up. Branch secretaries were expected to inform the general secretary of vacancies in their area, both 'actual and prospective', and these would be circulated nationwide, Mansfield, *The Press*, p.120, pp.146-148. It may be that the union's precursor, the National Association of Journalists, founded in 1884, operated a similar scheme.

¹⁰⁷ Dunbar, J. M. Barrie, p.54. The collection of *Burnley Gazette* editorial job applications mentioned in Chapter Two, held in file DDX 1101/27/8, Lancashire Record Office, Preston, is particularly revealing as to what applicants considered relevant to their hopes of engagement.

¹⁰⁸ H. Simonis, *The Street of Ink. An Intimate History of Journalism* (Cassell and Co), London, 1917, p.219.

Staffordshire in 1891.¹⁰⁹ It seems probable that Catton and Burrow worked in the same office for a year or two as Catton finished his Preston apprenticeship, and the link appears, at this distance in time, to have proved worthwhile for Burrow.

By late 1894, Catton had been promoted, following the sudden death in September of *Sporting Chronicle* stalwart Mounsey, aged 43. The paper's obituary on Catton, carried in 1936, states that '... at the special request of the late Mr Edward Hulton, he accepted the editorship of the *Sporting Chronicle* on the death of Mr W. H. Mounsey'.¹¹⁰ It seems unlikely, even given the passing of the years, that a fundamental error over the succession to the editor's chair would have arisen. But Catton was still classing himself as a sub-editor in an 1897 trade directory,¹¹¹ and his own tribute to Mounsey, carried in the *Sunday Chronicle* at the time of the death, described Mounsey as 'chief sporting sub-editor' of that paper.¹¹² It must be added, though, that Slater's 1893 street directory listed Mounsey as an 'editor'. Mounsey's death may have precipitated several executive changes within the Hulton titles, or perhaps we are dealing with an issue of semantics, with the task of helping edit a paper being construed as being 'the editor'. At the moment, it is perhaps safest to accept that Catton was rewarded with an important promotion, involving considerable responsibilities, following the death of

¹⁰⁹ Census, 1891.

¹¹⁰ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8. The paper repeats the assertion that Catton acted as editor two days later, Aug 24, p.7. Catton's death notice in the **Newspaper Press Directory 1937** (C. Mitchell and Co), London, p.61, states he had been editor of the *Sporting Chronicle* and then the *Athletic News*.

¹¹¹ **Slater's Manchester and Salford Directory for 1897.**

¹¹² *Sunday Chronicle*, Sept 9, 1894, p.4.

Mounsey.¹¹³ One obvious change saw the 'Tityrus' by-line attached to the *Sunday Chronicle's* 'Notes on Sport' column on a regular basis. The column appears to have lacked a by-line throughout Mounsey's tenure.¹¹⁴ In later years Catton was particularly keen to see that Mounsey received due credit for championing, through the columns of the *Sunday Chronicle*, *Sporting Chronicle*, and *Athletic News*, the league fixture system, prior to its adoption by the founder members of the Football League.¹¹⁵ The three papers were produced from the same Withy Grove offices, with the same paymaster and, without doubt, a cross-fertilisation of staff. A daily paper, a Sunday title, and a sporting weekly presented a tremendous opportunity for shared staff, shared copy, and shared costs, a point surely not lost on Hulton, who began his newspaper business on a relatively small budget and died in 1904 worth more than half-a-million pounds.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Mounsey is a case in point. At the time of his death he appears to have been both the chief sub-editor on the *Sporting Chronicle*¹¹⁷, and 'chief sporting sub-editor' on the *Sunday Chronicle*, and to

¹¹³ Confusion, even among staff, over job titles, if not job responsibilities, does not seem to have been a one-off. When T. W. H. Crosland joined the *Sunday Chronicle* in 1900, it was, in his opinion, as editor, although he replaced Andrew Caird who had been known as the paper's sub-editor. An acquaintance summed up the position, 'At all events Crosland was responsible for getting the paper out . . .', W. Sorley Brown, *The Life and Genius of T. W. H. Crosland* (Cecil Palmer), London, 1928, pp.399-400. Robert Blatchford wrote for the *Sunday Chronicle* in the 1880s, and recalled, 'We had no editor. Each man did his own job his own way, though the sporting side was directed by Mr. Hulton', Blatchford, *Eighty Years*, pp.184-185. A further example of this confusion comes to light in the 1904 *Manchester City News* obituary of Edward Hulton. Emphasising his abiding control of his newspapers, the obituary noted how Thomas Harris had been described by a Manchester paper as the *Sunday Chronicle* editor in an article concerning an 1890s election campaign. 'Next day came a disclaimer. "Mr. Hulton," wrote Mr. Harris, "is editor of all the newspapers under his control."'. It may well have been a situation repeated across the country pre-1900, as self-made press entrepreneurs gradually, and perhaps reluctantly, released day-to-day control of their maturing and increasingly commercially and editorially complex newspapers to trained journalists.

¹¹⁴ Catton's column was to cover the full spectrum of sports, including football, cricket, rugby, bowls, ice skating, curling, billiards, athletics, cross-country running, boxing, coursing, boat racing, tennis, cycling and yachting.

¹¹⁵ "Tityrus", *The Leaguers*, p.14.

¹¹⁶ Hulton will.

¹¹⁷ *Sporting Chronicle*, Sept 6, 1894, p.2.

have written in the *Athletic News*.¹¹⁸ There is no reason to doubt the likelihood that Catton took on a similar role.

It was to be a further six years before he was appointed *Athletic News* editor, and in that time he was to further enhance his reputation as a sports journalist, lending his undoubted writing skills to the coverage of a variety of sports fixtures, but in particular, cricket and football. The 'Tityrus' by-line can be found on regular and substantial sports reports and anecdotal columns in the *Sporting Chronicle* and *Sunday Chronicle* throughout the 1890s. The Hultons launched the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* in 1897 and Catton's talents and time were stretched further, eventually succeeding J. J. Bentley as the *Evening Chronicle's* cricket correspondent. The paper was said to have broken new ground at the time by sending a reporter to cover Lancashire both home and away, no doubt involving Catton in a busy summer schedule of travel¹¹⁹. Catton was credited with being the first correspondent on the *Evening Chronicle* to adopt the pen name 'Red Rose', used by later writers, and which became synonymous with Old Trafford cricket reporting.¹²⁰ The morning *Daily Dispatch* was launched in Manchester by the Hulton family in 1900, and once again Catton was enlisted as a star writer. A great many of these writing assignments overlapped, and Catton appears to have been kept busy, with, at various times, 'Tityrus' articles in the *Athletic News*, 'JC' pieces in the *Sporting Chronicle*, 'James Catton' by-lined stories in the *Daily Dispatch*, 'Red Rose' cricket reports in the *Evening Chronicle*, and further

¹¹⁸ *Sunday Chronicle*, Sept 9, 1894, p.4.

¹¹⁹ A. W. Ledbrooke, 'Cricket', in *Fifty Great Years 1897-1947*, compiled by "Denys" (Kemsley Newspapers), Manchester, 1947, no page numbers.

¹²⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.5.

'Tityrus' features in the *Sunday Chronicle*. Catton's progress on the Hulton titles was, without doubt, aided by his writing ability. But it should be noted that the death of senior journalists cleared the way for some of Catton's progress. It cannot be suggested that the Hulton newspapers exacted a heavier than normal toll of mortality on senior staff, but Robert Blatchford felt it worth commenting on the deaths of six *Sunday Chronicle* journalists within two years of his departing the paper in late 1891.¹²¹ Thomas Harris, mentioned above, died in November, 1892, and was possibly the most senior among the half-dozen.¹²² The death toll continued, however, with that of Mounsey, already noted, in 1894, and *Athletic News* editor Tom Sutton in 1895.¹²³ Each death freed up a senior position on the Hulton titles. Sheer chance simply cannot be discounted in any assessment of career advancement.

During this period Catton had two books published chronicling 'modern' football's birth pangs, and establishing his position as an authority on football and the rise of the professional game. In 1897, **The Rise of The Leaguers**, under the pen name 'Tityrus' appeared, based on a series of features, tracing the history of the game and the clubs, that had been carried earlier in the *Sporting Chronicle*. In 1900, **The Real Football. A Sketch of the Development of the Association Game** was published under Catton's name, and the author appears to have been allowed access to Football League files and minutes, held in nearby Preston, to help him complete the work. It is clear from the detailed content of both books that Catton had the

¹²¹ Blatchford, **Eighty Years**, p.194.

¹²² Harris obituary, *Sunday Chronicle*, Nov 6, 1892, p.5.

¹²³ Sutton obituary *Sporting Chronicle*, July 17, 1895, p.4.

ear of football administrators and club officials who provided him with information and anecdotes. Catton's early immersion in the development of the game in central Lancashire and Nottingham would have helped open doors and gained introductions, as well as providing first-hand knowledge. Soon after the appearance of the latter work, the *Athletic News* was preparing its readers for a further Catton book.

Having discussed the game from what one might call a sober point of view Mr Catton is now we understand engaged on something in the same connection but to be treated more airily a sort of romance written round the big ball¹²⁴.

Whatever Catton's intentions, the mystery book, possibly a novel, remains to be traced, if it was written at all.

4:6 'The monstrous inconvenience': Reporting play

Catton witnessed the development of sports reporting from the mid-1870s through until the mid-1930s, and was ideally placed to comment on the gradual elevation of the journalist, quite literally, from pitch-side to the grandstand press box. Unusually for Catton, his review of 50 years of sport in **Wickets and Goals** devotes space to the development of the press box, whereas the actual mechanics of reporting, of getting the job done, are rarely touched upon. Catton's potted account of the conditions faced by the football reporter in the 1870s through to those encountered by his 1920s' counterpart, is revealing. He wrote,

¹²⁴ *Athletic News*, April 30, 1900, p.1. *The Times* noted among its 'publications today' feature, **The Real Football** on April 3, 1900, p.13.

When I first attended football matches as a reporter it was necessary to walk about the ground, to keep outside the touch-lines, of course, or to stand behind the goal-posts, if the custodian was a genial man and free from nerves and small irritabilities . . . But up and down the touch-line and round about the goals the reporter had to wander like a restless spirit. He was as much exposed to the weather as the players, but there was rarely any account to do for an evening newspaper. At last some wooden benches or desks were put up near the middle of the field, and bordering on the touch-line. There was no shelter, and when the day of telegraphing reports arrived the telegraphic forms were often wet through, and sometimes blown away. Where the first Press box was built I cannot say, but when one secretary was asked for such accommodation his reply was: "Dear me! I suppose you would like nicely glazed windows, an armchair, a foot-warmer, a cigar, and a glass of whisky at intervals." The game was gaining adherents, "gates" were growing, and secretaries were beginning to show what they thought was independence and hauteur. Really it was rudeness. Reporters in those early days often suffered from severe colds and contracted rheumatism. Many a time have I left a match with clothes saturated by rain and with marrow chilled.

Catton recalled chatting with James Macaulay, goalkeeper for Dumbarton, during a match against Nottingham Forest, on a wintry November afternoon in 1883. 'The backs, who I think were Lang and Hutchison, were far away up the field, and we had a "guid crack" about football'. But the mechanics of reporting were changing.

In the middle of the 'eighties I thought it was a great feat when the National Telephone Company "tapped" a wire by affixing an instrument to one of their posts for me to send a report of a big match on Derby Racecourse . . . Nowadays, there is a separate entrance for members of the Press to a private gallery or reporting box, and there the journalist

can “talk” his report through an instrument on the desk in front of him to the offices of his newspaper.¹²⁵

Catton and newspapermen of his generation were working in an environment of change at sports grounds in the 1880s and 1890s, as noted in Chapter Three. He recalled a cup tie between Aston Villa and Preston North End in the 1880s in which ‘. . . constables on horseback made their first appearance on a football field. What a sensation that match was’.¹²⁶ There was an informal, *ad hoc* environment surrounding football at this time.¹²⁷ The makeshift nature in which early grounds must have transformed themselves on big match days in order to accommodate larger than average gates, is suggested in a few words in a Catton report of the FA Cup match between Notts County and Queen’s Park at Trent Bridge in 1885.

. . . even at that early hour drags and carriages began to arrive and take up positions around the enclosure. By eleven o’clock the best standpoints were occupied. Additional staging had been erected, and considering the awkward nature of the ground for sightseers, the executive had evidently done their best to provide for the unusual crush expected.¹²⁸

The close proximity of spectators to the reporters, mentioned in Chapter Three, could create unease. At a packed cup semi-final on the ground of the Merchiston Castle School in Edinburgh in 1885, a certain apprehension is hinted at by Catton, when he later wrote of, ‘. . . more bad language to the

¹²⁵ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.162-166.

¹²⁶ *Athletic News*, Jan 31, 1921, p.4.

¹²⁷ For example, see Catton’s recollection of the late arrival of the West Bromwich Albion goalkeeper in a cup semi-final at Trent Bridge in 1887, and his emergence from the crowd, fully kitted, at the last moment, *Athletic News*, Sept 11, 1922, p.4.

¹²⁸ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, Feb 23, 1885, p.6.

cubic foot of atmosphere than I ever heard. The populace leaned over the Press desk and imitated the famous troops in Flanders'.¹²⁹

Rudimentary reporting facilities were standard. Catton recalled the press being allocated a tent at Trent Bridge cricket ground from which to cover the games in the 1880s. But the press tent, 'A Bohemian resort', became something of a meeting point for players and enthusiasts alike, and the casual inter-action would no doubt have furnished the reporters with gossip, information, contacts and an easy introduction to players – a worthwhile recompense for the inevitable distractions.¹³⁰

Improvements at football grounds posed a certain worry for Catton. Following a fire at Celtic Park, Glasgow, in 1904, Catton was moved to ponder in print the possible fate of reporters perched in 'those very lofty erections'.

What would be the position of those journalists, telegraphic operators, messengers and others right at the summit of these buildings with one narrow staircase if ever there was a conflagration or a panic? These thoughts have occurred to people who are banished to the top of these conning towers. They would be utterly cut off . . . Even a journalist and a telegraphist are entitled to enjoy a sense of security which cannot be had in these isolated altitudes. I disclaim the idea of being an alarmist, but if professional men have to be placed in such places they should be assured of protection.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.152. At least in the above instance Catton had a game to cover. *Gamering even basic information in advance of a sports match could be fraught.* The *Athletic News* carried a complaint from its 'London correspondent' in 1886 about the lack of co-operation from the FA concerning advanced details of matches, with two reporters sent to cover cup ties in the capital only to discover the games had been cancelled, *Athletic News*, Nov 2, 1886, p.6.

¹³⁰ *Athletic News*, April 12, 1915, p.4.

¹³¹ *Athletic News*, May 16, 1904, p.4.

A safe entrance and exit could be an issue for the pressmen, too. Catton recalled occasions when he was caught in the crush at big football matches, with no special provision made for the reporters to avoid the crowd. After reporting a cup semi-final in Blackburn in 1893 from a table on a cinder track around the pitch, Catton, on attempting to leave the ground, had found himself,

. . . pushed up against one of the gates and pinned there with the pressure of a crowd in my back. As it was not likely that the gate would give I felt that my breast bone would be forced in. The position was painfully unpleasant until the police rescued me. But for a couple of months I was sore on the chest . . . ¹³²

As grounds were further developed, accommodation for the press became a feature of the planning, with *All Sports Football Annual* of 1922-23 highlighting the 'spacious gallery' created for journalists at the new Wembley Stadium, 'equipped with telephones, writing accommodation and every convenience', with 'an uninterrupted view of the whole playing area'.¹³³ But even Wembley came under fire from Catton in the summer of 1923 when he condemned, 'the monstrous inconvenience and the appalling discourtesy shown to the representatives of the Press' at an international varsity athletics meeting.

There were no facilities whatever for the adequate discharge of duties by journalists who go to such a celebration to work. There were no Press stewards, no information obtainable without much trouble and except as a favour, and no suitable place to write, for the Press gallery which may be perfect for a big football match, is too far away from the changing

¹³² The article also includes reminiscences about Catton being locked out of St James's Park, Newcastle, for the derby against Sunderland, and a ruse he used to beat the crowds queuing to enter a cup tie at Gigg Lane, Bury, which was depicted in cartoon form, see *Athletic News*, Dec 8, 1924, p.4.

¹³³ *All Sports Football Annual* 1922-23, p.7.

scenes of such contests . . . a working journalist with any self-respect and sense of duty must protest against such lack of consideration and arrangement.¹³⁴

But there's a sense of a certain press-box camaraderie and fun, too, with Catton telling of a time when he complained of the view from the seats of the Distillery ground in Lisburn, only to find when he next visited that officials had 'raised the seat for me and placed a specially elevated desk. Both covered with crimson drugget'.

Now thrones are embarrassing and so is so much prominence. Folk laughed, and I laughed with them. There was nothing else to do unless you wanted to look a fool and be judged as hyper-sensitive.

The same thing happened at Windsor Park, in 1923, although with less ostentation.¹³⁵

Catton frequently admits to having worn his favours on his sleeve when it came to international contests involving England. In the dramatic conclusion to England's one-wicket victory against Australia in the Oval Test of August, 1902, he appears to have overstepped the mark in the press box, admitting to 'standing on a chair, and forgetting my profession as I cheered'.¹³⁶ His reaction was so exceptional it merited allusion to by a colleague in an anthology of cricket writing published more than 30 years later. Frank Thorogood, recalling his own impressions of the game, concluded,

¹³⁴ *Athletic News*, July 23, 1923, p.5.

¹³⁵ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.273.

¹³⁶ *Athletic News*, Aug 18, 1902, p.5. Catton later admitted to also waving his handkerchief and breaking a favourite pipe in his excited reaction, *Wickets and Goals*, 1926, pp.103-104.

A few hours later I seek relief for shattered nerves in a London theatre, and my distinguished companion, still in a high fever, is James Catton. Does he remember it? Yes, I think so.¹³⁷

Catton's generation exploited the telephone alongside the homing pigeon and the telegraph, and as with both earlier systems, the take-up of the telephone as a news medium was uneven and protracted. Catton recalled the FA Cup semi-final replay between Sheffield United and Liverpool at the home of Derby County in 1899, when he was allowed to compile his report on an office rooftop behind one of the goals at the ground.

I was conceded this favour – greater than it seems, because I was able to use a telephone *within*, and so keep on speaking terms with Manchester. The worst of it was getting out and in of a window. I managed to get my distracted head in violent collision with the window sash – a much severer blow than any of the players received.¹³⁸

The first attempt to introduce a telephone at the Oval press box in the opening years of the twentieth century was given short shrift by the writers, seemingly too easily distracted by the sound of a colleague dictating his report over the line.¹³⁹ But around the same time, Percy Rudd was in charge of the *Evening News*' Saturday football edition in Manchester, and recalled,

... we had our own private lines and telephones at the reporter's side in the Press box on every football ground in the city, a staff of a dozen telephonists taking down continuous reports of the games in a special

¹³⁷ Thomas Moulton (ed), *Bat and Ball* (Magna Books), Leicester, 1994, p.166, first published 1935.

¹³⁸ *Athletic News*, Dec 20, 1920, p.4.

¹³⁹ Philip Bussy, 'A Private View Of The Press Box', in *C. B. Fry's Magazine of Action and Outdoor Life*, Jan, No 22, Vol IV, 1906, p.370.

room at the office and we went to press ten minutes after the final whistle with twelve columns or so of football news . . . ¹⁴⁰

For Catton, the phone was 'anathema', although he came to recognise it as 'a bearable necessity'.¹⁴¹ By Christmas, 1905, the authors of **Association Football and the Men Who Made It**, both sports journalists, declared that apart from 'a few country papers' still using homing pigeons to carry football match reports, 'Practically all the up-to-date papers now use the telephone for local reports', or, in some cases, messengers on bikes.¹⁴² Yet, such was the uneven adoption of the telephone by the press, that thirty-five years after Catton hurt himself on the window frame in Derby as he came to terms with telephone reporting, racing journalist Sidney Galtrey, 'Hotspur' of the *Daily Telegraph*, could still suggest, 'Nowadays even modern telegraphy at speed scarcely suffices. The telephone is ousting the telegraph . . .'¹⁴³

The task of reporting sport could be physically and mentally demanding. As outlined in Chapter One, new developments in the handling of sports news by the press created extra pressures on the reporter. New skills had to be mastered and, to an extent, a new approach adopted. The ability of the individual to rise to the challenge presented by those changes might well

¹⁴⁰ Percy Rudd, 'Where Would The Popular Sports Be Without The Press?', in **The Press 1898-1948** (The Newspaper World), London, 1948, p.85.

¹⁴¹ *The Journalist*, Oct, 1924, p.181.

¹⁴² Alfred Gibson and William Pickford (eds), **Association Football and The Men Who Made It**, Vol II (Caxton Publishing), London, 1905, pp24-29. For the take-up of the telephone as an aid to sports reporting among the news agencies, in particular PA, see George Scott, **Reporter Anonymous. The Story of the Press Association** (Hutchinson), London, 1968, pp.125-128. See also, N. Fishwick, **English Football and Society 1910-1950** (Manchester University Press), 1989, p.97, and Harold Herd 'The Quickening Tempo of Journalism', in *The Fleet Street Annual* (Fleet Publications), London, 1930, p.29.

¹⁴³ Sidney Galtrey, **Memoirs of a Racing Journalist** (Hutchinson and Co), London, 1934, p.289.

dictate the level of success he achieved. For Catton, at least, the practicalities of reporting appear not to have proved any obstacle to advancement.

4:7 'The usual Manchester amenity': A charge of hard drinking

Catton does not escape association with journalism's heavy-drinking culture, although the allegation comes from one source only. Writing in 1950, 14 years after Catton's death, former Manchester press box colleague Neville Cardus produced a light-hearted, whimsical, pen-picture of the sports writer in his second volume of memoirs, **Second Innings**. Writing with a seeming degree of affection for a man who, when the pair first met professionally, was a veteran of about 60 and Cardus, a novice in the sports reporting business, aged about 30, he describes Catton at the time as,

. . . incredibly small in height, red in the face, round as a ball, gold spectacles, white moustache, bald head at the front, twinkling eyes; he was as though born from Bacchus out of Mr. Pickwick. He had spent a wild youth but was now reformed, and when he visited London he stayed at the Thackeray Temperance Hotel. He would describe with great glee, tears of happiness in his eyes, sparkle of perspiration on his forehead, how during an English Cup Final he had slept throughout the game on the floor at the back of the Press Box – "dead drunk."¹⁴⁴

With due allowance for errors of recollection and the general anecdotal nature of the work, it seems unlikely that Cardus got the story completely wrong.

Catton's career covering sport at the time of the anecdote stretched back at the very least 45 years. It may be that Catton regaled a new recruit to the press box with tales of his youth, suitably embellished to provoke a reaction.

¹⁴⁴ Neville Cardus, **Second Innings** (Collins), London, 1950, p.175.

Catton left home at 15, was married at 19, was a father-of-two at 21, and worked in an industry renowned for its drinking culture. The reputation of the Nottingham drinking club has been mentioned earlier, and would no doubt have been mirrored nationally. Manchester journalism, too, was no exception. Perhaps it would have been exceptional had Catton not, at some time, dabbled with drink. However, any excess would probably have been restricted to his youth, as, from about his mid-20s onwards, his career appears to have been one of significant success, a success that might not have been possible under the influence of heavy drinking. Had Catton already developed a drink problem of some sort by the time he reached Manchester, the city's press environment, or at least that attached to the Hulton newspapers, does not appear to have been one likely to make tackling the problem an easy matter. Alex Thompson was hired as 'a writer of facetious notes on current events' on the *Sporting Chronicle* in the early 1880s and later the *Sunday Chronicle*. 'The drinking habit was universal', among Manchester journalists, he recalled. 'A teetotaller was a milksop'. Of the situation in the city post 1900, he wrote,

I fell in with a party of journalists including two editors. They drank champagne. Before we separated, each man had "stood his corner". There were six of us. When the rite was completed, I was undone for the day. They went to their various offices to tackle the day's work. How did they do it? There were giants in those days. Or, alternatively, perhaps the work was not as well done.

Thompson suggests that Edward Hulton was not averse to a daytime drink with his staff, or 'twopenn'orth', the price of a small glass of whisky.

It was the genial and not infrequent habit of my own proprietor, Mr Hulton, to pop his silk-hat round the corner of my cubicle, and to tilt it

mysteriously towards the door. No words were needed to explain the proprietorial command. He would lead the way through the clerks' office with dignity which might have suggested that we were going out to confer with Gladstone about the Eastern question, and it was not until we had reached the Parnassian fount "within the meaning of the Act", that he proposed the usual Manchester amenity.¹⁴⁵

T. W. H. Crosland, when editing the *Sunday Chronicle* briefly in 1900, was said by a friend, '... on Saturday nights when he should have been slogging into the 'copy' as it came into the office he would wander off at intervals to the nearest inn for a drink or two and a 'crack'.¹⁴⁶ Manchester *Evening Chronicle* apprentice Bernard Falk, wrote of a working and social environment circa 1900 centred on two pubs close by Hultons' Withy Grove offices, The Crosby and The Spread Eagle, where special occasions were celebrated and, seemingly, time between editions whiled away, with some of the editors of the Hulton titles to be found inside. The teenager, living away from parental influence, slipped into a routine of eating in pubs, with special deals offering cut-price warm meals included with the cost of the beer. 'More food would have been folly, especially as beer was so fattening,' he wrote.¹⁴⁷

4:8 Conclusion

James Catton came from a family where a good education was valued. His parents represented a merging of social classes, with his father from a middle class academic and clerical background and his mother from an agricultural

¹⁴⁵ Alex M. Thompson ("Dangle"), *Here I Lie. The Memorial of an Old Journalist* (Routledge), London, 1937, p.259.

¹⁴⁶ Sorley Brown, *Crosland*, p.400.

¹⁴⁷ Falk, *He Laughed*, pp.25-56.

family. Judging from their son's schooling there was a hope, if not an expectation, that a career in the professions might beckon. Despite the cost, his parents invested heavily in his education. In that sense, Catton's background was one of relative privilege, albeit, one senses, one touched by the ever-present risk of economic hardship that stalked the lower reaches of the Victorian middle classes. One wonders to what extent Catton as a boy was aware of the type of economic bargain his father, a clever man, regularly entered into, at a succession of small schools, in order to capitalise on his talents? It is tempting to extrapolate Catton's later *laissez-faire* attitude to the professional sportsman back to an earlier realisation of his family's economic position, and his own attempts to advance his career and earning potential. The termination of his schooling at 15 had ended any hopes of a 'professional' future. How much the decision was based on economic grounds and how much on a genuine vocation is hard to say. Catton had been exposed in early life to a love of literature, sport and his father's newspaper-reading habit. Those factors, together with reporting's questionable status and initial meagre wages, which made it an unappealing career choice for a boy lacking a vocational drive or with alternative options, suggest a serious commitment to journalism on Catton's part and an ability to influence his parents.

Based on the evidence of earlier chapters, Catton's induction to reporting followed a standard path, as did his introduction to sports journalism as an apprentice, centred on part-time responsibilities and an interest in games. In that regard, Catton's location in industrial Lancashire, among the 'frantic' passion for football, was a significant factor in later developments. Early

exposure to the professional lobby may well have touched a chord. In terms of Catton's personal life, there is a distinct air of an adolescent asserting himself away from parental influence. His marriage to a woman employed in industry, albeit in a skilled role, suggests an economic union not dissimilar to that of his parents. Catton's situation draws attention to the attitude, outlined in Chapter Two, of cricket official S. H. Swire and the topic of the ladies' enclosure at Old Trafford, with Swire worried about the social standing of reporters' wives.

Journalism attracted boys to far-distant towns, away from family controls, and reliant on low wages. For lower middle class adolescents, the financial circumstances surrounding a reporting apprenticeship probably dictated relocation among a lower stratum of society. If the hoped-for later rise in economic status materialised, through occupational migration and professional endeavour, there might well remain an unease surrounding the social background of their wives.

Catton's career after his apprenticeship follows a predictable path, judged by the occupational trends of the time. But the early move to a new office was followed by only one other move in his early 30s. Compared with an almost-dizzying round of relocations that some careers in newspapers exhibit, Catton either lacked ambition or, as seems more likely, based on later success, he impressed his employers enough to secure career advancement without recourse to job migration. That is particularly evident in the first decade of his stay in Manchester. The Hulton group provided ample opportunity for progress without moving, and Catton appears to have been suitably talented and versatile to make the most of the situation. Part of that success lay in the

decision to specialise in sports journalism. Catton's reason, centring on sport as a 'cleaner business', speaks volumes for reporting's uncertain standards and image, and the opportunity sport might offer to a man uneasy about the reporters' reputation as a 'visitor unwelcome'. As noted earlier, the technology of the day presented no obstacle to Catton's development as a journalist of note, and neither did the accusation of a temporary dalliance with heavy drinking, seemingly a not uncommon feature of the newspaper business.

Chapter Five

James Catton, *Athletic News* editor, 1900-1924

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5:1 Introduction

This chapter will trace James Catton's career in the years when he worked as editor of the *Athletic News* and will examine his role in the life of the sports paper and sport in general. Previous chapters have illustrated the at times casual nature of sports journalism, with much of the work in the hands of the trainee and the young, the slow development of a recognised reporting agenda, the open nature of recruitment and competition, and the lack of a well defined career structure and career status. By highlighting Catton's workload and working environment as an editor, the chapter should throw light on the manner in which, for Catton, most of the career shortcomings identified above, came to be overcome and left behind. The chapter will indicate the opportunities the editorship provided Catton in terms of establishing a reputation in sports journalism as a consummate professional. By studying some of the themes Catton examined in his own journalism, it is also intended to try and assess what he believed his role was in the sporting constituency he reported. It is intended to reveal as full a picture as possible of what it meant to be the editor of a sporting newspaper in the first decades of the twentieth century. The career-defining development that promotion to editor represented, together with the associated benefits in terms of journalistic prestige and economic well-being, are central to this chapter, as are Catton's personal circumstances which will be traced alongside his professional development. The chapter will consider the means open to Catton to gather the news, his attitude to the partial unionisation of journalism, his working relationship with sportsmen and the sports world's reaction to his exit from the *Athletics News*.

5:2 Promotion to editor

James Catton was promoted to the editorship of the *Athletic News* in 1900. A former colleague of Catton pinpoints his promotion to Easter Sunday.¹ If that was the case, the move was seemingly completed with an absence of fuss within the columns of the paper.² As editor, Catton's duties will have included the normal weekly newspaper executive tasks of supervising staff, policy decisions, liaising with columnists, sports administrators and promoters, commissioning articles, and general forward planning, with the added responsibility, in the case of the *Athletic News*, of being, quite simply, the star writer.³ Throughout Catton's time as editor he also fulfilled the role of reporter, and it was a job title he was proud to acknowledge. The 'Tityrus' by-line is consistently found on the reports of the big soccer and cricket matches of the week. As he settled into his role, he also wrote the majority of the sports news paragraphs and gossip under the heading "En Passant", which made up the front page of the paper, as well as a variety of news and comment columns over the years which gradually evolved into his "Stray Leaves" column on an inside page within which he dealt at length with an important topic or personality of the moment. Elevation to the editorship did not spare him writing duties on Hulton's other titles. He might preview a game in one, provide a match report for another, and finish off with a more considered

¹ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8.

² Catton's regular 'Notes on Sport' column in the *Sunday Chronicle* extends to April 28, with following weeks written by 'WLS' (William Louttit Sinclair, one-time *Sporting Chronicle* editor), although Catton occasionally appears to have filled in when necessary. Catton celebrated the 21st anniversary of his promotion to editor in the *Athletic News* edition of March 28, 1921.

³ Brown, *Victorian News*, p.89, states, 'What is an important and unvarying generalization is that sovereign powers of decision were exercised by the proprietors and not by the editors'. In the case of a specialist sporting title, in the hands of a journalist probably appointed, in part, on the strength of his sporting acumen, the scope for executive decision making must have been considerably wider.

colour piece for a third; at one time, while editor of the *Athletic News*, he was also expected to write leading articles in the *Daily Dispatch*.⁴ His attitude to work, and appetite for reporting, no doubt mirroring what was expected of him, is ably summed up in an affectionate tribute paid to Catton at the time of his death by former *Athletic News* colleague, 'The Pilgrim' who could boast a quarter-century working association with the editor.

I have seen him come into the office from an international match late on Saturday night, write his report and commentary which might be anything from a column and a half to two columns – approximately 3,000 words in those days, then turn to his "Stray Leaves," another column which was one of the most attractive features of the *Athletic News* at the time, and after that go home and "do a little bit of the front page" as he used to say. And that little bit of front page might be anything up to two columns of the most important news or gossip of the day.⁵

Catton's appetite for work was a matter of comment during his lifetime. In a 1921 review of North West football journalists, sports editor Ernest Edwards, "Bee" of the *Liverpool Echo*, proclaimed, "'Jimmy" is a terror for his size . . . a terror in the amount of work he covers per week. He is a very small man with a huge turn-out'.⁶

Catton's successor as editor, Ivan Sharpe, was equally impressed by his journalistic output, commenting, '. . . what a worker! The records he kept of cricket and football – to maintain intimate touch with form!'.⁷

⁴ *Evening Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.5.

⁵ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 24, 1936, p.7.

⁶ **Football Yarns. Being Reminiscences and incidents in the History of the Everton, Liverpool, Tranmere Rovers, South Liverpool and Marine Football Clubs**, edited and compiled by "Phil", (T Kilburn), Liverpool, 1921, p.126.

⁷ *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 30, 1936, p.17.

The happy coincidence of a journalistic union between Catton and Edward Hulton appears to have served both men well. Hulton was said to have been an astute judge of men, with 'a quick eye for journalistic ability';⁸ 'being able to recognise ability in others';⁹ 'a student of men' whose estimates of their worth were seldom wrong.¹⁰ The longevity and economic success enjoyed by the Hulton titles stands testament to the management and recruitment skills of both Edward Hulton senior and junior, with the son assuming full control of the newspapers during Catton's editorship, with Hulton senior passing away in 1904. Catton had been on the firm's payroll for almost a decade at the time of his appointment, and must have been considered a safe pair of hands. The Hultons knew what they were getting . . . a games enthusiast with, one would presume, an exemplary work record, an experienced journalist – Catton was aged 40 – with an established reputation among the sporting cognoscenti of the North and Midlands, an expert on the sub-culture that had grown up around the fast-expanding professional football scene, and a man who recognised the worth of cricket in the national psyche. In return, the *Athletic News* editorship provided an opportunity for Catton to fulfil his professional potential in sports journalism on a hugely influential title.

In some respects, Catton's appointment as editor broke new ground. The previous two editors, Tom Sutton and J. J. Bentley, unlike Catton, had laid claim to considerable sporting reputations, as outlined in Chapter Three. Catton and Bentley were the same age and they had first met in 1884 when Bentley played football for the Bolton Association in a match in Nottingham

⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1904, p10.

⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, March 29, 1904, p.4.

¹⁰ *Sporting Chronicle*, March 30, 1904, p.2.

which Catton reported. The two men struck up a deep friendship during their time with the Hulton newspapers, often working together to cover the showpiece football occasions that, at the time, would have involved Bentley managing a difficult balancing act with his reporting duties and his responsibilities as one of the game's figureheads and administrators. Despite Catton's promotion in the spring of 1900, Bentley's by-line, 'The Free Critic', continued to be seen on match reports, including the 1900 and 1901 cup finals, and on regular columns, until September, 1901, when a new column by soccer administrator and referee John Lewis was introduced. Lewis, a major figure in the professional game, may have been recruited to make up any perceived diminution in the paper's soccer credentials with Bentley's departure. Bentley's final exit may well have been connected with the fact that he was off work for three weeks in the summer of 1901 troubled by severe rheumatism. One can only wonder if the painful death of Tom Sutton, aged 41, in the summer of 1895, seemingly brought on in part by reporting in often chilling conditions, influenced Bentley's decision to cut his journalistic commitments on the paper.¹¹ Aged 40, Bentley certainly did not lack opportunities to make a living or to keep involved in soccer, as he carried on his administrative roles within football and took up freelance reporting, including work for the *Daily Express*, being described as a journalist and author in the 1901 census. In 1908 he became chairman of Manchester United and was club secretary between 1912 and 1916. Perhaps the duties as editor of a weekly sports paper with a growing circulation and reputation

¹¹ Bentley's persistent struggle with joint problems is noted five years later in Alfred Gibson and William Pickford, **Association Football and The Men Who Made It** (Caxton Publishing), London, Vol III, 1905, p.149. For details of Sutton's illness and death, see *Sporting Chronicle*, July 17, p.4, *Sunday Chronicle*, July 21, p.6, *Athletic News*, July 22, p.4, all 1895.

were proving too onerous for a man with potentially so many alternative calls on his time. From Edward Hulton's point of view, perhaps the time was right to appoint a journalist unencumbered by time-consuming distractions and able to devote his full, professional attention to the job in hand.¹² There is a hint that may have been the case from C. B. Fry who, in his autobiography, when writing of his time as a columnist on the *Athletic News* and his relationship with Bentley, suggests, 'either he or his proprietors found J. J.'s official duties too heavy, and he retired'.¹³

Catton would have been well aware of Bentley and Sutton's claim to sporting recognition. The new editor appears to have been well aware, too, of his own image, or at least that projected on first acquaintance. Catton worked in an occupation where ability on the sports field or in sports administration was often perceived to be a requisite for authoritative and insightful reporting and comment, as outlined earlier. His lack of sports field credentials would have been exacerbated by his lack of physical presence. Catton's unease at the time is revealed a quarter-century later, the anxiety and hurt still fresh in his mind, when he outlined his first meeting with sporting all-star C. B. Fry, a giant in the field of athletics, soccer, and cricket, who also happened to be a columnist on the *Athletics News*. The new editor arranged to meet Fry to secure a continuation of his contributions.

¹² All three men, Sutton, Bentley and Catton, came from families occupying the lower reaches of the middle classes. Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society* (Routledge), London, 1990, in a study of 83 editors of national newspapers and periodicals between the years 1880 and 1919, identified the majority grouping of having come from middle class families, with nearly two-thirds having attended 'public or other private schools', and the majority boasting a university education. Only 11 of the study group had working class backgrounds, p.90.

¹³ C. B. Fry, *Life Worth Living* (Pavilion Books, London), 1986, p.153, first published 1939.

The impression of that interview is with me still (wrote Catton in 1925), because when I told Fry my business he looked down on me from his 6ft of athletic manhood with eyes that betrayed scorn. His penetrating look seemed to say: "What, *you* appointed Editor of *The Athletic News*? You succeed John Bentley! Good heavens, good gracious! What do you know about such matters as cricket and football? Why, you are an undersized rat of a fellow that I could put in my pocket. You have never hit a century for any county. You have never taken part in a Final Tie . . . Fry did not, of course, pay me such compliments as these, but he seemed incredulous . . ."¹⁴

The raw emotion exposed in the extract perhaps tells us more of Catton's sensitivity over perceived slights concerning his physique, and a fragile self-esteem when mixing with the turn-of-the-century sports stars, than it does of any insensitivity on Fry's part. Catton rarely missed an opportunity to eulogise Fry's cricketing prowess and his worth as a man, whilst at the same time admitting that many fellow press men regarded him as 'a poseur'. 'As editor and contributor we got along very well,' wrote Catton, until the pair 'differed and parted' in a falling out over the expense of an article Fry had telegraphed to the office.¹⁵ Fry's forced departure soon after Catton's appointment underlines the power invested in the editor by the Hultons, and suggests an early statement of intent by Catton to impose his will on the way the paper was run.

¹⁴ *Athletic News*, June 1, 1925, p.1.

¹⁵ J. A. H. Catton ("Tityrus"), *Wickets and Goals. Stories of Play* (Chapman and Hall), London, 1926, pp.48-49, and Fry, *Life Worth Living*, p.153.

On that point, in Withy Grove management circles Catton was credited with aiding the paper's nationwide expansion.¹⁶ Catton was editor of the *Athletic News* at the height of its popularity. It had boasted in December, 1886, that it could 'be obtained at all newsagents and at every Railway Station Book Stall in the North of England'.¹⁷ The paper was an important voice in the sports world, described later as, '... without doubt the country's leading football weekly in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first fifteen years of the twentieth', with weekly sales estimated at 25,000 in the early 1880s, rising to a claimed 128,000 in the 1893 football season.¹⁸ Throughout Catton's time with the Hulton group the paper's circulation was portrayed by management, in the main, as an unbroken run of increasing sales. In 1896 circulation was put at 150,000 a week.¹⁹ Potential advertisers were assured a 'guaranteed circulation' of 170,000 in January, 1920²⁰, and in March, May, June and December it was advertising its sales at 200,000. The 1920 figure may well have been a peak year, with sales of 180,000 advertised in the summer and winter of 1924.²¹ In October, 1913, the *Athletic News* announced the launch of a new southern edition, with greater prominence given to London news.²² There can be little doubt that Catton would have been handed his share of an administrative and managerial workload associated with the paper's expansion. The paper was on sale each Tuesday in Cologne in 1921

¹⁶ *Athletic News*, Aug 25, 1924, p.4.

¹⁷ *Athletic News*, Dec 28, 1886, p.12.

¹⁸ Tony Mason, **Association Football and English Society** (Harvester Press), Brighton, 1980, pp.190-191. Accurate circulation figures for titles throughout this period are notoriously difficult to arrive at.

¹⁹ *Athletic News*, April 13, 1896.

²⁰ *Athletic News*, Jan 20, 1920, p.7.

²¹ *Athletic News*, Aug 4, 1924, p7, Nov 3, p.7.

²² *Athletic News*, Oct 27, 1913, p.1.

to meet demand among British servicemen stationed on the Rhine.²³ Of course, there were setbacks, such as the paper's temporary demise during the war years. In May, 1917, the paper disappeared from the news stands, incorporated within the Tuesday *Sporting Chronicle* until its relaunch, with new features, including a more extensive coverage of London sport, on December 9, 1918. The cover price rose to 1.5d the following month.

The obvious popularity of the paper among readers is well signposted by the above circulation record. Unfortunately, throughout the period of this study, as mentioned in earlier chapters, the voice of the individual reader remains, for the most part, anonymous, a shortcoming inherent in all press histories due to the nature of the sources available. As an alternative, the opinions of sporting celebrities may help fill that gap, although the timing of the comments, prompted, perhaps, by a significant retirement, may leave them open to a charge of bias or boosterism. But they are opinions still worth considering. With that caveat in mind, sports journalist Trevor Wignall who began his career in 1901 as a junior reporter on the *Cambria Daily Leader* in his home town Swansea, later claimed the Manchester-based sports weekly and its editor were ' . . . to the youth of that period . . . among the few things that mattered' - a tribute to the paper's appeal and its circulation.²⁴ Aston Villa chairman Fred Rinder considered the paper 'a great influence and a recognised authority', George Hirst, the former Yorkshire and England cricket all-rounder, born in the early 1870s, 'looked forward' to reading the *Athletic*

²³ *Athletic News*, April 18, 1921, p.1.

²⁴ *Daily Express*, Aug 26, 1936, p.13.

News from boyhood, and Huddersfield Town manager Herbert Chapman considered the paper to have 'world-wide' fame.²⁵

Whereas Catton's influence in terms of helping to manage the paper's commercial success remains hidden from record, evidence of his influence in editorial matters is more easily traced. The major sporting books of the period passed through Catton's hands. There would be an expectation among publishers and authors, many of them acquaintances and friends, of a review in the *Athletic News*. Such a steady stream of sporting literature from the pens of players, administrators and journalists was bound to keep the editor at the forefront of news and comment.²⁶ His involvement in the sporting books industry of the day extended to a role verging on that of literary agent. Catton encouraged Notts cricketer Richard Daft to compile his sporting reminiscences, promising help in placing the manuscript with a firm of publishers. He then sold the work on Daft's behalf to Bolton publishers Tillotson and Son for £325. The book was published in 1893 and Tillotson's contacted the Hulton group offering it first serialisation rights. Ironically, Edward Hulton asked Catton his opinion on the work's suitability for the pages of the *Athletic News* and Catton opened negotiations, securing serial rights for £175.²⁷ Catton was also instrumental in the Hulton group publishing journalist and FA official William Pickford's book 'How to Referee' in 1906.²⁸ Catton

²⁵ *Athletic News*, Aug 25, 1924, p.4.

²⁶ For examples of Catton's book reviews see *Athletic News* May 30, 1904, p.5 (Pelham Warner's **How We Recovered The Ashes**), Oct 28, 1917, p.4 (E. H. D. Sewell's **Triangular Cricket**), Dec 11, 1922 (F. B. Wilson's **Sporting Pie**).

²⁷ Catton, **Wickets and Goals**, pp.13-14; see also *Cricket: A Weekly Record of the Game*, Sept 10, 1908, p.402.

²⁸ W. Pickford, **A Few Recollections of Sport** (edited by BMP) (*Bournemouth Guardian*), 1939, p.96.

hired Essex cricketer E. H. D. Sewell to write a weekly article on the cricket scene, beginning in April, 1904.²⁹ He also played a part in advancing the newspaper career of Newcastle United skipper Colin Veitch in 1910, commissioning a series of anonymous articles by the player, under the byline 'Polyphemus', and featuring them in a competition for readers to guess the author's identity.³⁰ Veitch, an ardent reader of the *Athletic News*, had written to Catton offering to write the series of 'Open Letters to Footballers' in order to, 'help me to a journalistic career in the football world'. Veitch enclosed a number of articles he had already written in another paper as examples of his potential and, unsure of the rate of payment, suggested, 'To end or mend the business side of the question, how does £2 a column appeal to you? I leave it for your consideration just as it stands'.³¹ Catton, quite naturally, also appears to have been in charge of the recruitment of full-time staff. Ivan Sharpe, a 20-year-old reporter on the *Glossop Chronicle*, wrote to the *Athletic News* in 1909 seeking employment and although he was initially interviewed by the Hulton group's managing editor at Withy Grove, Alexander Paterson, he was told to then write to Catton enclosing examples of his work, although the approach failed to secure a job.³² Some 13 years later, Catton recruited Sharpe for the *Sunday Chronicle*, once again underlining the close working relationship and sharing of duties evident on the Hulton titles – and Catton's influence on all

²⁹ *Athletic News*, April 4, 1904, p.4, E. H. D. Sewell, *An Outdoor Wallah* (Stanley Paul), London, 1945, pp.68-69.

³⁰ *Athletic News*, May 2, 1910, p.4. Catton announced that out of 'thousands' of entries, 100 correctly identified Veitch, including his Newcastle team-mate Peter McWilliam.

³¹ Catton Correspondence, Arsenal FC, Vol V-W, Feb 15, 1909, p.1841.

³² *Athletic News*, Oct 13, 1919, p.4.

³² Ivan Sharpe, *40 Years in Football* (Hutchinson's), London, 1952, pp.18-20. The paper was advertising for football correspondents to cover Burnley and Reading in December, 1913, with applicants asked to contact the editor by letter, *Athletic News*, Dec 8, 1913, p.4. Paterson would appear to have been Catton's immediate superior in the Hulton business, appointed to the post of managing editor of all Hulton titles in 1906, aged about 40, Paterson obituary, *Daily Dispatch*, Dec 23, 1944, p.3

titles – and he eventually recommended him as his successor on the *Athletics News*.³³ The fact that Catton occupied the editor's chair for 24 years points, one would think, to a reasonable aptitude for most aspects of the job, although an anecdote recalled by Sharpe casts a little doubt on just how adept Catton was at managing certain of his administrative chores. Upon taking possession of the editor's desk in 1924 Sharpe discovered, 'Catton had left a drawer full of odds-and-ends, and told me to keep or destroy what I pleased. In the process I found my application of 1909 . . . unopened.'³⁴

On a more personal note, Catton made the most of the travel opportunities his work provided. Sports reporting took him the length and breadth of the country many times in a year and, if circumstances permitted, he took time out to study his environment. For example, whenever he was covering soccer matches in Wrexham he would attempt to visit 'the handsome parish church', with its historic memorials³⁵, and on his trips to Ireland he appears to have been keen to sample the scenery around Dublin and Belfast.³⁶ On a trip to an international match at Bangor, 'In accord with my custom', as he explained, he visited the cathedral 'to see the treasures that might be there'.³⁷

Catton's rise up the editorial ranks at Withy Grove had been accompanied by a gradual domestic flight north from the hubbub of the city centre environs, through the developing suburbs. The Catton family had left Bury New Road, Cheetham, by 1900. By 1906, the *Manchester City News* was describing that

³³ Sharpe, *40 Years*, 1952, p.35.

³⁴ Sharpe, *40 Years*, p.35.

³⁵ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, 1926, p.267.

³⁶ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, 1926, pp.274-275.

³⁷ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, 1926, p.261.

general area north of the city centre as, 'now merely an artizan district', spoiled by 'the jerry-builder', and with an 'alien' population.³⁸ Catton settled in Great Clowes Street, Higher Broughton, with his wife, three daughters aged 14, 20 and 21, with the 20-year-old working as a 'Board School Pupil Teacher', his son, 15, and the family servant, aged 30, who had moved with them to Manchester when the family left Nottingham.³⁹ His neighbours in this suburb on the northern, less fashionable side of the city,⁴⁰ included solicitors, a surveyor, cigar merchant, and timber agent. It was an area, 'noted for its handsome family mansions',⁴¹ and the house was, by the standards of the day, a large, well-built and imposing terrace. By 1911 he had put the inner city even further behind – although he remained close by the northern tram and rail commuter lines – with a move to Prestwich, where, including a further move within the village, he was to spend the next 13 years.⁴² A newspaper report of the time, highlighting the lack of affordable housing in the suburb for 'artisans' earning less than 40s a week, described it as, 'An eminently desirable place to which to go after the daily toil in the great, grimy, busy city'.⁴³

Clearly, his career as a senior sporting journalist on one of Britain's foremost specialist weekly titles was affording the family a suburban lifestyle among the

³⁸ *Manchester City News*, April 14, 1906, p.5.

³⁹ 1901 Census.

⁴⁰ Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society* (Routledge), London, 1990, p.82.

⁴¹ *Manchester City News*, June 20, 1906, p.5.

⁴² Manchester and Salford directories, various dates.

⁴³ *Manchester City News*, Aug 24, 1912, p.5.

middle-class professional elite and the commercially successful.⁴⁴ No records remain of Catton's rate of pay as editor, and what evidence there is for the pay of his contemporaries varies wildly, as outlined in Chapter Two. The editor of the weekly *Manchester City News* was paid £1,000 a year in 1897,⁴⁵ a figure on a par with other provincial editors of the time, according to an industry commentator.⁴⁶ The evening *Sunderland Echo* paid its editor £6 a week at the turn of the century.⁴⁷ Based on the success of the *Athletic News*, Catton's dual role as editor and chief sports reporter, his seeming myriad duties on the other Hulton titles, and his home environment, it is safe to say his earnings placed him among the highest paid journalists in Manchester.

The years Catton spent as editor saw several changes to his family circumstances. His first wife, Mary, the mother of the couple's four children aged between 21 and 28, died in June, 1908, aged 53, with Catton at her bedside.⁴⁸ Ten months later, Catton, aged 49, was married a second time. He appears to have embarked on an office romance, marrying Florence Cragg, 20 years his junior, who was employed establishing the reference department for the Hulton titles. The marriage service was conducted by a Baptist minister

⁴⁴ Catton's parents were both dead by late 1900. His father died in Harrogate, intestate, in 1889, and his mother, who appears to have then moved to the Whitby area, passed away in September, 1900, possibly with Catton's eldest daughter, Florence, as a companion. Bearing in mind his parents' economic circumstances, it appears unlikely that Catton enjoyed any significant financial benefit at the time of their deaths.

⁴⁵ A. J. Lee, 'The Management of a Victorian Local Newspaper, the Manchester City News, 1864-1900', *Business History*, VolXV, 1973, p.140.

⁴⁶ John B. Mackie, *Modern Journalism. A Handbook of Instruction and Counsel for the Young Journalist* (Crosby Lockwood and Son), London, 1894, p.83.

⁴⁷ Maurice Milne, 'Survival of the fittest? Sunderland newspapers in the nineteenth century', in Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (eds), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester University Press), 1982, p.221.

⁴⁸ *Evening Chronicle*, June 1, 1908, p.3; Mary Catton death certificate – she died of 'cirrhosis of the liver, 6 months Exhaustion', and it is interesting to speculate as to whether the years she spent as a teenager and young woman handling metals as a gold wire drawer may have contributed to her condition.

at the Union Chapel, Manchester.⁴⁹ Prior to joining the Manchester newspapers, Florence had established a reputation as an indexer, including work in New York with both the Astor Library and the publisher Macmillan.⁵⁰ The year after Catton's second marriage, his son Alfred emigrated to Ontario, Canada, aged 26, and found work in Toronto as a printer. Catton underwent 'an operation for a minor, but none the less painful ailment' in a Manchester hospital in 1915, and wrote of the 'long days of irksome convalescence'.⁵¹ Catton's second marriage was touched by tragedy with the death of an infant son in 1917, with the couple later adopting a child.⁵² Already extensively travelled, a female professional thriving in the male-dominated world of newspapers, one senses that Florence Catton introduced, perhaps, broader horizons to the Catton household. She was said to have been, 'A woman of wide interests, she was a lover of London and was devotedly interested in its artistic features'. There is a sense that, on an intellectual and social level, the couple may have had more in common than Catton and his first wife. Catton holidayed in Denmark in 1910, a year after his second marriage, the first mention of a foreign holiday, although he naturally took in some football matches during the trip.⁵³ In early 1914 the couple spent time in Rome,⁵⁴ although by the following year Catton was on more familiar holiday territory with a fortnight in Wales in September. The principality was seemingly a favourite autumn holiday destination 'after the daily joy of cricket for four

⁴⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, March 23, 1909, p.3. Florence appears to have been a regular church-goer up until her death.

⁵⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, March 23, 1909, p.3; *Wimbledon Boro News*, April 24, 1931, p.2. The development of ancillary roles in support of the editorial department, including the organisation of library and reference material for use by journalists, is another obvious sign of the further development and increasing specialisations within an ever-more complex industry.

⁵¹ *Athletic News*, Nov 15, 1915, p.4, Nov 29, 1915.

⁵² *Wimbledon Boro News*, April 24, 1931, p.2; Catton will.

⁵³ *Sporting Chronicle*, Jan 10, 1917, p.4.

⁵⁴ *Athletic News*, April 13, 1914, p.4.

consecutive months'.⁵⁵ In September, 1923, the couple were holidaying in the Channel Islands.⁵⁶

In assessing Catton's professional standing during his time as editor, any number of invitations, opportunities and incidents stand testament to a career on the rise. In 1907, seven years into Catton's spell as editor he was included for the first time in *Wisden Cricketer's Almanack's* 'Births And Deaths of Cricketers' section, a fast-expanding list of the great and the good of the game, which numbered only a dozen or so sports journalists among some 3,000 names of cricket's 'immortals' – predominantly players of all standards and administrators. The list merely recorded the name, a note on the relevant club or a career feature – in Catton's case, 'Editor of the *Athletic News*' – and date of birth and, if necessary, death. Although there is no record of Catton's reaction to the 'honour', there can be little doubt it proved a significant marker in a cricket lover's life. That same year, a group of players agitating for the formation of a footballers' union felt it useful to curry favour with Catton, appointing him one of eight vice-presidents of the new Manchester-based organisation, with the other seven all connected with professional clubs.⁵⁷ Catton was a guest speaker at the first national conference of the referees of England and Wales, held in Nottingham in May, 1908, when the Union of Association Referees was formed, an issue considered later.⁵⁸ By 1909, Catton had introduced a weekly 'Stray Leaves' column, at first advertised as a new summer feature, possibly to make up for any shortfall of

⁵⁵ *Athletic News*, Sept 18, 1922, p.4. Catton made time during his stay in Aberystwyth to interview a member of the Welsh FA about the local soccer scene.

⁵⁶ *Athletic News*, Sept 24, 1923, p.4.

⁵⁷ *Athletic News*, Jan 27, 1908, p.1.

⁵⁸ *Athletic News*, May 11, 1908, p.5.

copy during the football close season. After a winter break it returned in May, 1910 and, from 1911, as an unbroken weekly feature for the rest of Catton's editorship.⁵⁹ The column provided an unrivalled platform in British sports journalism for Catton to wander freely over the big issues of the day, offering his own assessment and verdict on controversies and talking points in most major sports, although football and cricket topics were in the majority. But it was not unusual for the column, carried without fail on page four, to include an often idiosyncratic and individualistic look at the more fringe elements of Catton's sporting constituency. Considering Catton's views on the worth of sport as a means of binding the British colonies together, it is perhaps not surprising that the first column highlighted an FA tour of South Africa, describing the party as 'missionaries of empire'. Catton was invited to sit on a seven-man panel of Lancashire County Cricket Club members appointed in 1913 to examine issues such as season ticket sales, ground redevelopment, youth coaching and the election of club officials, and to report their findings to the club committee. The move was prompted by criticism of the running of the club by the team skipper.⁶⁰ Catton had been an Old Trafford member since 1897 and had been reporting club news for even longer, and his invitation could probably be said to rest on a combination of personal merit and professional standing. In May of that same year Catton was elected president of the national referees' union, succeeding Football League vice-president and former referee Charles Sutcliffe.⁶¹ In April, 1921, Catton was asked to

⁵⁹ *Athletic News*, May 9, 1910, p.4. The editor's first regular opinion column had been launched in spring 1906 under the heading 'Footballiana', covering football news and gossip during the summer months and ceasing with the restart of the competitive season.

⁶⁰ *Athletic News*, Aug 25, 1913, p.1, Sept 15, p.1 and p.4, Sept 29, p.1, Dec 1, p.1.

⁶¹ *Athletic News*, May 26, 1913, p.3. The announcement warranted the rare use of a photograph of Catton.

give a talk to London referees on the eve of the cup final, suggesting club programmes could be used to educate young players 'in the fine points of the rules'. It was one of many after-dinner speeches and keynote addresses Catton was invited to deliver in the course of his career.⁶² His intimate knowledge of the leading sportsmen of his day prompted cricket writer Sir Home Gordon to contact him in 1923 seeking information 'from the amazing store of knowledge you weekly draw upon', to aid in 'a huge work of statistics' he was compiling. The bowling pace and personal details of more than 200 cricketers were proving elusive to come by.⁶³ Catton's efforts must have proved fruitful, for he received an acknowledgement in the preface to the work published the following year.⁶⁴ The demand for Catton's help and involvement in a variety of roles over the full period of his editorship point to the importance of both the man and the office in the eyes of the sporting fraternity. He was occupying an influential position at the interface between the newspaper industry and professional sport. Catton, it is fair to say, grew into the role of editor of the *Athletic News*, and the position of influence that came with the job, and the paper, in turn, benefited from the skills that he brought to the role. The demands of editorship appear not to have hampered his role as sports reporter, and the manner in which he fulfilled his writing duties will be examined next.

⁶² *Athletic News*, April 25, 1921.

⁶³ Catton Correspondence, held at Arsenal Football Club Museum, Vol F-G, July 7, 1923, p.602.

⁶⁴ Sir Home Gordon, *Cricket Form At A Glance 1901-1923* (Duckworth and Co), London, 1924, p.VIII.

5:3 'The situation was far from pleasant': Gathering the news

As editor of the *Athletic News*, Catton was at the centre of a network of sporting information. He was privy to the thoughts, ambitions and prejudices of a generation of sporting stars and sports administrators. The *Athletic News* was a conduit through which passed the news, opinion and gossip concerning the country's popular spectator sports. Part of the information that came Catton's way did so simply because he was the editor of an influential sports paper. But there is also a very real sense that Catton had built up a favoured position of trust in the sub-culture he chronicled.

Information would be passed on face to face in the myriad social and professional meetings that punctuated his working week. Catton, for example, had acted as an intermediary in offering ex-international footballer Harry Makepeace a coaching job with a Dutch club after having been approached by the club for help whilst reporting a cricket match at the Oval.⁶⁵

The mail, too, was a vital means of maintaining contacts. In one issue of January, 1913, for example, Catton gave details of letters he had received from two former English footballers working successfully as coaches in Germany, and giving details of the growth of the game in that country. His postbag had also included a letter from Fiji, outlining the progress of the 'barefoot' game in the South Seas, plus a letter from the chairman of the Commonwealth Football Association of Australia. Catton also gave an update on the game in the USA culled from the pages of an American sports

⁶⁵ *Athletic News*, Nov 24, 1919, p.4.

magazine.⁶⁶ His correspondents included a reader of many years in the Punjab.⁶⁷ In 1915 alone, he mentions reading three different French publications, *Sporting*, *L'Auto*, and *Excelsior*. The Argentine Football Association sent him a copy of their 'annual' for 1917, listing clubs, leagues and developments in Latin American internationals.⁶⁸ In March, 1923, Catton wrote that his post that week had included letters and newspapers from Brussels, Paris, Gothenburg, Las Palmas, Nairobi, Pretoria, Madrid and Australia, all proof of, '... the universality of sport, and the way that *The Athletic News* moves about the world'.⁶⁹ A Dorset FA official wrote to Catton following a foreign tour, to proclaim, 'I had no idea "Tityrus" was so well known in Australia'.⁷⁰

Catton's postbag might range from a letter from a football manager seeking publicity for his record in the game to help him secure another job; sports writers alerting him to an exciting new playing talent; a footballer seeking a helping hand in finding a coaching post abroad.⁷¹ A football administrator might write asking for 'constructive criticism' on a move to develop youth football; ex-players coaching on the Continent asked Catton to alert them of possible vacancies in England, and to broadcast their wish to return home; a father seeking a cricket trial for his son at Old Trafford sought Catton's aid.⁷²

⁶⁶ *Athletic News*, Jan 6, 1913, p.4.

⁶⁷ *Athletic News*, July 27, 1914, p.4.

⁶⁸ *Sporting Chronicle*, April 26, 1917, p.4.

⁶⁹ *Athletic News*, March 26, 1923, p.4. There are no clues as to whether Catton could read French or Spanish, or whether he enlisted the help of others to translate.

⁷⁰ Catton correspondence, Arsenal FC, Vol D-E, Sept 16, 1925, p.449A.

⁷¹ Catton correspondence, Arsenal FC, Vol T-V, Oct 8, 1910, p.1750; Vol H, probably Oct, 1913, p.812; Vol P-R, July 15, 1924, p.1339.

⁷² Catton correspondence, Arsenal FC, Vol S-T, Sept 14, 1918, p.1918; Vol F-G, Feb 27, 1919, p.572, and Vol B-C, May 12, no year, p.206; Vol G-H, Jan 15, 1922, p.634.

Football club secretaries wrote explaining the reasons behind a transfer or enclosing details of club finances and transfer dealings, or even, following a request from Catton, outlining the personality and character of a player.⁷³

The use Catton would make of the information supplied would vary. Some items were marked private and, judging from the columns of the *Athletic News* for the period concerned, Catton honoured the request. Other letters prompted the sort of response the correspondents craved, publicity.

The above letters to Catton, with due regard to issues of chance and motive in terms of their survival, provide an illustration of the central role Catton came to assume in the processing and dissemination of sports news in the first decades of the twentieth century. For those prepared to impart information, Catton seems to have been regarded as a man with the ear of officialdom, an intimate knowledge of the jobs market, a man who could be trusted to use sensitive information in a constructive manner, a skilled journalist working for a title worth currying favour with, a veteran, and a friend, even, with a lifetime's experience of sport – a potential ally in the quest for public sympathy.

Catton also appears to have made it his business to keep abreast of sports news from across the world. He regularly mentions being sent sports papers from the Continent, in particular, from France, and he used the foreign point of view on sport as a discussion point in his articles. He was also in touch with

⁷³ Catton correspondence Arsenal FC Vol H-K, Feb 10, 1922, p.1378; Vol E-F, July 27, 1922, p.504; Vol H-K, Nov 11, and Nov 8, 1924, p.930.

sporting developments in Australia, North America and Latin America. News from abroad broadened the horizons of his weekly musings and added to the aura of knowledge and expertise that gradually accrued to Catton's journalism. On a more basic level, Catton and his colleagues on the *Athletic News* were seen as a font of information and sporting probity when readers sought a definitive view on the rules and history of a variety of sports. For example, Catton writes of an 'amazing' postbag from officers and men seeking clarification of football's rules during the First World War.⁷⁴ It is pertinent here to mention an oft-repeated compliment associated with Catton and occasionally other senior journalists, regarding their ready command of sporting facts and figures. Contemporaries felt the trait worth highlighting. The retrieval of sports records would have been a time-consuming or, occasionally, an impossible chore for the uninitiated. Widespread evidence of the slow and erratic development of editorial reference libraries, comprising the almanacs and works of record of the day, point to an aspect of newspaper reporting still in its infancy. The ability to accurately recall past deeds, or even be aware of them, possibly through personal files – a skill a modern reader might consider grossly overrated – could, in an age of sparse resources, prove an important factor in an individual's career chances and office standing. It could, for some observers, represent a building block in the make-up of a 'professional' journalist.

The job of gathering news, of gaining trust and insight, was eased for men like Catton by the often-easy access to players in the period under review. The

⁷⁴ *Sporting Chronicle*, May 30, 1917, p.4.

days of socialising together at sports club 'smoking concerts' and informal post-match social gatherings might have been numbered, especially when the demands of daily paper journalism ate into the reporter's free time after a game and when professionalism saw clubs regularly travelling great distances on tight deadlines to fulfil fixtures. From his days in Nottingham, Catton recalled both County and Forest staging match-day social events, with noted professional entertainers sharing the stage with the players.⁷⁵ But even by the turn of the century there were still opportunities for clubmen and others to relax together. Showpiece matches, in particular, internationals and cup finals, might see the press invited to official dinners.⁷⁶

Ready access, of course, meant that writers were on hand when players wanted to dole out their own criticisms of a report of their own play or of an incident seemingly misinterpreted. Catton recalled a replayed FA Cup final between Sheffield United and Southampton at the Crystal Palace in 1902. Southampton had scored a disputed goal to force a replay. Prior to kick-off Catton 'went down to the dressing cubicles in the pavilion to ascertain the teams before they went out', and he was confronted by United back Peter Boyle who remonstrated with him over his version of the disputed goal in his

⁷⁵ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.156-157; see also *Athletic News*, Jan 29, 1923, p.4.

⁷⁶ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.184-186. Catton writes of travelling by rail and ferry with the Football League team and officials for a match against the Irish League played at Cliftonville in October, 1902, and being entertained by the Irish League at a post-match dinner; he travelled by rail back to Manchester from a Cardiff football international with Welsh goalkeeper Billy Meredith, and benefited from the player's dismay at losing 1-0 to England, being presented with the star's discarded international jersey; in 1902, Catton travelled from Lancashire's match against Gloucestershire at Bristol, to a Test match the next day in Birmingham, with internationals Archie MacLaren and John Tyldesley, 'and discussed the game all the way'. Catton even found himself sharing a 'double-bedded room' with Tyldesley in a Piccadilly hotel during the Lord's Test later that summer, *Athletic News*, Oct 13, 1902, p.4, Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, p.264, pp.92-94. John Macadam, *The Macadam Road* (Jarrolds), London, 1955, pp.111-112, gives an insight into how relationships between the press and a touring party of sportsmen could break down.

match report. He 'indignantly denied that the ball ever touched him, and threatened to do all manner of things with my poor body. No doubt he was annoyed and at the moment heated'. With Catton attempting to explain away the conflict of opinion, a naked Bill Foulke, the United keeper, intervened, along with team-mate Ernest Needham, to defuse the situation. With kick-off minutes away and nerves frayed Catton, with masterly understatement, considered, 'The situation was far from pleasant'.⁷⁷ England international Charles Buchan recalled of Catton, 'Though I knew him, he did not mince words about my play in general. After one game he called me a 'sand-dancer'. I was rather inclined to take exception – remember, I was very young at the time'. But a senior Sunderland team-mate persuaded him of the maxim that no publicity is bad publicity, and Buchan let the perceived slight rest.⁷⁸ As far as Catton's recollections of confrontations between player and press are concerned, disagreements appear to have been rare, or at least of a nature to have been soon forgotten. Of course, the likelihood of petty squabbles over interpretation and wounded pride ever seeing the light of day appear slim.

Too close a contact with a player, especially away from the sporting environment, could undermine expectations. Catton visited an unnamed international footballer to interview him at home and recorded his feelings some years later.

⁷⁷ Catton, **Wickets and Goals**, pp.167-168. For the views of Cliff Bastin, the Arsenal and England winger of the 1930s, on 'sensationalist' reporting, and his change of opinion after taking up journalism, see Cliff Bastin and Brian Glanville, **Cliff Bastin Remembers** (Ettrick Press), London, 1950, p.106 and p.134. Raich Carter, **Footballer's Progress** (Edward Lanchbery ed) (Sporting Handbooks), London, 1950, pp.50-53, also has some interesting comments to make on the way press publicity could affect a player, and E. A. (Eddie) Hapgood, **Football Ambassador** (Sporting Handbooks), London, 1945, pp.137-138, presents a more understanding attitude.

⁷⁸ Charles Buchan, **A Lifetime in Football** (Phoenix House), London, 1955, p.89.

The player wore a tattered shirt, his face was unwashed, his hair uncombed, and his arms were thin, even emaciated. He looked a poor wretch in a miserable home. Yet he was a great player, the idol of crowds, and extremely popular with his intimates. Of his private habits I cannot speak, for I do not know, but I never had such a disillusionment, and I have had many.⁷⁹

The picture conveyed, of a flawed sporting hero, with the writer's own expectations shattered, says much about the high estimate Catton was prepared to bestow on sportsmen simply because they were athletes, with the correlation that a sporting career would be accompanied by a private life redolent of clean living, ambition and pride. The experienced sports journalist, inured by the years of reporting the foibles and fallibilities of sportsmen, could still crave, and anticipate, a figure to look up to.

Catton appears to have been at ease mixing with the sportsmen he wrote about. Many professional relationships developed over time into friendships, boosted, no doubt, by a shared passion for sport and a shared respect for what each was trying to achieve.⁸⁰ Catton frequently referred to the need for constructive criticism of players and cautioned against outright blame over shortcomings on the field of play. As football, in particular, became more organised through the various leagues at national and regional levels, it was

⁷⁹ Catton, **Wickets and Goals**, p292.

⁸⁰ For the type of friendships that could develop between a sports writer and sportsmen in the inter-war years, see the reminiscences of sports columnist Trevor Wignall, **Almost Yesterday** (Hutchinson), London, 1949, pp.142-143, pp.156-157, p.182, p.202; Trevor Wignall, **Ringside** (Hutchinson), London, 1941, p.69, p.111, p.143; Trevor Wignall, **Never A Dull Moment** (Hutchinson), London, 1940, p.138. On the same theme, see also, V. A. S. Beanland, **Great Games and Great Players. Some thoughts and recollections of a sports journalist** (Allen and Co), London, 1945, p.146. For the easy access to sports stars enjoyed by a privileged number of reporters, see B. J. Evans, **How to Become a Sporting Journalist** (W. H. Allen), London, 1946, p.14, pp.17-18, p.54, p.47.

natural for the local press to provide reports from both home and away fixtures. This would often entail the local reporter travelling with the team, to defray costs, for ease of arrangement, and, in part, no doubt, to help cement the special relationship that developed between the sporting club and the local newspaper in the fostering of group identity, a point noted by several historians.⁸¹ Such a close working association could create tensions and leave the reporter in an uneasy position if he felt the need to criticise the host club or players. Catton's work with the Hulton newspapers meant that he no longer had to follow the fortunes of any one particular football club throughout a season, although he was keenly aware of the pressures that could be brought to bear on the 'club reporter', and his summer reporting duties covering Lancashire left him open to similar concerns. Catton devoted one of his 'Stray Leaves' columns to the difficulty of remaining objective, admitting, '... even trained journalists, professional writers, if it suits, are not altogether free from partial accounts of matches in which their favourite club is engaged'.

Hundreds of journalists have contracted the football fever, and I doubt if such whole-heartedness can be found in any other section of pressmen who are specialists . . . But scores of these men, possibly hundreds, are obliged to report the matches of one particular club throughout the season. They, consciously or unconsciously, come under the influence of that club. They listen to the secretary, the team-manager, the directors and the players. One point of view is so constantly presented to them that it is not easy to see the other side . . . I go so far as to say that the readers of local newspapers expect these prints to adopt the local point of view. They look, or the majority do, for what they consider club loyalty,

⁸¹ N. Fishwick, *English Football and Society 1910-1950* (Manchester University Press), 1989, pp.97-100; J. Hill and J. Williams (eds), *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele University Press), 1996; Dave Russell, *Football and the English. A Social History of Association Football in England 1863-1995* (Carnegie Publishing), Preston, 1997, pp.64-69.

a very precious thing in its place, for it is the force which keeps so many clubs in existence.

Catton added,

All of us – that is, those who write on football – have to keep our eyes wide open. We intend to tell the truth, and we may believe that what we write is the truth. There's the difficulty, and that is magnified again and again for the hurried reporter who cannot shut his ears against the insistent iteration of the club version of the thrilling episodes in a big match.⁸²

Fishwick has described the interplay between club and the local reporter in the inter-war years as 'a special, if not always harmonious, relationship'.⁸³ The reporter needed to be objective, to steer a middle path between an automatic lauding of a club's efforts and an overly critical stance in search of novelty or controversy. The attainment of an objective reporting stance, whilst maintaining valuable contacts throughout the sporting world, and whilst producing interesting stories for public consumption in a keenly competitive working environment, stand testament to the development of a 'professional' reporting outlook. Catton's seeming mastery of that combination of skills adds to the image of a man at ease with the demands of his work.

5:4 Union matters: 'Protection from interlopers and from rainstorms'

One means of gaining a partial insight into Catton's opinion of the social and economic standing of the journalist and the seeming dichotomy between trade

⁸² *Athletic News*, Dec 19, 1921, p.4. See also Alfred Kingston, *Pitman's Popular Guide to Journalism. A practical handbook for all engaged in or seeking to qualify for professional work on the newspaper press* (Pitman and Son), London, 1925, pp.23-24, for advice to the would-be sports reporter of the 1920s on the pitfalls of biased reporting.

⁸³ Fishwick, *English Football*, pp.94-100.

and profession, is through his attitude to the creation of a union and self-help groups among newspaper editorial staff. Catton was an original member of the National Association of Journalists, founded in 1884,⁸⁴ out of which grew the Institute of Journalists in 1889. The NAJ aimed to promote the 'interests of the profession', with its successor, the IOJ, more overt in its long-term goal of achieving 'formal and definite professional standing' for journalists. How long Catton remained a member of the NAJ and IOJ is not known but, it would seem, by the time of the foundation of the National Union of Journalists in 1907, or soon afterwards, he had transferred his allegiance to the trade union, seemingly maintaining his membership over almost 30 years until his death.⁸⁵ The IOJ was consistent, although ultimately unsuccessful, in pressing for the creation of an examination scheme to control access to journalistic positions. It welcomed proprietors as members and worked to improve the status of journalists. But the rival NUJ accused the IOJ of failing to address the problem of widespread low pay. The union took a more pragmatic stance, concentrating its efforts on improvements to pay and conditions at the expense of the 'professional' question, and barring proprietors, managers and directors from membership, but not editors. F. J. Mansfield, writing in the NUJ's official history, succinctly summarised the potential friction between issues of status and pay, suggesting, 'All very nice and agreeable to have the

⁸⁴ Report of IOJ conference, *The Times*, Sept 14, 1935.

⁸⁵ The NUJ newspaper, *The Journalist*, noting Catton's death in 1936, suggested '... Central London has lost a veteran member, and the Union one of its foundation members', stating that Catton had transferred from Manchester to the Central London branch at the time of his move to the capital. A tribute to Catton carried in the same paper at the time he left Manchester in 1924 noted his work on behalf of the charitable NUJ 'Press Fund'.

toast of "The Press" honoured at the mayoral banquet, but what about the money with which to buy the dress suit?'⁸⁶

The NAJ began with an initial membership of 221, rising to 830 in 1888.⁸⁷ The IOJ membership was said to be 'nearly four thousand' in 1894.⁸⁸ The NUJ recruited an initial 738 members on formation in 1907, with numbers rising to 2,160 in 1911, 4,680 in 1921, 5,565 in 1931 (representing 'about 90 per cent of the working journalists of England and Wales', according to the 1930 *Fleet Street Annual*), and by 1936 it had risen to 6,232 (with the newspaper industry reckoned to be employing about 10,000 journalists, according to the *Fleet Street Annual of 1935*).⁸⁹

Mark Hampton, in his study of the IOJ and the 'Professional Ideal' at the turn of the last century, concludes,

At least two distinct ideals were, then, available for journalists as members of an occupation. They could regard themselves as 'professionals', whether or not this entailed providing a service that no other individuals could provide with the same degree of efficiency and expertise. Alternatively, they could see themselves as employers and employees, positioned within a series of competitions; that between newspapers for the consumers' favour; that between employees for jobs; and that between employees and employers for the newspapers' earnings. The acceptance of one ideal over the other was not inevitable, yet . . . there were factors inherent within the structure of journalism –

⁸⁶ F. J. Mansfield, "Gentlemen, The Press!" *Chronicles of a Crusade (Official history of the National Union of Journalists)* (W. H. Allen), London, 1943, p.17.

⁸⁷ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855-1914* (Croom Helm), London, 1976, p.114.

⁸⁸ Mackie, *Modern Journalism*, p.104.

⁸⁹ Clement J. Bundock, *The National Union of Journalists. A Jubilee History 1907-1957* (Oxford University Press), 1957, p.243.

the ownership of newspapers, the dependence upon consumers – that gave the employer/employee dichotomy a greater purchase.⁹⁰

For Catton to be involved at the inception of two significant organisations designed to protect the position of journalists suggests a man keenly aware of the, at times, precarious and poorly rewarded lot of the reporter, 'positioned within a series of competitions', and a man keen to make use of whatever associational infrastructure could be grafted on to the occupation. He was not afraid to be seen to be in the minority, judging by the relatively small numbers signing up for early membership of the NAJ and later the NUJ, although it must be noted that Manchester was a centre of union agitation in 1907.⁹¹ Following the IOJ's failure to make ground in the cause of journalists' 'professional status', Catton appears to have given backing to the drive for unionisation.

Catton's support for the NAJ when he was in his mid-20s with a young family to provide for and an uncertain career path ahead, is unsurprising. But the motives behind his recruitment to the ranks of the new union in 1907 are a little more difficult to understand. Catton was, by then, a 47-year-old editor, holding one of the most important jobs in British sports journalism. He was busy establishing a reputation as an outstanding reporter and columnist, based on his writing ability, experience, contacts and general personality, the very traits of creative individualism lauded by journalists as the means of

⁹⁰ Mark Hampton, 'Journalists and the "Professional Ideal" in Britain: the Institute of Journalists, 1884-1907', *Historical Research*, Vol 72, No 178, June, 1999 p.199.

⁹¹ By 1911, support for the NUJ among Manchester journalists was described as 'amazing' in a district report, with no more than 20 'eligible non-members in the city', NUJ annual report, 1911, p.85, MSS.86/1/NEC/2, Modern Records Centre, Warwick University.

advancement.⁹² Clearly, Catton, as a writer, did not then need the collective support that union membership offered, nor, it can be speculated, did Catton, the editor, relish the potential conflict of interest arising from union agitation for improved pay and conditions, tenure of office and issues of professional conduct likely to arise between staff and proprietor. One ameliorating factor for the editor may well have been the attitude of Edward Hulton, junior, to the new union. Hulton is said to have given 'every encouragement' to NUJ efforts to establish a central union chapel in the newspaper group's London office in 1921, and he may well have been equally accommodating in Manchester 14 years earlier.⁹³ Whatever the practicalities of the situation, Catton obviously felt strongly enough about the need for collective bargaining and protection, and sure enough of his position, to put aside any reservations as to membership.

No details exist as to what, if any, union issues Catton, as *Athletic News* editor, had to deal with. It may well be that all questions of pay and conditions were handled directly by the proprietors. But the manner in which Catton negotiated a path between union membership and the responsibilities of an editor becomes clear in the publicity he gave to the difficult question of non-journalists writing for the press. From the creation of the NUJ to the closing

⁹² To put Catton's standing into some sort of context, the year after the foundation of the NUJ Catton was interviewed for the regular page one feature of the weekly sports paper *Cricket* (Sept 10, 1908), a slot normally reserved for chats with leading players and administrators. The piece opened, 'There is probably no more widely-read sporting journalist in the world than Mr Catton, the editor of *The Athletic News*, who, as "Tityrus," "J.C." and "Red Rose," must be well known to tens of thousands of followers of cricket and football. He is not only a most prolific and entertaining writer on present-day topics, but a walking encyclopaedia concerning the history of cricket and cricketers: it is, in fact, as easy for him to discuss the introduction of the third stump as to dilate upon the art of "googlie" bowling'. Catton's reputation as a talented sports journalist and authority on games was not in doubt.

⁹³ William Colley, *News Hunter* (Hutchinson), London, 1936, p.199.

years of this study, regular efforts had been made by the union to restrict the writing of press articles, including match reports, by football officials and players, as outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Catton, a working reporter and union member, faced a difficult balancing act. He was also the editor of a specialist weekly newspaper that relied on the good name and expertise of a number of 'star' writers, non-journalists, to enliven his pages with authoritative and informed comment across a number of sports. The *Athletic News* payroll was not exclusively for journalists. Catton was prompted to defend the right of soccer administrators to write press articles in response to a move in 1909 by a faction within the FA to bar fellow members from supplying 'signed contributions on football topics to the newspapers'. Catton wrote,

Journalism is largely a republic, and if gentlemen have the ability to write in an interesting and lucid style, there appears to be no valid and convincing reason why they should not profit from their talent. So long as those who comment on football, cricket . . . uphold the code of honour which should regulate the actions of a man.

Catton reserved his criticism for ghosted articles written on behalf of players.

The most impudent abuse of the day is the alleged preparation of Press articles by players who are paid for the use of their names and never even see the opinions attributed to them until they are common property . . . The bona-fide journalist has a real and lasting grievance . . .⁹⁴

In December, 1913, Catton gave mention on page one of the *Athletic News* of a plea by the NUJ to the FA Council to bar players, referees and officials from acting as 'contributors of news and reports'. Admitting the issue was 'involved', Catton agreed that, 'Encroachment on the legitimate sphere of the

⁹⁴ *Athletic News*, Oct 4, 1909, p.1.

working journalist should be checked', but cautioned against the risk of 'infringing the rights of any man, whether journalist or not, to write generally on football topics'. Stating that the FA had already addressed the issue in previous years, Catton suggested the union press for the right to attend FA meetings in order to prevent a clash of interests on the part of soccer officials. Catton cautioned,

No journalist should be prevented from earning money in a legitimate way by any person who is not a journalist and uses his position on a legislative body to usurp the privileges of a recognised professional journalist. Working journalists have done much for the advancement of the game, especially in its infancy, and can do more. The Football Association would never regret any protection that they gave to these men, often poorly paid, and at least they should see that in all great matches under their control, working journalists should have facilities for writing under cover. Journalists do not ask for more than protection from the interloper and from rainstorms.⁹⁵

Catton, often an advocate of conciliation and arbitration when seeking answers to sporting arguments, was again seeking a compromise solution, extending the rights of the working journalist, rather than curbing those of the administrator, whilst at the same time safeguarding his own ability to commission whoever he felt most appropriate to write on a certain subject.

Catton took a leading role in the work of the Newspaper Press Fund, which had been set up in mid-century to provide financial help for journalists, or their widows, who had fallen on hard times. The fund operated independently of

⁹⁵ *Athletic News*, Dec 15, 1913, p.1. See also Nov 3, p.1, where Catton defends the right of 'newspaper proprietors' to employ 'sketch writers' and 'experts' on the FA Council to illuminate football issues.

both the NUJ and IOJ,⁹⁶ and it was suggested that, for Catton, the charity work was a favoured cause.⁹⁷ Catton was to later rejoin the Institute of Journalists in 1930, and by the time of his death both the NUJ and the IOJ claimed him as one of their own.⁹⁸ Catton had seen fit to be a member of both bodies but his motives cannot be discerned. Perhaps membership of both provided added security in a competitive industry. Perhaps there were contradictory attractions to membership, in having worked for so many years as both editor and reporter. Maybe the financially secure veteran was looking for sociability as much as occupational support. Clearly, both organisations were keen to consider the veteran journalist one of their own. His reputation as a leading sports journalist of his era made sure of that.

However, it is equally clear that Catton, a talented journalist, who appears to have been valued by his employers at each stage of a developing career, felt the need for union protection and occupational support throughout that career. That fact says as much about the uncertain nature of press work, and the issues of poor pay and conditions of employment, as it does about Catton's opinion of unionisation.

⁹⁶ Catton retired from the fund's governing council in 1919, *The Times*, Feb 24, 1919, p.7.

⁹⁷ *Journal of the Institute of Journalists*, Oct, 1936, p.194.

⁹⁸ *The Freemason's Chronicle*, Aug 29, 1936, p.129. Catton's decision to join the IOJ in 1930 may well have been prompted by the social side of Institute affairs. Catton had been a Freemason since 1919, later joining the Alfred Robbins Lodge, in London, as a founder member. The London lodge membership consisted of journalists and, I would suggest, a significant proportion would have been IOJ members. The lodge was named after a former IOJ president. I would like to thank Martin Cherry of the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London, for assistance in piecing together Catton's Masonic involvement. *Journal of the Institute of Journalists*, Oct, 1936, p.194.

5:5 'Where are the loungers and the idlers?': Expressing an opinion

Catton's role as a senior sports reporter and columnist on the Hulton newspapers, and then as editor of the *Athletic News*, provided him with a platform upon which he could expound his own views on sporting topics. His opinions were obviously framed by certain professional and commercial parameters, chief among them probably being an adherence to the newspapers' promotion of properly organised professional sport as a respectable pastime for participant and spectator alike, and the worth of all sports in the development of both a healthy individual and a healthy nation. Within those boundaries, Catton appears to have been free to roam. Certainly, there are no hints, as far as Catton is concerned, of interference in editorial policy from the Hultons. As stated earlier, they knew the manner of editor they were getting in 1900 as Catton had already been on the payroll for almost a decade.

A brief examination of a handful of topics that Catton voiced an opinion on will hopefully illustrate the type of concerns that a senior journalist might consider within his remit, as worthy of comment and debate and likely to be of interest to readers. Some of the issues were aired in the form of short-term campaigns or pleas, and others represented more long standing commitments or hoped-for reforms. The success, or otherwise, of Catton's calls for change, illustrates the extent to which he could be seen to be an opinion former within the sporting community, and will help gauge what influence, if any, his views commanded.

Catton was ahead of his time in his support for a substitute being allowed to replace an injured player in football games. It was not until the 1965/66 season that the rules of the game were changed to allow teams to name a substitute, but Catton suggested their use be considered in a *Pall Mall Gazette* article in the late 1880s, in particular to allow the replacement of an injured goalkeeper whose withdrawal from the game without a replacement could ruin the contest. It was a theme he was to return to several times. Quite naturally, his views altered slightly over the years. In 1897 he was in favour of substitutes being allowed for any position, and by 1913 he was strongly in favour of an outfield substitute being allowed in international and representative matches, and for keepers in all games, 'in the interest of true sport'. Although he rigorously maintained his support for a goalkeeping substitute over the course of his career, by 1925 his concern over the possibility of 'sham' injuries being used to introduce a fresh pair of legs among outfield players saw him voice opposition to a utility twelfth man. Catton occasionally mentions club managers and legislators being in favour of the changes he proposed, but his views did not generate enough support to provoke a positive reaction.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Catton is unsure himself just what year the article in question appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, suggesting either 1887 or 1888. But he is clear on the reaction the suggestion created, with Corinthians founder N. L. (Pa) Jackson, among others, objecting to the idea, 'When Football Substitutes Should Be Allowed'. *All Sports Weekly*, Oct 31, 1925, p.6. See also *All Sports Weekly*, Nov 20, 1926, p.6, and Dec 25, p.6. In the *Athletic News*, Aug 25, 1913, p.4, he claimed Jackson had 'poked fun at what he considered a possible innovation which he thought would lead to all manner of malpractices'. See also *Athletic News*, Feb 17, 1913, p.4; Dec 8, 1913, p.4; Nov 13, 1911, p.1; *Sunday Chronicle*, Feb 14, 1897, p.4. The extent to which Catton was pushing against the conventions of his day is revealed in a 1937 coaching manual featuring the FA's views on the 'correct' development of the game. Writing 50 years after Catton had first mooted the need for substitutes to cover for seriously injured players in order to prevent games becoming meaningless, the manual cautioned against the Continental trend to allow substitutions, suggesting, 'To us Britishers the whole principle is wrong, even though we have to admit that many a match has been ruined by a key player receiving a serious injury early in the game', F. N. S. Creek, *Association Football* (Dent and Sons, London), 1937, p.169.

Catton was certainly ahead of his time when it came to the question of how best to train professional footballers. The normal coaching regime at clubs for the vast majority of Catton's career centred on fitness work, with the honing of ball skills seemingly of secondary importance.¹⁰⁰ In his book, **The Real Football**, published in 1900, Catton spells out his concern that 'charging, bustling, boring, and unchivalrous tactics' were being cultivated at the expense of skill on the ball. It was an early plea from the sports reporter, with the game still in its relative infancy, for brain over brawn on the sports field, for the 'cultivation of deft foot work'.¹⁰¹ In order to better develop the skills of the player on the training ground, Catton was keen to support the promotion of ex-players to the role of trainer and team manager. In 1911, he questioned the trend for hiring former 'pedestrians rather than veteran footballers' as club trainers.¹⁰² It was a theme he returned to two years later.¹⁰³ In 1917, with one eye on the eventual regeneration of professional football after the debilitating toll of the war years, Catton urged professional clubs to develop a greater involvement with their local communities in order to nurture young, local talent. He suggested clubs might consider creating a feeder system for talented players. Catton was critical of the lack of youth coaching undertaken by professional clubs within their own communities, contrasting them unfavourably with Academicals of Copenhagen, who boasted several teams, with the youngsters coached by the first team players.¹⁰⁴ In a 1919 'Stray

¹⁰⁰ For a brief assessment of the training regimes current up to 1915, see Mason, **Association Football**, pp.108-109, p.131.

¹⁰¹ J. A. H. Catton, **The Real Football. A Sketch of the Development of the Association Game** (Sands and Co), London, 1900, pp.182-183.

¹⁰² *Athletic News*, July 3, 1911, p.4.

¹⁰³ *Sporting Chronicle*, Jan 10, 1917, p.4. For Catton's views on the worth of the ex-player as manager see *Athletic News*, Feb 17, 1913, p.4.

¹⁰⁴ *Sporting Chronicle*, Jan 10, 1917, p.4. Catton had visited Denmark for a holiday in 1910 during which time he toured the club mentioned.

Leaves' column directed at young players making their way in the game, Catton urged clubs to adopt training regimes designed to familiarise the youngsters with the ball.¹⁰⁵ Catton criticised the departure of 'the best coaches' to foreign clubs, a trend particularly noticeable in the years up to the First World War, calling instead for them to be given jobs in England to show how best to trap and control the ball, how to dribble, 'how to pass with either foot'. That article, at least, provoked a positive response at the next match Catton reported. Aston Villa chairman Fred Rinder approached Catton and gained permission to reprint it in his club programme, so much was he in agreement with the sentiments expressed. Bill MacCracken, the Newcastle United skipper, also congratulated Catton on his coaching ideas.¹⁰⁶ Catton returned to the subject in 1928 with an article headlined, 'No More Excuses Please!', perhaps hinting at the exasperation felt as one of his pet wishes seemed no closer fruition despite years of campaigning. He noted the absence of decent ball control in First Division matches, and the continuing reliance on stamina training. The article lays open Catton's passion for the finer points of the game, and he writes with a keen sense of the joy to be gained from a mastery of decent football skills, an empathy perhaps unexpected from one who had never played sport at any level beyond schoolboy knockabouts.¹⁰⁷

Catton maintained an equally consistent line over the years in his defence of the professional sportsman, especially the footballer. His stand was at odds

¹⁰⁵ *Athletic News*, Nov 17, 1919, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ *Athletic News*, Nov 24, 1919, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ *All Sports Weekly*, Jan 7, 1928, p.3. For Catton's view on the need for skills training in other sports, see *Athletic News*, Jan 22, 1923, p.4.

with a view prevalent among many influential opinion formers, especially adherents of the amateur game, that professionalism, and the spare time associated with it, left players open to develop bad habits and an indolent lifestyle.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, after a working life supporting the right of the skilled sportsman to profit from his talent, it hardly seems surprising that one of Catton's last significant pieces of journalism before his death, a review of the game's progress for the *Athletic News Football Annual* 50th issue, should include a defence of the paid player. The Hulton newspapers, and Catton, had been staunch supporters of the professional sportsman since the annual's first edition in 1887, the second season in which professional football had been sanctioned officially. Throughout that period the worth of the paid man had been regularly questioned in certain influential circles. It was a regular irritant for Catton, and he was moved to ask the annual's readers,

Where are the loungers and the idlers that were to be created by the "new movement"? What harm has the paid footballer done to the sport? Does he not play a game that gives him delight? Does he not try to excel and gain popularity by as decent a kind of life as others in any miscellaneous group of men? Occasionally a superior person in these days says: "What kind of fellows are these 'pro' footballers? Are they decent?" That question has been put to the writer within recent years. The instant answer cannot be printed on these pages.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ For the view that professional football bred laziness and bad habits among players left idle for most of the week, see, Creek, *Association Football*, pp.202-204.

¹⁰⁹ Ivan Sharpe (ed), *Athletic News Football Annual 1936-7* (Withy Grove), Manchester, p.7. For an example of Catton's defence of the professional footballer, see *Athletic News*, May 4, 1908, p.4, and on his general view of the Football League's achievements in its first 35 years, see, *All Sports Weekly*, Sept 4, 1926, p.6.

More than 40 years earlier, Catton had commented in the *Sunday Chronicle*, with obvious glee, on the performance of the 10 professionals in England's team for the 4-1 international victory in Glasgow.

... after the wild, crazy rubbish we have seen from time to time in the London papers this season, reflecting in a wickedly libellous fashion on the conduct of the pros, it is pleasant to find the ten paid players and an amateur giving perhaps the finest and most scientific exhibitions of the game ever seen in an International match. One large inference to be drawn from the result and general character of the game is in favour of professionalism. The paid man has not degraded the game, but rather raised the standard of play all round.¹¹⁰

Catton's defence of the professionals had gone hand in hand over the years with a stern opposition to the 'sham amateur'. Whatever the sport, Catton had urged the administrators to embrace professionalism 'under stringent regulations'. In the case of rugby's split over paid players, he had warned, 'that sham amateurism cannot be crushed, and that it is better to encourage honesty and fair and open dealing than secrecy and mean and contemptible secret bargains and payments'.¹¹¹ Catton declared, 'Pseudo-amateurism and uncontrolled professionalism are the bane of any sport'.¹¹² The arrangement in soccer, where both the amateur and the professional games existed in an alliance, however shaky, under the ultimate guidance of the Football Association, was preferable to rugby's split. Writing of the decision by a group of northern rugby clubs to embrace professionalism, Catton suggested,

Many organisations are now about to do openly and under stringent conditions that which they have for years done secretly and without any

¹¹⁰ *Sunday Chronicle*, April 10, 1892, p.4.

¹¹¹ *Sunday Chronicle*, Nov 4, 1894, p.4.

¹¹² *Sunday Chronicle*, Sept 1, 1895.

limit . . . Personally I repeat that I am sorry the English Union is not wise enough and strong enough to keep the disaffected within the fold. The worst charge that can be brought against the seceders is that they are honest.¹¹³

The search for honest dealing in sport led Catton to question the huge amount raised in the name of cricketer W. G. Grace in his testimonial year in 1896. After suggesting, 'our amateurism is all round a shadow, not a substance; a delusion, not reality', he noted the £5,000 raised by a newspaper for Grace and more than £2,300 in a testimonial fund.

All this has been handed to W. G. Grace, who, of course, will still repair to the gentlemen's dressing room on our pavilions, and will not change his flannels in the company of mere professionals . . . What rot! The whole business from end to end reeks of humbug. I do not object – and these are merely my own opinions – to runners being well paid, to cricketers being remunerated, and to any man making the most of his talents with which he has been endowed. More power to him . . . But how can these persons be regarded as amateurs? Englishmen like to call things by their right names. Abolish these terms of distinction, and in the world of sport let us all be on an equality on the green sward, as we shall all be when underneath it. A pure amateur I admire. A fine professional just as much commands one's reverence. What we do not like is the person who takes the pay of a professional and poses as an amateur. I may be singular in my views as to cash and caste in sport, but at least they come from the heart.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Sunday Chronicle*, Sept 1, 1895.

¹¹⁴ *Sunday Chronicle*, May 3, 1896, p.4. For Catton's views on the resurgence in popularity for 'pedestrianism' in the late 1890s, and a campaign in the *Sunday Chronicle* for a rapprochement between the professional elements of the sport and the Amateur Athletic Association, see *Sunday Chronicle* Feb 14, p.4, Sept 12, p.4, Sept 26, p.4, Oct 3, p.4, all 1897, and Sept 25, p.4, and Oct 2, p.4, both 1898.

In cricket, too, Catton was prepared to support the paid player. The run-up to the 1896 Oval Test match against the Australians was marked by a call for higher pay by five professionals in England's line-up. Their written request for a £20 match fee for the deciding game, rather than the normal £10, was turned down and only three of the five were allowed to play after suitable retractions of the pay demand had been made.¹¹⁵ Writing on the eve of the match, Catton noted the manner in which 'the metropolitan press' had 'condemned' the players, and described the matter as 'a sordid, squalid squabble'. But in even stronger terms he exonerates the five professionals from any blame, save that of timing. Warming to his subject, Catton posits, 'If the Mother Country wants to win, let her pay the proper price for the honour of victory'; and on behalf of the professional cricketer he asks, 'Why in the world should he not have a fair share instead of a beggarly pittance?'.¹¹⁶

Catton's support for the professional sportsman seeking fair reward for his skills was a sentiment central to the *Athletic News*' general editorial policy. But bearing in mind Catton's own background it must have been a policy he could support with very few misgivings. His father's teaching career had been marked by an air of independence, a readiness to move from one small private school to the next in a quest for career advancement and fair remuneration. Catton's chosen occupation, too, was one marked, generally, by opportunities, or, indeed, an occupational imperative, to move frequently from employer to employer to maximise earning potential, selling one's skills

¹¹⁵ Ric Sissons, *The Players. A Social History of the Professional Cricketer* (Kingswood Press), London, 1988, pp.178-180.

¹¹⁶ *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 9, 1896, p.4. For Catton's view on the pay of county cricketers compared to that of professionals at northern league clubs, see *Athletic News*, Aug 23, 1919, p.4.

to the highest bidder and tapping into a competitive lineage market to boost financial prospects.

While Catton maintained a consistent line throughout his career in defence of the 'honest' professional and in opposition to the 'sham' amateur, he also maintained a strong belief in the worth of the true amateur, whatever his sport and whatever his level of play.¹¹⁷ The embodiment of the amateur ideal, for Catton, appears to have been the gentleman cricketer, worthy of a place in the top echelons of the English game by reasons of skill and character. In January, 1925, Catton chose, in his new, shortlived position as guest writer on the *Athletic News* to enter the fray over the vexed issue of the captancy of the England Test side. Lancashire and former England professional bowler Cecil Parkin and Lord Hawke, former amateur Yorkshire captain and an influential voice in the cricket establishment, had stoked the issue into life with a public spat over the merits of a professional Test captain. The two camps split along predictable lines of class, with Hawke declaring his opposition to a professional leader on the pitch, a move, in part, favoured by Parkin, which would have breached decades of tradition. Catton had championed the cause of professional sportsmen throughout his writing career, but in this instance he opted to side with the forces of tradition, the established order, in an argument reliant upon images of Empire, class leadership, and a love of the game for sport's sake, and not that of financial reward. Catton introduced his argument with a criticism of both camps for fuelling the controversy at a time when Test skipper Arthur Gilligan and his side were touring Down Under. Catton wrote,

¹¹⁷ For Catton's opinion of the worth of amateurs in professional soccer, see *All Sports Weekly*, Sept 26, 1925, p.6.

To place the cares of captaincy, the responsibility of office, and the hundreds of worries on the shoulders of a professional who is played for his great skill, would not be fair to him, and might very easily not be in the best interests of the side. The greatest of batsmen and bowlers might easily fail under such a burden . . . It is not a position to be coveted, and it by no means follows that the cleverest professional in the world would be the best captain in the world. Let us leave the professional unhampered to play his own game. That is what he is employed for. As cricket is a game, it should be the aim of the M.C.C. and the Boards of Control, on both sides of the world, to encourage amateurism; to enthuse those who play for the love of the game.

Catton concludes his argument,

The leader, preferably, should be a typical English gentleman who has the education, the natural courtesy, the charm of manner, and perhaps even the wealth to grace any assembly or social event, and to make our Colonies feel that the old country, that "Home" can still send forth true-born English gentlemen with our love of a game for the sake of a game. 'This is not the least reflection upon the professional, who, in the matured opinion of thinking people, is paid to play, and not to lead. Let it be remembered that cricket is a game, and that it is even far better to keep it so and encourage amateurs than to win Test matches.'¹¹⁸

The above comments jar a little with Catton's otherwise consistent support for the professional sportsman. The sentiments appear deeply felt and suggest there were limits to the place of the professional in sport, especially cricket, even for the seemingly broadminded editor. Catton was a product of the Victorian middle classes, and the deep-seated issues of class, never far from the surface in that society, were bound to colour Catton's writing, however occasionally.

¹¹⁸ *Athletic News*, Jan 26, 1925, p.4.

Catton was a guest speaker at the first national conference of the referees of England and Wales, held in Nottingham in May, 1908, when the Union of Association Referees was formed. A gathering of around 250 officials heard the newspaperman talk of 'The aims of the Union and how they can be attained', with Catton urging,

. . . a bold and united front . . . to raise the status of referees, to correct inequalities in the system of appointments, to alter the mode of payments, to obtain representation both on the Council of the F.A. and on the International Board.¹¹⁹

The conference speech followed a five-month campaign by Catton, supported by a small number of senior figures from the football establishment, in particular *Athletic News* writers. Catton had aired the possibility of a referees' union being formed in late December, 1907, a matter of weeks after the formation of a professional footballers' union. Catton felt the referees needed to strengthen their hand in their dealings with clubs. Launching his campaign, he suggested that Football League referees,

. . . are virtually professionals, and not a few of them openly declare that they regard their duties as a very remunerative and honourable profession. Like the players, they are wanting more salary – it is natural to do so.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Athletic News*, May 11, 1908, p.5. Although the article does not carry Catton's byline, it is certainly his work and provided the editor with a two-column feature. Catton's speech was reported as ending in 'cheers', with Charles Sutcliffe's provoking 'applause', perhaps a sign of Catton's way with words. Bearing in mind Catton's knowledge of soccer lore, it is hardly surprising that, according to the *Nottingham Guardian*, Mon, May 11, he regaled his audience with the fact the referee's whistle was 'invented' in Nottingham, with details of when it was first used.

¹²⁰ *Athletic News*, Dec 30, 1907, p.1.

Catton was critical of referees' treatment by club directors, 'free with insinuations' in defeat. 'With a strong union behind them referees could assert themselves before some so-called sportsmen without fear of consequences'. Catton was in favour of referees being paid by the Football League rather than individual clubs on a match basis, and failing that he urged that payment be made before kick-off, in order to avoid 'the necessity of having to face directors with more club feeling than chivalry at the conclusion of a game'. He admitted there were faults to be remedied among the referees – 'There are incompetent referees, and always will be, but the clubs elect them for duty. Why put these same men on the list if they are unsatisfactory?' Judging from his column the following week, the suggestion had failed to provoke much of a favourable response, but six weeks later *Athletic News* columnist and Football League official Charles Sutcliffe added his voice to the call for referees to organise themselves in a strongly worded article backing Catton's earlier stand.¹²¹ It seems hardly credible that the two men had not discussed the issue in private before going into print. At any rate, Sutcliffe's spirited article, coming after Catton had sounded the mood of the game and stirred debate, tipped the balance in favour of unionisation. A week after Sutcliffe's demand for action, Catton could report an 'extraordinary response' with the paper 'flooded with letters approving' the project.¹²² By March 2, the *Athletic News* was announcing a referees' meeting in Manchester organised by Sutcliffe. The week after, Catton was not slow to garner due credit for his paper's role in the road to unionisation, with stories on both page one and page five. In fact, Catton had been invited to address the Manchester meeting, where he

¹²¹ *Athletic News*, Feb 24, 1908, p.4.

¹²² *Athletic News*, March 2, 1908, p.1.

spoke 'at some length'. *Athletic News* columnists William Pickford and John Lewis, both senior football administrators and referees, added their voices to the campaign.¹²³ The aims of the union, as outlined in the *Athletic News*, included clauses to improve the status of referees, to assist in promoting the best interests of football, to protect members from injustice, and to take action on behalf of members 'unjustly treated'. Five years later, in May, 1913, Catton, who had been a patron of the union for several years, was elected president, succeeding Sutcliffe who, in proposing Catton, suggested 'he was one of the founders of the union, if not the founder', and the editor held the position until 1915.¹²⁴

The plight of sports clubs attempting to return to a normal fixture programme after the war years, despite added expenses caused by a rise in the cost of living, drew Catton's attention in 1919.¹²⁵ He gave publicity to a campaign by sports organisations to secure reduced railway fares when travelling to away matches.¹²⁶ At the time football clubs, in particular, appear to have been dismayed by an increase in rail fares combined with a reduction in the service they had come to expect. Catton was in correspondence with Fred Rinder, a member of the Football League Management Committee and chairman of Aston Villa FC who thanked Catton for championing the clubs' cause and suggesting further means of developing the publicity campaign.¹²⁷ Catton devoted a full column to the issue in the *Athletic News*, making use of a

¹²³ *Athletic News*, March 9, 1908, p.1, p.4 and p.5.

¹²⁴ *Athletic News*, May 26, 1913, p.3. The announcement warranted the rare use of a photograph of Catton. By 1914 the union had more than 1,500 members and was producing *The Football Referee*, a monthly magazine, *Athletic News*, April 6, 1914, p.1.

¹²⁵ *Athletic News*, March 31, 1919, p.4.

¹²⁶ *Athletic News*, Sept 22, 1919, p.1.

¹²⁷ Catton Correspondence, Arsenal FC, Vol A-B, Oct 6, 1919, p.36.

detailed estimate of the railway mileage Football League clubs were travelling in a season which had been supplied by Rinder.¹²⁸ A month later, the *Athletic News* could announce that the Railway Executive had 'promised' an improvement in facilities, but reduced fares were 'beyond possibility'.¹²⁹ The campaign by 'nearly twenty associations of national scope concerned with the control of various branches of sport' had proved a partial success. Rinder, at least, had felt it worthwhile to enlist Catton's aid in winning public support. On a lighter note, Catton rarely seems to have missed an opportunity to sing the praises of 'the Invincibles', the successful Preston North End team of the late 1880s who won the first Football League championship without losing a match. He often compared the team's record and the ability of its players with the successful sides of later years, and often at the most unexpected times. The support of a journalist like Catton in regularly adding colour and drama and an almost mythic quality to the deeds of a successful team like North End could greatly enhance the reputation of a team or player from yesteryear and improve the chances of that reputation being handed down in glittering condition for future generations, possibly at the expense of equally deserving, but less well 'supported', cases.¹³⁰

In concluding this section on Catton's licence to express an opinion, it is enlightening to touch briefly upon the subject of gambling and sport. As Mason has pointed out, the profits made by the pro-betting *Sporting Chronicle*

¹²⁸ *Athletic News*, Oct 13, 1919, p.4.

¹²⁹ *Athletic News*, Nov 24, 1919, p.1.

¹³⁰ Catton, *Wickets and Goals*, pp.142-143; Catton, *Real Football*, p.150; *Athletic News*, March 23, 1903, p.1, Sept 4, 1911, p.4; Sharpe, *40 Years*, p.101. See also *Sunday Chronicle*, Jan 27, 1895, p.4; *Athletic News*, May 1, 1922, p.4; interview with 'Invincibles' star John Goodall, *Athletic News*, Jan 29, p.4, Feb 5, p.4, Feb 12, p.14, all 1917.

financed the launch of the *Athletic News*.¹³¹ But Edward Hulton's weekly title steered clear of any involvement in horse racing and, for the most part, appears to have avoided too overt an encouragement of gambling on other sports. That market was well catered for elsewhere within the Hulton newspaper group. The *Athletic News* occasionally encouraged speculation on football results through a variety of competitions for readers, but it seems to have refrained from any active encouragement of bookmaker-betting on the game. Prior to appointment as *Athletic News* editor, Catton was readily identified with the *Sunday Chronicle's* easy familiarity with the sports betting sub-culture. In an 1895 piece on the Boat Race, Catton, writing as 'Tityrus', pokes fun at the anti-gambling lobby and suggests the event has been a focus for gambling from its inception. Following a professional athletics meeting at Burnden Park in 1897, 'Tityrus' bemoaned a ban on betting at the fixture. A week later, he reported a professional foot race attended by an estimated 15,000 spectators, and revelled in the fact that, 'It was a rare gathering of sportsmen, and there was, I rejoice to say, plenty of speculation', and he went on to discuss the betting odds.¹³² In these brief examples, Catton projects the image of a 'sporting gent', keen to enjoy the action but keen also to enliven proceedings with a small punt on the outcome. He adopts a familiar, conspiratorial tone with his readers, to create a mood of shared values and pleasures. There is no doubt that Catton enjoyed a bet and the excitement of the racecourse. As a young reporter his love of horse racing prompted him to dodge an assignment covering the funeral of the Bishop of Lincoln in favour of attending the Lincolnshire Handicap, getting 'an obliging brother-journalist' to

¹³¹ Mason, *Association Football*, p.200. For an overview of football gambling and the involvement of the sporting press, see pp.179-187.

¹³² *Sunday Chronicle*, March 31, 1895, p.4, April 25 and May 2, 1897, p.4.

furnish him with the necessary details for his story after the funeral, and the racing, were over. The racing episode was revealed to *Athletic News* readers in a light hearted aside written in 1915.¹³³ It is a rare example of Catton's open association with gambling in the pages of the weekly paper during his time as editor. Catton appears to have turned his back on the betting badinage following his career shift to the *Athletic News*. Regular quips to appeal to the gambling fraternity would have jarred a little in his new position. The Hultons had other titles in which to cater for that audience.¹³⁴

5:6 A place 'in football history': Farewell to 'Tityrus'

When football's hierarchy gathered at Goodison Park in March, 1925, their primary goal was to see the Football League take on the Scottish League in a best-of-British showcase of soccer talent. But the occasion also marked the very public and high-profile recognition of what the game's grandees saw as a lifetime's contribution to national sporting excellence by Catton, 'Tityrus' of the *Athletic News*. For the previous six months, sportsmen the length and breadth of the country, sports administrators, and club officials had rallied to mark Catton's retirement as editor by subscribing to a special 'Testimonial' in his honour. The committee lending their names to the farewell tribute included an impressive array of sporting administrators who described Catton's work as 'a potent and inspiring force in the healthy development of national pastimes'.¹³⁵

¹³³ *Athletic News*, March 8, 1915, p.4.

¹³⁴ *Athletic News*, March 8, 1915, p.4.

¹³⁵ *Athletic News*, Nov 10, 1924, p.1, Oct 13, 1924, p.1. No doubt the administrators were, for the most part, mere figureheads in the testimonial arrangements, and there may well have been an element of them not wishing to upset an influential newspaper group by declining to lend their names to the tribute. On the other hand, the list is impressive, especially as regards football, and suggests the paper did not find it difficult to enlist support.

Personal subscriptions to the fund were limited to a guinea and it remained open until the end of February, 1925.¹³⁶ The presentation party at Goodison Park handed over a cheque, an inscribed barometer testifying to Catton's services rendered to 'British recreations', a gold watch for Catton's wife, and the 'Testimonial'.¹³⁷ Every county cricket club and Football League club had subscribed to the Catton tribute, but a colleague later revealed that Catton's greatest pride was 'that in the lists were the names of scores of cricket and football professionals who had wished to pay their tribute to a good sportsman and gentleman'.¹³⁸ Tributes had poured in to the offices of the *Athletic News*, or had at least been assiduously garnered by staff, to accompany the official announcement of Catton's retirement in the issue of Monday, August 25, 1924. The editorial comment credited the editor with expanding the sports paper's coverage to become a national publication, 'making the whole of Great Britain its sphere of influence'. A flavour of the many tributes printed over two consecutive editions, can be gathered from the comments of John McDowall, Scottish FA secretary, who proclaimed, "'Tityrus" will live in football history', and FA and Football League veteran Chas Sutcliffe who credited Catton with a brilliant writing style, adding, 'The world has seen few such men. A deep thinker and writer, full of interest and charm'. Fellow Lancastrian John Lewis, vice-president of both the FA and League, added, 'His comments have been of great assistance to the governing bodies, who have had from time to time to deal with difficulties which might have proved fatal to the sport had

¹³⁶ The final figure raised has proved elusive, although Catton received a 'substantial cheque', *Newspaper World*, March 21, 1925, p.15.

¹³⁷ *Athletic News*, March 16, 1925, p.1.

¹³⁸ *The Times*, Aug 25, 1936, p.5.

they not been firmly handled'.¹³⁹ Football players' union secretary H Newbould, revealed, 'When, during my long connection with Derby County and Manchester City, I needed advice, I had only to appeal to Mr Catton, and it was readily given'. Fred Stewart, manager of Cardiff City FC, credited the editor with a role in the club's admission to the Football League in 1920. A common theme among the tributes was that of Catton as protector of football's image.¹⁴⁰

The Field sporting paper, honouring a former 'regular contributor', reckoned,

He must have met practically every well-known cricketer and footballer who has played during the past 25 years, and his knowledge of the two games is profound. Probably there is no man living who has such an intimate knowledge of league football as he has.¹⁴¹

The impressive picture painted of Catton at the time of his retirement as editor is of a talented writer; a man admired, or at the very least respected as a leading exponent of his trade; the friend of sport; an observer privy to the exploits of generations of sportsmen and sports clubs; a trusted confidant and an 'authority' to turn to for advice, whether player or administrator; a journalist with influence, listened to in high places. The hagiographic nature of some of the tributes paid to Catton naturally promotes a healthy scepticism as to the sincerity of the sentiments expressed. But the seeming readiness of so many figures in the world of sport to praise the editor on his retirement is a significant testimony in itself as to his standing in sport and journalism.

¹³⁹ *Athletic News*, Aug 25, 1924, p.4.

¹⁴⁰ *Athletic News*, Aug 25, p.4, September 1, both 1924, p.4.

¹⁴¹ *The Field, The Farm, The Garden. The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, Aug 7, 1924, pp.219-220.

Despite the obvious recourse to selective editing employed by *Athletic News* journalists in producing the article, the testimonials serve to underline the varied attributes that made Catton a figure to be reckoned with in sporting journalism, and a journalist, perhaps, embodying the professional outlook that men like V. A. S. Beanland and John Brierley, highlighted in Chapter Three, were keen to promote.

5:7 Conclusion

Catton's appointment as editor of the *Athletic News* confirmed his status as a professional within the serried ranks of turn-of-the-century journalism. His new position, over time, as he came to settle into the role, provided him with an economic, social and occupational status far removed from the situation of the apprentice, the reporter, sports reporter, sub-editor and sports editor roles that he had previously occupied. As editor, Catton could afford a comfortable middle class lifestyle, he was a welcomed guest, away from the sports field, at functions held to celebrate the achievements and landmarks of sports clubs and organisations, he was sought out as a confidant and advisor, and was acknowledged as an expert on football and cricket matters and the business of sports journalism. He was encouraged and expected to pontificate on the major sporting issues of the time, to develop a view and express it in a manner he could develop as his own trademark style, with the obvious rider that he would avoid alienating the paper's core readership and work within any previously agreed guidelines suggested by the proprietors. Catton, it would seem, had a certain amount of responsibility for the hiring and firing of staff and, one would presume, for their conduct. That responsibility would no

doubt have extended to the paper's star columnists. Catton would undoubtedly set the editorial agenda in terms of what sporting events would be covered, at what length, and by whom. As both a reporter and a columnist, Catton was his own boss and he no doubt took executive decisions that helped confirm his status by reserving the plum assignments for himself. He could supervise his own career development, carving a name for himself in a manner he considered most suitable. He was still subject to the commercial diktats of his employers and, without any evidence of a contract to the contrary, could be summarily dismissed by the owners. But, by ensuring, as best he could, that the *Athletic News* editorial department contributed to the overall commercial success of the Hulton group, he made that possibility more remote. The reputation he cultivated on his own behalf as a reporter and columnist made sure that, should he fall foul of a proprietorial change of heart, his employment credentials were already well known in the market place. The comments of contemporaries on the worth and popularity of the *Athletic News* among adherents of the British sporting sub-culture, suggest that Catton's opinions and reporting style set standards of journalism that fellow sports writers on less influential titles must have been tempted to emulate and copy. The nature of the newspaper industry of the time, with much unofficial 'sharing' of copy, with 'national' titles cannibalised editorially for news and views in less well resourced provincial offices, as noted in Chapter One, meant the *Athletic News* would have been essential reading for the country's sports journalists. As such, Catton's influence among his contemporaries, whether consciously or subconsciously, must have been significant.

Chapter Six

James Catton, Fleet Street veteran, 1924-1936

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6:1 Introduction

James Catton spent the final 12 years of his life working on Fleet Street, an extension to his career that was surely built on the reputation he had developed over the previous 33 years with the Hulton newspapers and, in particular, his time as *Athletic News* editor. This chapter will examine his exit from Manchester, the work opportunities that came his way in London and the manner in which Catton traded on his name and his experience. The personal circumstances of his stay in the capital will be traced, where possible, to further develop as complete a picture of Catton's life as the sources allow. This chapter will also be used to examine the value that Catton placed on sport. Quite apart from reporting play as a service to readers keen to experience the enjoyment of sport from a distance and to know how a game of cricket or football developed and was decided, Catton subscribed to the view that sport, conducted on 'straight-dealing' lines, contributed to the well being of society, the country's economic health, and even national security. This chapter will also look at Catton's writing style against the background of stylistic developments in the wider industry. The opportunities available to Catton to influence the writing style of those journalists under his control and, possibly, a wider audience, will also be assessed. Finally, Catton's posthumous reputation will be examined. The views of contemporaries and successors within the industry provide a valuable means of assessing Catton's professional legacy.

6:2 'The best known writer on football and cricket': Catton on Fleet Street

Catton's involvement as editor of the *Athletic News* ended in late August, 1924, and following substantial pre-publicity in the paper his series of sporting reminiscences, 'The Recollections of "Tityrus"' was launched on September 15, and ran through to December. The series was given exceptional treatment, with an unprecedented change to the normal page one layout, the top half being devoted entirely to Catton's tales of footballing greats for several weeks before the feature was moved to an inside page in late October. Catton continued to write his 'Stray Leaves' news and opinion column, but his reporting diary now comprised, for the most part, the home matches of London football clubs. The 'Recollections' feature was reintroduced in May the following year, focussing on cricketing memories, and ran until July 20, with Catton signing off, '... the time has come to draw the stumps and shut the score book'. The *Athletic News* had celebrated its 50th jubilee with a special issue on June 8, with the former editor interviewing Lord Hawke on developments in the game of cricket, the feature given a prominent position on the centre pages as the title relaunched that week as a tabloid paper. One can only speculate how keen Catton would have been to have stayed in charge until at least the paper celebrated such an important milestone, and, equally, one wonders how long such a dramatic change in format had been in the planning. The change in size naturally involved considerable alterations in terms of design and content, ending decades of fairly consistent and traditional layout.

Quite what had prompted Catton's move from Manchester is not clear, although it may well have been a combination of several factors. Catton was in his mid-60s and his time as editor had involved him in a prodigious amount of travelling, covering the length and breadth of the country in the summer following Lancashire CCC at home and away, producing daily copy for the *Evening Chronicle's* 6.45pm cricket edition and reports and comment pieces for the *Athletic News*. He faced a similar commitment for the Hulton papers in winter, reporting two and sometimes three Football League and FA Cup matches a week, together with international games and a variety of club functions, from testimonial dinners to awards nights.¹ He had also devoted considerable time to maintaining sporting records which he put to good use in his articles, and which can also be seen, in raw form, so to speak, in the *Athletic News's* football and cricket annuals, which he edited. It was a workload bound to take a toll, and by the time he quit the editorship he was said to have been suffering from ill health for 'a year or two', 'followed by operations'.² The *Athletic News* had only recently changed hands, twice, in fact, in the space of a matter of months as a makeweight in a complex deal in the autumn of 1923 involving Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Rothermere, and the Berry brothers.³ The severing of the Hulton family ties, extending in Catton's case to more than 30 years, heralded a period of change and can only have served to further weaken any resolve on his part to extend his career in Manchester. As noted

¹ In one exceptional week in January, 1920, Catton reported matches from Bolton on the Saturday, Burnley, Tuesday, Derby, Wednesday, Wolverhampton, Thursday, and Bradford the next Saturday, *Athletic News*, Jan 19, 1920, p.4. He told readers, 'life on the railroad in these days is not a joyful experience'.

² *The Journalist*, Oct, 1924, p.180; *The Field, The Farm, The Garden. The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, Aug 7, 1924, pp.219-220. The illness may have been of some duration as a letter written to Catton some 12 months later touches upon his poor health, Catton Correspondence, Arsenal FC, Vol D-E, p.449A, letter from Dorset FA.

³ For a summary of the deal see Dennis Griffiths, *Plant Here The Standard* (Macmillan), London, 1996, pp.210-221.

above, the *Athletic News* completed the biggest development in its history by adopting a tabloid format with more pages, and there may well have been intimations much earlier that significant changes were being considered by the new owners. The above factors, together with Catton's second wife's love of London, as noted in Chapter Five, can only have served, in varying degrees, to turn his focus to 'retirement' in the capital.

With the valedictory reflections on more than 50 years of sport written and published; with the plaudits of friends, colleagues, and sportsmen recorded for posterity; and with a new, younger, and seemingly highly respected occupant of the editor's chair safely installed, the scene was set for Catton to ease himself into a well deserved retirement, out of the spotlight and away from the passion and competition of professional sport and the pressure and rush of daily paper journalism. But Catton appears to have been what we might now term a workaholic. Sport and writing about sport had become ingrained and, health permitting, whatever thoughts of semi-retirement he had harboured, or aired in Manchester to explain his exit, were shelved as he embarked on a new phase of his career. Just how much work Catton had planned to take on from his new London base is open to conjecture. *Athletic News* readers had been assured that the writer known as 'Tityrus' was to keep his hand in by covering 'big games' for the paper and that he would keep up his 'Stray Leaves' column from his new home in the south of England.⁴ The new

⁴ *Athletic News*, Aug 25, 1924, p.4.

working relationship was described by the *Sporting Chronicle* in terms of Catton acting 'in the capacity of free lance' to the paper.⁵

But Catton's contributions to the Manchester-based title had ceased by the summer of 1925, and his workload for a new set of London paymasters burgeoned. Over the next 10 years or so, until his death in 1936 at the age of 76, Catton was to build on a formidable journalistic reputation established in Manchester, by reinventing himself as a doyen of Fleet Street, a popular London-based columnist with a metropolitan readership. Soon after settling in Wimbledon, Catton was on the payroll of *The Observer*, and he was to combine his work for the Sunday paper with soccer and cricket reporting for the London *Evening Standard*, and with work as a regular columnist on *All Sports Illustrated Weekly*. The papers often made capital of Catton's reputation, plugging his standing as a journalist of renown. However apocryphal, Catton was seen by some as a writer who had had a hand in the selection of international elevens, the make-up of the Football League, and even influenced the standard of play in the matches he attended. 'Tityrus', a name synonymous with the *Athletic News* for almost a quarter century, had been laid to rest, and J. A. H. Catton became a prized by-line on Fleet Street's sports pages – as a journalist who had been in at the beginning of so many of the major initiatives in the growth of professional sport. The end to Catton's freelance contributions for the *Athletic News* may have been tied up with whatever arrangement he came to with his new employers in London, combined, perhaps, with a desire to allow Sharpe to work unencumbered by

⁵ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 30, 1924, p.11.

the presence in print of his predecessor.⁶ One key factor in Catton's new workload was the lack of travel. The assignments he covered, especially football, appear to have been predominantly London-based,⁷ thus considerably easing the strain on a seemingly weakened constitution. E. W. Swanton, at the time a young sub-editor on London's *All Sports Weekly*, considered Catton to be the paper's 'ace' cricket reporter, and went on to work under him on the capital's *Evening Standard*.⁸ As well as covering sports assignments for the paper, Catton produced a series of feature articles, primarily on soccer and cricket, and ranging across the full gamut of possible topics. His 1925 contributions, for example, starting in the autumn, included features headlined, 'What is a model football captain?'; 'Amateurs in League football'; 'Universal football'; 'Is football too fast?'; 'When football substitutes should be allowed'; 'England's fall from football grace'; 'Is football a form of madness?'; 'Danger to English football'; and 'The necessity of goal-judges'.⁹ Each article was illustrated, either with a photograph or sketch, with Catton's by-line figuring prominently.

Catton joined the staff of *The Observer* in 1925 and worked on the paper until a couple of years before his death in 1936.¹⁰ When articles can be attributed

⁶ The prolonged nature of Catton's departure from the columns of the *Athletic News* bears a similarity to that of J. J. Bentley 24 years earlier. The owners obviously intended to make the most of whatever commercial capital and reader loyalty attached to Catton's 'Tityrus' signature at a time of immense change. But perhaps Catton had, not unnaturally, felt inhibited by the presence of his own predecessor a quarter century earlier, and wanted to avoid any chance of friction developing.

⁷ Catton was covering the Trent Bridge Test in 1930 when family illness necessitated his return home, *Wimbledon Boro News*, April 24, 1931, p.2. However, football assignments appear restricted to the capital.

⁸ *The Cricketer*, Sept 11, 1964, p.5.

⁹ *All Sports Weekly*, Sept 5, Sept 26, Oct 10, Oct 17, Oct 31, Nov 14, Nov 21, Nov 29, Dec 5.

¹⁰ *The Observer*, Aug 23, 1936, p.21. A study of the newspaper's files reveals no sign of Catton's by-line until 1929, in line with a policy up to that year of only using pseudonyms.

to Catton, he is found covering football, in particular, with a lengthy review of the Saturday results a notable feature, and one that he continued until he was aged 74. The *Evening Standard*, in particular, used Catton's name and picture as a selling aid, promoting his articles in advance. The paper previewed its soccer coverage for the 1925/26 season with an advertisement, stating,

Mr J. A. H. Catton, the best known writer on football and cricket, whose contributions to the "Evening Standard" during the past year have been so widely read and appreciated, will deal specially with the leading features and figures of Association Football.¹¹

Catton was described as, 'the great authority', when the paper advertised its plans for cricket coverage for the 1927 season, promising 'daily reports and weekly articles' from his pen.¹² His reputation as an authority on football saw him invited to give a talk, 'Association Football: Ups and Downs of Big Clubs', on the BBC 2LO station in 1926.¹³

Catton was mining a lifetime's experiences and contacts to further establish his reputation, and he gave notice to his new London competitors just how sharp a journalistic opponent he intended to be by being the first reporter to secure an interview with Charles Buchan when he finally moved house to London following his transfer from Sunderland to Arsenal. So quick off the mark was Catton, the interview was conducted as the removal men carried

¹¹ *Evening Standard*, Aug 22, 1925, p.15.

¹² *Evening Standard*, May 7, 1927, p.13.

¹³ *The Times*, Nov 6, 1926, p.20.

Buchan's furniture into his new home. 'We sat on two packing-cases in the bare room and talked', recalled Buchan.¹⁴

The publication of Catton's memoirs, **Wickets and Goals, Stories of Play**, in 1926, can only have boosted the author's profile among sportsmen, the public and fellow journalists. It was a record of his career among cricket and football's great achievers, melded together from his reminiscences that had concluded in the previous year's *Athletic News*. The tales retold naturally show off Catton in a positive light, as mixing easily with great sportsmen and administrators. *The Times Literary Supplement* highlighted the author's easy familiarity with leading sportsmen, his eye for a dramatic situation, his 'rich store' of anecdote, and the air of authority worn lightly.¹⁵

For the most part, Catton is modest about the privileged position at the centre of sporting developments that his occupation and his talent created for him. But the book's final chapter sheds light on a few explicit examples of the influence he obviously wielded at times. Catton was no anonymous observer flitting quietly from football stadium to county ground with a passing nod to the gatemen. He was central to the day's proceedings, so much so that some players and directors constructed their own superstitions around the reporter's attendance at a game.

. . . the fact is that certain clubs declare that they never win when I happen to watch their matches. As soon as I have walked on to the ground I have seen the faces of directors and secretaries and managers

¹⁴ Charles Buchan, *A Lifetime in Football* (Phoenix House), London, 1955, p.88. The interview appeared in the *Evening Standard*, 22 Aug. 1925, p14.

¹⁵ *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 27, 1926, p.354.

grow glum as if the last hope of success has gone . . . Players have been icy in their reception. "We can never play our game when you're looking on." This has been told me dozens of times by footballers . . .¹⁶

Catton is poking fun at the sportsman's age-old credulity for lucky omens, even at his own expense. However, it is a revealing scenario in terms of the author's presence and impact in the build-up to play. Catton extends his reverie on the footballer's gullibility by revealing that some players, 'have been so silly as to blame me when they have not received their international caps, and others have come up and thanked me when they have been honoured'. He adds, 'Really I was supposed to carry some little weight in the construction of International elevens. But this idea was all moonshine – although it is difficult to convince players to the contrary'. But Catton does mention recommending an outside-right for England selection, and the pleasure it gave him to see him play well, and the reverse sensation when a centre-forward he had had a hand in promoting didn't impress. Once again, in self-deprecating fashion, Catton is pointing to a level of influence worthy of further consideration. It was an influence, accrued, it seems, through seeing more games than most men in other occupations, through having a reputation as a keen judge of soccer talent, and through a network of contacts across the football clubs in the North and Midlands. He mentions being approached by two young Nottingham Forest amateurs during his time in the city and of being able to help them secure a place at other clubs. Praise from Catton for Southampton full-back Robert Benson in a 1905 cup tie prompted Sheffield United to write to the reporter 'inquiring if I thought that Benson would be of

¹⁶ J. A. H. Catton ("Tityrus"), **Wickets and Goals. Stories of Play** (Chapman and Hall), London, 1926, pp.283-294.

any service to the United in the First Division'. Following a positive reply, the player was signed. Catton was so impressed by two players in a North v South amateur representative game in 1912 that his praise for North keeper Edward Taylor saw Oldham Athletic telephone a few days later asking 'if Taylor was as good as I had said!', and the player was signed. Centre-half Edward Hanney caught Catton's eye for the South.

. . . I went out of my way to advise Manchester City to get the assistance of this player. They hesitated, and went down to Elm Park to watch him before they did so, but eventually they brought him to the old ground at Hyde-road, and never regretted it.

It would seem that Catton had anticipated his advice being acted upon without the club's recourse to a scouting mission of its own.

Catton's London years included a professional low point in the summer of 1931 with the news that the *Athletic News*, then priced 2d, had lost its battle in the competition for readers with a national, regional and local press that had taken commercial sport to its heart as a means of boosting circulation. The weekly paper disappeared, merging with the *Sporting Chronicle's* Monday edition, having recorded 2,910 editions.¹⁷

Just how great Catton's financial needs were at the time of his retirement from the *Athletic News* are not known. In 1936 he left an estate (gross) of almost £10,000 in his will,¹⁸ suggesting that the drive to find new avenues of

¹⁷ *Athletic News*, July 20, 1931, p.1.

¹⁸ Catton will. The gross value of the estate, £9,794, would be worth approximately £362,182 in 2006 prices, according to the National Archives currency converter (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency).

employment had been more a lifestyle choice than a pecuniary consideration. There is no suggestion, despite his long association with the Hulton newspapers, that Catton received a pension from the firm.¹⁹ Catton certainly appears to have experienced little difficulty in finding work. He was a contributor to newspapers other than those mentioned above, annuals and anthologies, a number of British Empire newspapers took his articles, including the *South African Argus*, and well into his 70s he began freelance work for the *Glasgow Herald*. By 1933, steeped in cricketing lore and with an unrivalled command of facts and figures, Catton was also in charge of the cricket records section of *Wisden Cricketer's Almanack* a post he held until his death.²⁰

6:3 His last cup final

Catton died, aged 76, of a coronary thrombosis on Friday, August 21, 1936, at his home in Cambridge Road, Wimbledon.²¹ A number of obituary notices mentioned he had been suffering from heart problems, with the symptoms becoming apparent about 18 months earlier. In autumn, 1935, friends in the newspaper industry had celebrated Catton's 60 years in journalism with a dinner at the London Press Club.²² The event was particularly poignant on several counts, not least because that year the last vestige of the *Athletic News*, a shared masthead one day a week with the *Sporting Chronicle*,

¹⁹ *Sporting Chronicle* racing correspondent Robert Rodrigo had been granted a pension by Sir Edward Hulton after almost 40 years' service when he retired in the early 1920s aged around 80. The favour was deemed newsworthy enough to mention in his obituary, *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 26, 1924, p.2.

²⁰ *Wisden Cricketer's Almanack* (London), 1933, p.21. He replaced the renowned cricket historian F. A. Ashley Cooper on his death, further proof of Catton's reputation as a cricketing authority together with his command of statistics.

²¹ Catton death certificate.

²² *Wimbledon Boro News*, Aug 28, 1936, p.6.

disappeared from the news stands, its faded drawing power and reputation no longer justifying the arrangement. The sports pages of *The Observer* for the 12 months leading up to his death reveal a man fighting stubbornly to maintain his working routine. In September, 1935, at the start of the soccer season, Catton was writing the paper's main review of the Saturday match action. But his by-line is soon replaced, the column attributed to a 'Special Correspondent', before *Observer* sports writer J. T. Bolton took over the task on a regular basis in late October. Catton reappeared in print with a report of a midweek international match between England and Germany at White Hart Lane in early December, with the writer seemingly fit enough to produce a handful of FA Cup previews and reviews and a trademark feature comparing goalscorers past and present, before his by-line finally disappeared from the paper in late February, 1936. Catton had also been busy with 'the onerous duty of keeping the records in *Wisden* up to date and his desire to complete this work for the present issue was one of his last cares', according to the publication. Catton had contributed a fascinating article for the *Athletic News Football Annual 1936-7* special 50th anniversary issue in which he reviewed the progress of the professional footballer over a half-century, a task he was singularly equipped to handle.²³ It would seem that Catton had also dabbled with a little freelance work for the *Glasgow Herald* up to the time of his death,²⁴ and away from sport he had achieved a personal ambition, becoming Master of his Freemasons lodge in the summer of 1935, relinquishing certain physical aspects of the ceremony to a colleague only 'when he feared he

²³ Ivan Sharpe (ed), *Athletic News Football Annual 1936-7* (Withy Grove), Manchester.

²⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, Aug 22, 1936, p.3, *Wimbledon Boro News*, Aug 28, 1936, p.6.

might have a breakdown'.²⁵ The lodge appointment would no doubt have represented a considerable commitment for the 75-year-old. Catton attended the FA Cup Final in April, 1936, with former colleague Ivan Sharpe, remarking in prescient fashion to his friend, after struggling with the Wembley steps, 'Ivan, I have seen my last Cup Final'.²⁶ Catton had even been contemplating a final trawl through his records and reminiscences to write a history of the FA Cup to complement his two earlier works on League soccer's development.²⁷

The funeral service, held the Wednesday following Catton's death at St Matthew's Church, Wimbledon, featured a tribute by the Rev Herbert Dunnico, a fellow Mason, who later conducted the Masonic service at the graveside at Wimbledon Cemetery. Dunnico had met Catton 40 years earlier at Burnden Park, Bolton, with the clergyman describing himself as 'a young ambitious sportsman' who, at the time, had welcomed the advice of a sports journalist who had later become a friend. The service was attended by Catton's two surviving daughters, a grand-daughter and grandson, together with a Miss Jessie Cavey who Catton was said to have 'made his home' with,²⁸ following the death of his second wife Florence in 1931 aged 51.²⁹ Masonic colleagues were joined by Fleet Street representatives and mourners from the world of sport.

²⁵ *The Freemasons Chronicle*, Aug 29, 1936, p.129.

²⁶ Ivan Sharpe's 'Sports Gossip' column, *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 30, 1936, p.17.

²⁷ *Wimbledon Boro News*, Aug 28, 1936, p.6.

²⁸ *Freemason's Chronicle*, Aug 29, 1936, p.129.

²⁹ Florence Catton death certificate.

6:4 'The contagious passion for our national pastimes': The worth of sport

Much of Catton's journalism displays a passion for sport, an infectious enjoyment of the contest and the challenge, an empathy with the players and the officials, and an understanding of what the spectator looked for from the athlete and the occasion. They were qualities, honed by experience and the practicalities of daily journalism, that came to the fore in both his reporting and in the more thoughtful features and columns he produced in abundance. They were qualities, also, that must have lightened a physical and intellectual workload centred on a daily round of sporting assignments. Catton was fortunate to find his work enjoyable, both in terms of watching sport and writing. He cultivated an interest in statistics and worked on becoming an expert on several sports. He immersed himself in the sub-cultures that grew around them, their histories and the exploits of their finest exponents.

On a deeper level, Catton also developed an understanding of where he thought sport, both spectator and participatory, fitted into the national psyche, and its worth in the 'progress of the nation'. The moral and psychological significance with which Catton imbued the country's sporting sub-culture can only have added to his own sense of self-esteem. Catton, through his writing on an assortment of papers, projected himself as a guardian of sporting probity. A favoured expression of his was 'straight-dealing', and it is what he looked for at all levels of sport. His job as a reporter on the *Sunday Chronicle* and the *Athletic News* favoured him with ready access to the leading fixtures on the sporting calendar. It provided him with a platform upon which he could

act as an arbiter of good and poor play and, indeed, there was an expectation that, as a leading columnist and, later, editor, he would step beyond the mere act of reporting to deliver his own athletics creed. It was in his own interest and that of the newspaper group he worked for to defend the sporting constituency. Sport's popularity underpinned Hulton newspaper sales. His high-profile role, albeit within the constraints of writing under a pen-name, established him as a potential counsel for the nation's sporting elite, in the eyes of his public, at least. In order to validate his 'straight-dealing' mission and to give substance to the aura of authority associated with the *Athletic News* editorship, Catton claimed to look beyond the superficial in all the sports he reported, adopting, what he considered to be,

. . . a close and I hope an intellectual interest in all manly games.

Because of that and from a detached position I have been able to see more perhaps than some of those who are immersed in it.³⁰

Catton was unstinting in his assessment of sport's popularity and worth.

Writing in the *Sunday Chronicle* in 1895, at a time when English cricket teams had visited the USA, Australia and the West Indies, he declared,

I have no hesitation in expressing my belief that the contagious passion for our national pastimes is one of the signs of the times which the histories will note as evidence of the power and the greatness of England. The cultivation of these sports and the International struggles to which I am referring tend I am convinced to the peace and amity of the world. This is a use of our much abused games too often overlooked. The friendly rivalry in these manly pursuits between the Mother Country and the Colonies lengthens and strengthens the bonds of union. The civilising character of cricket may be suggested, although it cannot be

³⁰ *Sporting Chronicle*, April 26, 1917, p.4.

discussed at this writing. The racial hatreds of the world and the antipathies of nations will probably never be eradicated, but they may be minimised by the universality of sport. The more the people of this planet are brought together on common ground the better for all of us. It enables us to understand one another the more.³¹

With one eye on a global picture of international amity supported by sport-loving peoples, Catton is ever aware of the anti-sport lobby closer to home and those eager to question the popularity of Britain's 'much-abused' games. Catton appeared unwilling to pass over any opportunity to boost sport's sometimes questionable standing with positive publicity.

Catton used his book, **The Real Football**, to enthuse in extravagant fashion about the nature of soccer, comparing the cut and thrust of the game with life's unpredictability, and revelling in the classless aspect of the physical struggle and its redemptive features in the weekly lot of the working man.

Football is one the grandest games devised by human ingenuity for the delight alike of the player and the spectator. There is a short, sharp, and decisive battle which appeals to our virility. The nature of the sport fluctuates as the fortunes of life, and is in no sense symbolical of the law of caste. The field is rather typical of the world's strife, and the fittest survive in each struggle, be they lowly-born or of the loftiest pedigree. In football there is an endless spice of variety, for the discerning can discover novelty in every game . . . Nothing is so certain as the uncertainty of the game.³²

³¹ *Sunday Chronicle*, Jan 20, 1895, p.4. See also Catton's remarks on a tour of the footballing Corinthians to Canada in 1906, *Athletic News*, Aug 6, 1906, p.4

³² J. A. H. Catton, **The Real Football. A Sketch of the Development of the Association Game** (Sands and Co), London, 1900, pp.212-213.

Cricket and football, in particular, were 'national assets', raising the recreational tone for the modern working man, and also, at professional level, paying their way in boosting the national economy through entertainment tax, travel, wages, sports equipment, ground development and charity work.³³

The health benefits for the younger generations engaged in active sport were self-evident for Catton, and he took a personal interest in efforts at both local and national levels to introduce greater games playing in schools. He was a friend of George Sharples, one-time president of the National Union of Teachers and founder of the Manchester Schools Football Association, with the pair sharing, 'the ideal of the physical development of the children in the elementary schools of the country'.³⁴

For Catton, writing at the height of the First World War, football, in particular, had a central role to play in the promotion of a healthy and happy nation at a time of national crisis. The open nature of the game – 'Players and spectators can see all the time all that is taking place. The great moments are spread out before us like the opened pages of a big book' – stood as a contrast with boardroom machinations and possible commercial exploitation. The openness

³³ 'Is Football A Form Of Madness?', *All Sports Weekly*, Nov 21, 1925, p.6. See also *Athletic News*, May 23, 1910, p.4, for a defence of the football crowd.

³⁴ *Athletic News*, Sept 1, 1919, p.4; Sharples was the author of an 1898 report for the Department of Education on games playing in schools, and taught at a school in the neighbourhood of the Catton family's first homes in Manchester; George Sharples, 'The organisation of games out of school hours for the children attending public elementary schools in the large industrial centres, as voluntarily undertaken by the teachers', Special Reports on Educational Subjects 2, Parliamentary Papers XXIV; *Manchester City News*, Aug 30, 1919, p.7. It would be interesting to know if the relationship between Catton and Sharples developed through contacts generated by the schooling of the Catton children in the Higher Broughton neighbourhood.

of football placed a burden of fair play on the participants, especially when viewed by potential friends and foes across the world.

. . . this is our insular game, our British pastime, which has been adopted by the world. Even Germany has taken up the most popular pastime of the hated English. England is the model, the object lesson, and I hope the example to others. How important it is that we should never lose sight of the fact that Association football is a great English game and that we are copied by other people.³⁵

Catton had earlier raised his voice in support of an appeal to raise cash to promote competition and help British athletes prepare for the proposed 1916 Olympic Games in Berlin. Writing at a time of increased international tension, he warned of the dangers of allowing British prowess and prestige on the sports field to wane.

Do we wish our kith and kin across the seas, in far distance climes, where comparatively few Englishmen dwell among vast communities of subject races; do we wish our sons in the outposts of the Empire to hear the phrase: "Old England is played out"?³⁶

Sport as a means of strengthening the bonds of empire was an unbroken theme in Catton's journalism throughout his career in Manchester, and there is, not unnaturally, perhaps a deeper resonance and urgency to the argument in the period of the First World War. For Catton, personal considerations intervened to underscore the common imperative of the survival of the nation. His son Alfred had emigrated to Canada in 1910 and was a member of the

³⁵ *Sporting Chronicle*, April 26, 1917, p.4. For Catton's reaction to a 1914 tour of South America by Exeter City, and the risks to the national reputation the writer perceived in British teams under-performing in front of foreign audiences, see, *Athletic News*, July 20, 1914, p.4, July 27, p.4.

³⁶ *Athletic News*, Sept 1, 1913, p.4.

Canadian Expeditionary Force in Europe, a sapper in the Engineers, shipped to France in 1917, where he was wounded and convalesced in England before a return to France.³⁷ Although never referred to in his work, the personal commitment of men like Alfred, aged 28 in 1914, drawn to war from the far-flung corners of the English-speaking world, demanded the 'home country' uphold certain standards to mark itself as worthy of such loyalty, and Catton was keen to remind his readers of that duty.

Cricket, in particular, above and beyond a pleasant recreation, was a means to a greater end, a means of inculcating and then fine-tuning the qualities necessary to uphold Britain's 'pristine prestige' at the battlefield. Writing in 1917, and noting the death of a servicemen in action, an officer's promotion, and the valour of two others, all former cricketers, Catton suggested, 'We know that cricket makes men'.

It is an arduous game, and the fact that it taxes our activities, that it tries our courage, that it develops discipline, and that it increases our sense of comradeship makes this pastime worthwhile for all the expenditure of energy . . . There is no need to defend cricket, to apologise for the young and the old who play even in war time, and for the spectators who are not able to join the revels save in a passive sense. I shall always

³⁷ 1911 Canada Census; National Archives of Canada First World War service files for Alfred Catton. Although his occupation was listed as a printer on arrival in Canada, at the time of his discharge from military service he was describing himself as a waiter. A further career change saw him employed as a railway carriage cleaner in Toronto, where he died in 1926, after falling under a freight train, *Evening Telegraph*, Toronto, July 14, 1926, no page numbers.

maintain that cricket is the best of all first class games, and I do so after some experience of many forms of recreation. Nor after this war can any man again ask the question, what is the utility of cricket?³⁸

For the most part, Catton conformed to the standards of the day in seeking to attach a greater meaning to cricket. Jack Williams, in his study of the game between the wars, noted the widely accepted sporting creed that, '... celebrated cricket as a metaphor for England and for Englishness. Cricket was seen as an expression of English moral worth and had a key role in how the economically and socially privileged imagined themselves and their place in the world'.³⁹ It was a belief system rooted in discourses surrounding the almost-mythological hey-day of cricket's pastoral roots. Its main adherents, apart from aristocratic patrons and players, were found among the burgeoning middle classes, the economic group that the *Athletic News* clearly pandered to in order to increase circulation. Williams questions just how many of those 'who wrote about cricket being the distillation of Englishness' actually believed in what they wrote, with the spectre of editorial instructions, 'or a feeling that cricket ought to have been so described' possible factors in the popularity of the sentiment.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Sporting Chronicle*, May 30, 1917, p.4. For Catton's views on the benefits of maintaining competitive football during the war years, in terms of both public and military morale, together with general fitness, see *Sporting Chronicle*, March 7, 1917, p.4, and Jan 31, 1917, p.4. The manner in which the *Athletic News* reacted to 'the traumas of the Great War', its support for the continuation of sporting engagements, its call for the introduction of 'drill for professional players', and its praise for the military exploits of ex-sportsmen, is outlined in John M. Osborne, "To keep the life of the nation on the old lines": the *Athletic News* and the First World War, in *Journal of Sport History* 14, 1989, pp.137-150.

³⁹ Jack Williams, *Cricket and England. A Cultural and Social History of the Inter-war Years* (Frank Cass), London, 1999, pp.1-19, and pp.142-145.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Cricket*, p.4 and pp.142-143.

In looking for explanations for the reverence accorded to cricket by Catton, the suggestion of editorial orders emanating from the office of Edward Hulton senior on the romance of the game seems unlikely. Hulton, a self-made newspaper magnate, 'a shrewd, hard-headed businessman',⁴¹ who had risen from humble working-class roots on the profits generated by the pro-gambling *Sporting Chronicle*, seems an unlikely champion of cricket's pastoral idyll. Catton, however, the consummate professional sports writer, knew the central role that cricket had assumed in the British sporting pantheon, and he was keen to underpin the status quo, in part, because he subscribed fully to the principles involved. Derek Birley has outlined the role played by literature in the promulgation of cricket's 'moral and social potentialities', with the Rev James Pycroft's 1851 work, **The Cricket Field**, a significant marker in the nineteenth-century acceptance of cricket's 'ethical superiority'. 'The equation of Englishness and virtue was already well-established by the time of Pycroft', notes Birley, adding, 'The various threads of Pycroft's eulogy were woven together more self-consciously into the later Victorian fabric'.⁴² There is little doubt that Catton had immersed himself in the Victorian cricket literature that eulogised the worth of the game. Although, as a boy, he did not attend one of the newly emerging public schools, he appears to have enjoyed a middle-class classical education at minor private schools where he would have been exposed to 'the endless stream of poems, rhymes and songs which were rife with the language and metaphor of self-sacrifice and character developed in

⁴¹ *Lancashire Faces and Places* (Manchester), Vol 1, new series, No4, April, 1901, p.54.

⁴² Derek Birley, **The Willow Wand. Some Cricket Myths Explored** (Queen Ann Press), London, 1979, pp.50-51.

games-playing'.⁴³ In addition, his journalism is littered with references to the work of Pycroft, John Nyren and other early writers on the game. Catton was a bibliophile of some renown, his sporting library being sold at a Sotheby's auction to raise money for worthy causes after his death.⁴⁴ The sale attracted sportsmen and collectors and raised £330.⁴⁵ He regularly boasted of having obtained first editions of sporting books, often rare and obscure titles, with cricket a favourite subject, and of having them bound in leather. He showed a ready recourse to consult these titles to check on esoteric points of contention in his articles.⁴⁶ Catton wrote of Pycroft and Nyren in 'hallowed' terms, and there is little doubt that he fully subscribed to the cricketing sentiments Pycroft expounded. It was a small step to express those beliefs in print, with himself, as sports editor and then editor, as final arbiter of what he wrote. His cricketing philosophy was certainly in line with much popular and influential opinion of the time. It is perhaps in his attempts to imbue football, for both the player and spectator, with the finer moral points more readily associated with cricket, that traces of a more original and independent journalism can best be traced.

⁴³ Roberta J. Park, 'Biological thought, athletics and the formation of a 'man of character': 1830-1900, in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), **Manliness and morality. Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940** (Manchester University Press), 1987, p.10; see in particular, James A. Mangan, **Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology** (Cambridge University Press), 1981.

⁴⁴ Catton will; *The Times*, Jan 12, 1937, p.5, Jan 19, 1937, p.25.

⁴⁵ *Daily Dispatch*, Feb 4, 1937, p.14. The collection included one book already 140 years old at the time. The on-line currency converter at the National Archives, puts a modern valuation on the sale total slightly over £12,200. The sale included an unpublished manuscript of a book by Catton, 'The Four Georges England Needs – Ulyett, Lohmann, Hirst and Gunn', sold for £10. Judging by the title, it was to be a book on cricket's heyday.

⁴⁶ For example, *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 4, 1895, p.4, *Cricket. A Weekly Record of the Game*, Sept 10, 1908, p.403, *Athletic News*, March 24, 1919, p.4, May 26, p.4, *The Times*, April 19, 1934, p.13, and, in particular, J. A. H. Catton, 'An Excursion Into Cricket Literature', **Papers of the Manchester Literary Club** (Sherratt and Hughes), Manchester, 1911, Vol XXXVII, pp.178-198.

In terms of football, Catton was at his most expansive, and possibly reflective, in his final work, the review of the game's progress for the 1936 *Athletic News Football Annual* when he declared the advent of the Football League as, 'so beneficial to Great Britain as an antidote to political, industrial and civil unrest'.⁴⁷

Catton's sporting philosophy and adherence to the cult of athleticism left little room for the encouragement of women's sports. He was firmly against the encroachment of women into the realms of what he saw as masculine games and overly physical endeavour. His concept of femininity, in step with much contemporary opinion, restricted women to the role of helper, supporter and, if necessary, player, for the purposes of good health and recreation, of suitably physically undemanding games. As the father of three daughters, his public stance was no doubt shaped and mirrored by his home life.⁴⁸ Catton was consistent on the point throughout his career.⁴⁹

6:5 'The crimson Rambler': Catton's reporting style

This section of the thesis will briefly examine the issue of writing style. It is a huge topic and one worthy of considerable further research as it touches upon the careers of all sports journalists. In particular, it will deal with aspects of

⁴⁷ *Athletic News Football Annual 1936-7*, Manchester, pp.8-9.

⁴⁸ Catton was moved to comment on women and sport in response to publicity surrounding a 12-year-old girl cricketing prodigy in Worksop, *Athletic News*, Aug 16, 1915, p.4.

⁴⁹ For Catton's views on competitive female cycling, see, *Sunday Chronicle*, Oct 7, 1894, p.4. Surprisingly, he found words of encouragement for female billiards players, *Sunday Chronicle*, Oct 17, 1897, p.4. It might be unfair to suggest it, but perhaps the patronage of 'Society ladies' softened any doubts Catton might have had on the subject. For his views on the 'unsavoury topic' of female footballers, see, *Sunday Chronicle*, March 24, 1895. Catton was much more positive on the role of women as spectators at football matches, see, *Athletic News*, May 16, 1921, p.4.

style that throw light upon Catton's career and how he was regarded by contemporaries and how, in his role as editor, he influenced the writing of those who worked for him. It will build on the thesis' earlier assessment of stylistic changes in the press coverage of football, in particular, as the twentieth century progressed. Both modern historians and journalists working in the period under review have written of the way the sports report gradually evolved, especially post-1900. But caution must be exercised over the industry's self-analysis of writing change, and the claim that the passing of the years, and press modernisation, led to 'better' reporting. It is not difficult to find examples of sports reporters considered to have been at the forefront of the advance to brighter, lighter journalism, but culled from earlier generations. J. J. Bentley, who retired as *Athletic News* editor in 1900, was credited by his friend Catton, in less than effusive terms, as having a 'lucid and practical style' as a journalist, noting also that, as regards his work as a football administrator, he was 'Without any gift of eloquence'.⁵⁰ Tony Mason, in his study of Bentley for the **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography**, stated, 'his many journalistic words were eminently unquotable'. Yet, in contrast, a former colleague, writing a well-informed obituary in the *Bolton Journal and Guardian* was of the opinion,

He may be said to have been one of the first football journalists to revolutionize the style in which matches were reported, introducing a chatty tone to relieve the bald narrative so usual in the 'eighties, and so dull and uninteresting.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Sporting Chronicle*, Sept 3, 1918, p.4.

⁵¹ *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, Sept 6, 1918, p.3.

Martin Cobbett, respected reporter of an earlier generation, was regarded, at the time of his death in 1906, as a skilled exponent of the personal side of reporting. It was written of him,

One great secret of journalistic success is to be a personality, and before all Mr Cobbett fulfilled this essential. He went to a race meeting, or a cricket match, or a boat race, or a boxing competition, to say what he thought of it . . .⁵²

Depending on the sources, the record of advances in reporting style can be stretched back into the closing decades of the nineteenth century, at least. With that important proviso in place, the question must be asked as to where Catton's journalism fits as regards the rather uneven and at times unflattering occupational profile depicted in Chapter Three?

During the course of his career, and afterwards, Catton was said to have played a significant role in the development of a more 'modern' style of sports journalism. The *Wimbledon Boro News*, writing of the veteran in 1931, claimed he was 'a leading authority on sport, who reformed the style of sports journalism'.⁵³ His obituary in *Wisden* described him as 'absolutely fair if caustic in his criticism' with a writing style marked by 'easy clearness that made his descriptions of cricket and football delightful to read'.⁵⁴ In a 1921 review of North West football journalists, Ernest Edwards, "Bee" of the *Liverpool Echo*, proclaimed,

⁵² *The Referee*, April 29, 1906, p.7.

⁵³ *Wimbledon Boro News*, April 24, 1931, p.2.

⁵⁴ *Wisden Cricketers Almanack for 1937* (John Wisden and Co, London), p.269.

... all his work is tinged with a beauty of language that defies criticism of his judgement, should your judgement be unfavourable to his verdicts. He is the Dickens of Sports' Journalism – a man admired by all.⁵⁵

A colleague writing in *The Journalist* at the time of his retirement suggested he boasted 'an insatiable instinct for the production of literary art'.⁵⁶

An appreciation of Catton in *The Times* described him as 'a link between the new and the old journalism'.⁵⁷ The writer of that paper's obituary commented on Catton's 'old-fashioned form of journalism, which insisted on a courtesy and pleasure in Fleet Street which can never be forgotten'.⁵⁸ Boasting a career stretching 60 years, it is only natural that Catton's journalism could provoke contradictory assessments. Contemporary opinion of his early work, pre-1900, is not available. The prolific inter-war sports writer Trevor Wignall mentioned meeting Catton among the 'sports-writer stalwarts of the old school' as he made an early name for himself on Fleet Street in the 1920s.⁵⁹ Catton was credited with popularising a new kind of sports writing, one that went beyond a simple retelling of the action in a match to include personal comment and asides, a more chatty style laced with expert opinion. John Macadam, one-time chief sports columnist on the *Daily Express*, was ideally placed to comment on the stylistic changes of the period. For him Catton,

... was of the old tribe, but he was first to see the new light. He was completely the expert, but he saw that expert reporting could be dressed

⁵⁵ **Football Yarns. Being Reminiscences and incidents in the History of the Everton, Liverpool, Tranmere Rovers, South Liverpool and Marine Football Clubs**, edited and compiled by "Phil", (T Kilburn), Liverpool, 1921, p.126.

⁵⁶ *The Journalist*, Oct, 1924, p.180.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, Aug 25, 1936, p.5.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, Aug 22, 1936.

⁵⁹ Trevor Wignall, **Never A Dull Moment** (Hutchinson), London, 1940, p.49.

with expert opinion and backed by expert writing and illuminated by personality.⁶⁰

Neville Cardus suggested Catton, 'was one of the first of the poetic school of cricket reporters; he seldom referred to a cricket ball. It was for him "the crimson Rambler"', but he possessed the skill to tailor his style to the occasion and the atmosphere.⁶¹ Cricket writer E. W. Swanton began his career in sports journalism in the mid-1920s when Catton was a reporter of 50 years' standing. As a junior sub-editor on *All Sports Weekly* he handled the veteran's work on his arrival in London, and reckoned Catton,

... was one of the old school with a vengeance: reams of stuff, all hand-written, and packed with the sporting clichés that derived from lengthy experience. Jack Hobbs would be the Oval idol in the first sentence and the Surrey crack in the next. I verily believe it was Catton who first sent the crimson Rambler speeding to the confines. It was a style that made no appeal to the priggish young sub-editor.

Swanton explained that he used to 'cut about and generally rewrite whole tracts' of Catton's work. 'No word of complaint ever came from the author to my editor, from which I conclude that once his work was in the post that was the end of it for him. He never read a word in print. There's professionalism for you.'⁶² In his role as editor, Catton was also credited with shaping the style of reporting that made the *Athletic News* a commercial success throughout his

⁶⁰ John Macadam, *The Macadam Road* (Jarrolds), London, 1955, p.127.

⁶¹ Neville Cardus, *Second Innings* (Collins), London, 1950, pp.175-176.

⁶² *The Cricketer*, Sept 11, 1964, p.5, also reproduced in E. W. Swanton, *As I Said At the Time* (Willow Books, Collins) London, 1983, p.522. I take this throwaway line from Swanton to be a compliment to Catton rather than a criticism, and to refer to his match reports and not the opinion pieces he produced. The days of worrying about the presentation of reports on the page were over for the ex-editor in London. He was surely experienced enough to rise above any feeling of being slighted due to any tampering with his reports, a common enough occupational risk for any journalist. Catton, the reporter, was also well aware of the ephemeral nature of most stories once in print.

time in charge. A colleague of many years standing in Manchester wrote that Catton 'used to say that hard work never killed anyone'.

Mr Catton was thorough in everything and a stickler for accuracy and the English language. There were no "O.K.'s," no "hunches," or any of the modern American slang terms, or slang of any description in his paper. "Show it to me in the dictionary" he would say to any member of his staff who happened to write a word that did not pass muster with him. Then he would laugh. And who did not know Jimmy Catton's laugh! Such was The Chief – a stern taskmaster, maybe, but the best and most generous of pals.⁶³

His dislike of what passed for slang at the time was allied to a demand for accuracy – 'He hated sham. He loved fact. And he insisted upon it from those with whom he worked and whose efforts he directed'.⁶⁴ Ivan Sharpe hints at the world of the reporters' room hidden from the general reader when he wrote that Catton had 'caned' him as a journalist, 'but I bent to it because I knew he was so competent to criticise. The second of his initials surely stood for Accuracy'.⁶⁵ In a later reflection on Catton, Sharpe, writing in 1964, suggested, 'He insisted on dignity in the game's control, in criticism, and in all comment. He killed off the winger, the upright, the leather, Straw-hatters, Peacocks, Trotters, Toffees'.⁶⁶ Clearly, in terms of football literature over the decades following Catton's death, he did not 'kill off' any of the club nicknames listed, or terms such as winger or upright, although leather had probably had its day, and Sharpe would have been perfectly aware of that. Presumably, Sharpe was writing specifically about the pages of the *Athletic*

⁶³ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 24, 1936, p.7.

⁶⁴ *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, 1936, p.8.

⁶⁵ *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 30, 1936, p.17.

⁶⁶ Ivan Sharpe, *The Football League Jubilee Book* (Sportsmans Book Club), London, 1964, p.129.

News, and Catton's predilection for no-nonsense reporting among staff. If that is the case, it is a timely example of the limits to the paper's, and the editor's, influence in the wider industry.

Another former colleague suggested,

Mr Catton looked for an approach to his own high standard in the work of his staff. He was rather exacting. This can be said, that he made it his personal interest, by kindly precept, to attain that objective in the individuality of his staff.

He addressed Hulton colleagues as 'fellow workers' in an 'expression of professional camaraderie'.

In his editorial capacity Mr Catton expected from his staff two fundamentals he followed – *simplicity of writing and accuracy of fact*. Of course he is a veritable encyclopaedia of sports record, reminiscence, and personnel. He abhorred the use of slang, while the man who wrote or passed "deputise" and "smart" incurred an amount of displeasure commensurate with the editorial anguish the use of these words involved. He believed in giving footballers, cricketers, and their like in the public eye, the Christian names they had in their baptism. The ball was the ball, and not to be trifled with by such perversions as "the sphere" and "the leather". But once editorial license created the "crimson rambler." That surely was the inspiration of a once-upon-a-time British summer. Again, a goal-post was just that; not "the upright" or "the sticks." These may appear minor matters, even putting too fine a point on tasteful expression. Notwithstanding, by such appeal to common sense, and to a sensitiveness from his staff, did Mr. Catton build up an example of sports journalism which has had the effect of gaining for this side of the profession a respect to which it was stranger.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *The Journalist*, Oct, 1924, pp.180-181.

There is a hint of a confrontational element in the above writer's assessment of Catton, together with room for misunderstanding among those not fully *au fait* with his personality, as he admits.

I will say that "J. C." was perplexing at times; but he was not the forbidding little person some people in and out of the office imagined. In the "Athletic News" rooms clouds appeared only to be dissolved as gossamer. Forth came, what somebody once aptly described as the Cattonian chuckle. It was infectious.

Whatever Catton's grammatical edicts among his staff, he appears to have been less rigorous with some of his star columnists. Cricketer E. H. D. Sewell claimed that Catton 'never sub-edited my 'stuff,' or deleted a single word of it'.⁶⁸

Catton's career spanned a period of immense change in the style of sports reporting, and his professional longevity suggests a writer of obvious talent and one able and willing to adapt to – and possibly influence – changes in the public appetite for sports writing. The above comments on Catton by his contemporaries paint a revealing picture, if one, as noted, slightly blurred by contradictions. His reporting skills drew praise and his command of vocabulary and turn of expression were highly valued. Catton knew the worth of 'personality' and felt at ease in expressing his opinion. His journalism eventually came to be seen as a bridge between the old and new, a natural consequence, one might conclude, of such a long career and his ability to find high-profile work deep into old age. In the opinion of contemporaries, Catton had successfully bridged the gap between, one might say, the late Victorian

⁶⁸ E. H. D. Sewell, *An Outdoor Wallah* (Stanley Paul), London, 1945, p.69.

style of reporting and the inter-war years drive for 'sharper' prose – the take-up of which was so protracted as to defy a keener delineation. But for younger colleagues in the late 1920s and 1930s, the voice of experience that Catton represented and, indeed, traded upon, had become couched in a rather old-fashioned style, and was in danger, perhaps, of parody. The mention by Cardus, Swanton and an unnamed ex-colleague, all younger men, of Catton's fondness for the 'crimson rambler' as a description of the cricket ball, and of even having first steered the phrase on to a sports page, suggest that an element of the veteran's wordplay was tolerated rather than embraced by later generations of sports reporters.

The comments serve to underline general views expressed in several of the memoirs consulted, and other works, concerning an emphasis on reporting being seen as a young man's occupation. As Reade warned prospective journalists, highlighted in Chapter Two, 'Even strong men not infrequently break down, and retire into less laborious occupations'.⁶⁹ The stock anecdotes of the trade regarding veteran sports reporters, featured in Chapter Three, and recounted by Macadam and Beanland, belittle the image of the 'old-timers'.⁷⁰ The 1943 official NUJ history carried the views of a journalist of 40 years' experience who wrote of his work in 'Greater London' in 1900. The East End weeklies were staffed 'by very young men', with senior reporters 'usually in the early thirties. If they were over 40 they generally received rather

⁶⁹ A. Arthur Reade, **Literary Success: Being A Guide To Practical Journalism** (Wyman and Sons), London, 1885, p.132.

⁷⁰ Macadam, **Macadam Road**, pp.130-131 and V. A. S. Beanland, **Great Games and Great Players. Some thoughts and recollections of a sports journalist** (Allen and Co), London, 1945, pp.11-12.

less, for they were supposed to be past their zenith', he recalled.⁷¹ It is a point confirmed by Aaron Watson, writing of London journalism in 1902. 'The senseless dictum that a man is too old at forty was in the heyday of its youth', he wrote, with even men of 35 being seen as 'too old' for reporting work. He recalled the fashion of 'taking down' senior men, with 'a man of long experience and world-wide reputation . . . instructed to take a turn in one of the police courts', or a war correspondent sent to 'an inquest in a Westminster slum'.⁷² Cardus, when writing of his press box colleagues covering Lancashire cricket, referred to them as 'veterans', and 'old stagers'.⁷³ At least Catton's reputation in later life appears to have saved him from the worst of the industry's seemingly inherent condescension for and prejudice against the 'old-timers'.

Comment on Catton's edicts as editor is revealing on two counts. It would appear that 'the Chief' ran a tight ship in terms of reporting style, with little leeway for the introduction of novelty and even mild slang. There is little sense of there being a margin for compromise or negotiation. He was a stickler for accuracy and straightforward writing. He knew how he wanted the *Athletic News* and, no doubt, other Hulton titles to look and while he was in charge he made sure he got his way. Catton's demands on his staff also reveal something of his personality. He was a hard worker, perhaps even driven, and expected a similar commitment from his staff, to the point of being 'exacting', 'stern', prepared to criticise colleagues and lecture them in his quest for what

⁷¹ F. J. Mansfield, "**Gentlemen The Press!**" *Chronicles of a Crusade* (Allen and Co), London, 1943, pp.513-514.

⁷² Aaron Watson, *A Newspaper Man's Memories* (Hutchinson), London, 1925, pp.203-204.

⁷³ Cardus, *Second Innings*, pp.175-180.

he wanted. He was sure of himself. But his criticisms and cajoling were softened by an infectious laugh and a working environment of 'professional camaraderie' that favoured a sense of mutual respect. But Catton was not averse to occasional lapses, whether it be his literary asides and allusions or recourse to the 'crimson rambler'. When considered alongside Sewell's claim to have not been subject to alterations on a stream of regular opinion and chat columns on cricket, one wonders if there might have been some slight friction on the editorial floor arising from the treatment of staff writers compared with the work of star columnists and the editor himself.

Catton had an opportunity to explain his writing style when invited to deliver a lecture in 1923 to journalism students at the University of London, a talk later printed in *The Journalist* and *The Newspaper World*. After highlighting the need for knowledge and observation skills, he impressed the need for writing,

. . . good, sound, plain English. There are technical terms which cannot be avoided, but the resources of the King's English are quite equal to describing any sporting event. Avoid slang and looseness of expression, and beware of falling into ruts. Be natural in style, and, above all things, be lucid. Rivet the attention of the reader with the first sentence, carry

him along with an arresting narrative, and conclude with a phrase which leaves a tang in his mind. You have a story to tell – not to write a dry-as-dust report.⁷⁴

6:6 'He loved sport and he loved the *Athletic News*': Reputations

The laudatory theme prevalent among the comments of the football and cricket fraternity at the time of Catton's 'retirement' in 1924 was mirrored by fellow journalists 12 years later in the press coverage of his death. His time on Fleet Street, with an unbroken employment record, had cemented his image as the grand old man of sports reporting. The London-based media might well have dismissed him as something of a provincial back-number had he closed his notebook in Manchester some 10 years earlier. However, there was no shortage of opinion or anecdote when his obituaries came to be written. There is little or no sign of an authoritative article being printed, say, in Manchester, and cannibalised by Fleet Street writers, or even of the former Hulton titles

⁷⁴ James A. H. Catton, 'Sports Reporting', *The Journalist*, Oct, 1923, p.176. The university launched a two-year course of study for a diploma in journalism in October, 1919, 'largely in the interests of demobilized officers and men and of released war workers', following a conference the year before involving the Institute of Journalists and the well established School of Journalism at Columbia University, New York, see *The Times*, Dec 11, p.7 and Dec 17, p.5, both 1918, and April 1, p.9, July 21, p.9, and Sept 13, p.13, all 1919. See also Mansfield, *The Press*, pp.411-412, for the NUJ's efforts to find demobilized men work and a claim that the union helped with the university course. A commercial rival to the university course was launched in 1920, with the London School of Journalism boasting a number of high profile industry figures as patrons, including Viscount Northcliffe, Lord Beaverbook and former NUJ president F. J. Mansfield, see *The Times*, April 23, p.12, and December 23, p.6, both 1920. Both initiatives point to efforts to place the occupation on a sounder 'professional' footing. Percy Rudd, sports editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, had delivered a talk on 'sporting journalism' to the university students the year before Catton, confirming the acceptance of sport as a legitimate strand of journalism. The NUJ Education Committee also featured tips for sports journalists in a series of advice columns, *The Journalist*, Oct, 1928, p.206. Some NUJ branches appear to have taken on the role of educating and training members, with the East Lancashire branch featuring sports writing prominently, *The Journalist*, Jan, 1929, p.3, and April, 1930, p.101, although some of the guidance could be at a very informal level and of questionable utility. Sports editor Ernest Edwards, of the *Liverpool Echo* cautioned his audience to take up a hobby and sports journalists, in particular, to avoid cigarettes, 'if they wished to retain their youthful alertness and keenness of eyesight. There was nothing to beat a pipe'.

subscribing to a generally agreed 'in-house' sketch of the man. Each of the writers recording Catton's death for a variety of titles was keen to express an independent view of the man, evidence, surely, of a rise in the status of sports journalism as practised by James Catton.

Catton's reputation is perhaps best summed up by the *Fleet Street Annual*, which considered him, 'perhaps the best-known sporting journalist in the country'.⁷⁵ *Wisden* thought fit to note that he was 'Always looking for the best that happened'.

A regular attendant at Test matches almost from the time that the Australians first came to England, he was steeped in cricket lore. An indefatigable worker, he kept a file of the doings of every player and in this way built up a remarkable memory which made him a walking encyclopaedia of cricket and football.⁷⁶

His pride in having reported top cricket matches for 50 years is illustrated by his involvement in the '25 Club', an exclusive group of journalists who qualified by having covered at least 25 Test matches between England, Australia and South Africa . . . no barrier for Catton, who was president of the club at the time of his death and had even designed a tie for members incorporating the MCC and Australian colours and was said to be, 'very proud of this distinction'.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Fleet Street Annual* 1937, p.51.

⁷⁶ *Wisden Cricketers Almanack for 1937* (John Wisden and Co), London, p.269.

⁷⁷ *Freemason's Chronicle*, Aug 29, 1936, p.129. Catton's former press box colleague from his Manchester days, J. A. Brierley, later became the third chairman, *Lytham St Annes Express*, Sept 7, 1951, p.16.

The qualities highlighted in 1924 were again remarked upon in the obituaries, with certain extra, larger-than-life attributes accruing to the Catton reputation.⁷⁸ *The Times* suggested,

. . . it was a common saying that he selected the English football teams. Football directors always declared that when the players knew that he was in the reporters' box there was a certainty of a high-class game, free from fouls. On several occasions when the Football Association dealt severely with clubs and players, the initiative came from him.⁷⁹

It was a motif *The Cricketer* noted a week later, but the repetition of a number of key phrases suggests the sentiments were copied, an example of the easy borrowing between titles and the manner in which one man's point of view can be given extra credence by repetition.⁸⁰ Ivan Sharpe, former colleague and a friend, warmed to the theme of Catton as a force for good,

It is almost true to say the smallest man in sport, not so many years ago, had the greatest sway. Sir Charles Clegg, veteran president of the Football Association, says no one gets lost on a straight road. The true route, at vital times in sport, has often been pointed by Catton's busy pen.⁸¹

Invariably, his size was mentioned in light-hearted tones, underlining the striking impression Catton must have made on first acquaintance. Terms used included, 'small in inches but immense in mind'; 'such a little man'; 'a tiny man

⁷⁸ Catton obituaries consulted (all 1938): *The Cricketer*, Aug 29, p.551; *Daily Express*, Aug 22, p.5, Aug 28, p.13; *Daily Mail*, Aug 22, p.12; *Evening Standard*, Aug 22, p.13; *Fleet Street Annual*, p.51; *Freemason's Chronicle*, Aug 29, 1936, p.129; *Glasgow Herald*, Aug 22, p.5; *Journal of the Institute of Journalists*, Oct, p.194; *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, Aug 22, p.5, Aug 27, p.8; *Manchester Guardian*, Aug 22, p.15; *News Chronicle*, Aug 22, p.11; *The Observer*, Aug 23, p.21; *Sporting Chronicle*, Aug 22, p.8, Aug 24, p.7; *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 30, p.17; *The Times*, Aug 22, Aug 25, p.5; *Wimbledon Boro News*, Aug 28, p.6.

⁷⁹ *The Times*, Aug 25, 1936, p.5.

⁸⁰ *The Cricketer*, Aug 29, 1938, p.551.

⁸¹ *Sunday Chronicle*, Aug 30, 1936, p.17.

with towering gifts'; 'his squat figure barely reached the shoulders of the average man'; 'his brain must have been twice as big as his body'. Other aspects of his personality to come to the fore included his talent as a 'witty conversationalist' and popular after-dinner speaker; a man of 'genial disposition which endeared him to many people'; of 'very wide culture'; 'an insatiable reader'; 'a loveable soul'; 'invariably conscious of the dignity of his profession . . . he could always laugh when laughter was occasioned, or tender a helping hand to newcomers to the trade'. Professionally, he was described as, 'one of the greatest sporting journalists Britain has produced'; 'a perpetual joy to every Press Box in which he honoured' (sic); 'He loved sport and he loved the *Athletic News*'; 'no one was ever more wedded to his work' as editor. Catton had apparently, on several occasions, told a close colleague in his days with the *Athletic News*, 'If I could have my way, when my time comes, I would like to die in this chair'. Sharpe saw him as 'A grand little man, chock full of personality', a 'great laughter', a lover of music. The writer of the *Times* obituary claimed Catton was 'proud to be called a reporter'. He was portrayed as a senior journalist prepared to go easy on the fresh recruit and to offer the advice of experience.

There was an understanding that Catton's football journalism had played a significant part in not just how the game was perceived and represented, but in its very progress, and a sense that his efforts would be recognised for many years to come. Sharpe, again, declared, 'James Catton had long since earned a lasting place in the gallery of those who have been clean, sane, and really

constructive forces in building Britain's games'. Herbert Dunnico, in his funeral address, said of Catton,

He had a large share of that old world nobility, simplicity and courtesy that mark great hearted men. His code of honour was a high one and he would not lower it. Sport to him was not an end in itself, but a school in which the great virtues of fair play, straight-dealing and honesty of purpose should be fostered. His knowledge of sport, particularly Association Football, was wide and deep, and he was intensely jealous of its reputation.

Catton had obviously made a deep and lasting impression on his *Athletic News* successor Sharpe. In his 1952 reminiscences, **40 Years in Football**, he paid a warm tribute to Catton. In a book sprinkled with affectionate memories of the veteran and his days on the weekly paper, Sharpe introduces the diminutive writer to a new generation, and reminds older readers of the man's reputation, his place in sport and journalism, and what he stood for.

Catton was the mighty midget of sporting journalism. Dwarf-like in stature, his knowledge of football and cricket was equalled, if not outmatched, by his zeal for work and accuracy. He detested slang, and anything slipshod. He hit hard, fought for ideals amid the growing commercialism of Soccer, and wielded more influence than most of the legislators. James ("Tityrus") Catton helped materially to set the game on the right road.⁸²

Sharpe repeated his tribute to Catton and his work on the *Athletic News* in the 1964 **Football League Jubilee Book**. In a work devoted to the great and the good of the game, Sharpe was no less effusive than he had been 12 years earlier, describing him as 'the pioneer of football journalism . . . of informed,

⁸² Ivan Sharpe, **40 Years in Football** (Hutchinson's), London, 1952, p.35.

outspoken, constructive criticism', although Catton's name would have, by this date, meant little to probably a majority of readers.

The editor and his journal wielded great influence. It is true to say that, although he was the smallest man at any match, he was the man most feared. He insisted on dignity in the game's control, in criticism, and in all comment.⁸³

Catton's name was kept before the sporting public in the years after his death in a variety of images created by a handful of former newspaper colleagues who mentioned him in passing, either in the context of their own careers or, in rare exceptions, in an attempt to place him and the development of sports reporting in some sort of historical context. The prolific sporting commentator Trevor Wignall, writing in 1940, mentions meeting Catton among the 'sports-writer stalwarts of the old school' as he made an early name for himself on Fleet Street in the 1920s.⁸⁴ C. B. Fry, writing in his 1939 autobiography, mentioned 'the well known' Catton in context of his 'amenable' editorship of the *Athletic News*, recalling briefly their falling out over Fry's expensive wire story, mentioned above, and the fact that he was 'the smallest man who ever edited a newspaper'.⁸⁵ In 1950, Neville Cardus, in his book of memoirs, **Second Innings**, as mentioned earlier, portrayed Catton as a Manchester press box veteran of the 1920s, holding him and his provincial contemporaries up to friendly ridicule as representatives of a passing generation of reporters. He was mentioned in positive fashion in 1945 by Arsenal and England star Eddie Hapgood, who included him among a list of his newspaper friends in his

⁸³ Ivan Sharpe, **The Football League Jubilee Book** (Sportsmans Book Club), London, 1964, p.129.

⁸⁴ Wignall, **Dull Moment**, p.49.

⁸⁵ C. B. Fry, **Life Worth Living** (Pavilion Library), London, 1986, first published 1939, p.153.

playing days.⁸⁶ Soccer legend Charles Buchan in his 1955 book **A Lifetime in Football**, described Catton as ‘. . . a little tubby fellow, not five feet in height. He was, however, the greatest writer of his day, knowledgeable, benevolent and respected by all the soccer authorities’. He retold a surprising story of his time at Sunderland in the 1912-13 season that says much about Catton’s and the *Athletic News*’ standing in the game.

Gladwin was one of those full-backs who never read a newspaper or knew whom he was playing against . . . Before a game, a colleague would say to him: “You’re up against Jocky Simpson today so you’re for it.” All Gladwin would say was: “Who’s Jocky Simpson?” At that time, Simpson was as well-known and as famous as Stanley Matthews is today. At other times, one would say to Gladwin: “You must be on your best behaviour, ‘Tityrus’ is reporting the game.” Now ‘Tityrus’, the mighty atom Jimmy Catton, was the outstanding sports writer of his day and editor of the *Athletic News*, known then as the ‘Footballers’ Bible’. Yet Gladwin’s only remark was: “Who’s ‘Tityrus’?”⁸⁷

The insular Gladwin was oblivious to Catton’s reputation, but not so his teammates.

Also in 1955, Fleet Street journalist John Macadam attempted to place Catton and similarly talented veteran reporters of the 1920s in a professional context, portraying Catton as among half-a-dozen ‘elder statesmen’ of the press box who invested sport ‘with a dignity it never had before’ and to whom ‘the sporting public looked for their news, views and criticisms of sport. They were received in the soccer board-rooms, in the Wimbledon dressing rooms and in

⁸⁶ E. A. Hapgood, **Football Ambassador** (Sporting Handbooks), London, 1945, p.138.

⁸⁷ Buchan, **Lifetime**, pp.89-89, pp.41-42.

the boxing camps. They were liked, respected and trusted'. But Catton was reserved a special place by Macadam among this small elite.⁸⁸

Post-war sports writers Archie Ledbrooke and Edgar Turner, in their review of the game in the mid-1950s, were moved to quote approvingly in a chapter on 'The Man with the Typewriter',

A pupil of the late JAH Catton once said that he was told by that strange little man to say in his report: '*What* happened, *how* it happened, and *why* it happened', and that pithy instruction would seem to hold good for other events on the newspaper diary than merely sporting fixtures.⁸⁹

The 1994 republication of the 1935 anthology of cricket writing, **Bat and Ball**, including Catton's pen picture of 'Famous Cricket Grounds', his recollection of a sporting novelty from the 1880s, together with anecdotal mention of his sporting patriotism and his inclusion as a writer worthy of mention in a review of a century and a half of 'great' cricketing prose and verse, has gone some way towards presenting him to a new generation of cricket enthusiasts.⁹⁰ But the sporting 'immortality' conferred by *Wisden* in its 'Births And Deaths of Cricketers' section was somewhat short-lived. After regular inclusion up to the outbreak of World War Two, Catton's name had been removed upon the reappearance of a somewhat truncated list in 1949, following suspension of the publication during the war years. Catton's posthumous reputation, in the cricketing world at least, was not enough, it seems, to survive a tightening of

⁸⁸ Macadam, **Macadam Road**, pp.127-128.

⁸⁹ Archie Ledbrooke and Edgar Turner, **Soccer From The Press Box** (Nicholas Kaye), London, 1955, p.162.

⁹⁰ Thomas Moulton (ed), **Bat and Ball** (Magna Books), Leicester, 1994, first published 1935, pp.99-110, p.168, p.166, p.219.

credentials for inclusion. His cause cannot have been helped by the demise of the *Athletic News* in the early 1930s.

Catton's *Athletic News* sports reports have attracted a new wave of interest over the past 25 years following the growth in interest in sports history in academic circles, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis. It is not unusual to find his work on the Manchester paper used as a means of understanding the development of sport, and football, in particular, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, whether the reports are directly attributed to Catton or not.

6:7 Conclusion

James Catton's reputation as a sports journalist with a wealth of experience as editor and chief reporter on one of the country's foremost specialist sports papers opened doors for him on Fleet Street. He appears to have found as much work as he wanted, irrespective of his age and declining health. Despite having worked all his life in the provinces, his peripatetic working environment had ensured that there were few graduates of the nation's press boxes who had not come across the diminutive veteran. The qualities that had marked him out for promotion in 1900 and that had ensured a long and seemingly successful stint as editor, ensured he could not be ignored on his move south. It cannot be doubted that force of personality, writing ability, a love and understanding of most sports, reputation, ambition, early education and training, longevity, sociability, contacts, experience, tenacity, a sharp intellect, an ability and willingness to compromise, a thick skin, and luck, all combined to play a part in marking Catton as one of the most remarkable sports

journalists of his time. The exact fit of the traits listed, and their proportions, are open to debate. But the manner in which Catton made use of whatever qualities he possessed ensured that in the second half of his career he had distanced himself from many of the occupational disadvantages that beset the majority of his editorial colleagues – low pay, uncertain prospects, ambivalent status and a debilitating lack of occupational safeguards to withstand the economic threat posed by unregulated recruitment. Catton was a newspaper personality, he possessed a byline that carried immense credibility inside the newspaper industry, the world of sport and, one can only surmise, among the reading public. His reputation following his death places him firmly among the ranks of the industry's 'modernisers', although the length of his career left him open to the condescension of youth and the taint of being old-fashioned at the close of his career.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the development of sports journalism from a period of newspaper industry expansion in the third quarter of the nineteenth century through to the advent of the recognisably 'modern' press of the inter-war years. The popular newspaper over that period came to play a significant part in the lives of millions of people, as a source of information and entertainment, and sports reporting grew to represent an important element in the shape of that popular press. As the newspaper industry expanded, so too did the role of the reporter.

Journalists were burdened by a questionable status, in part a consequence of the lingering stigma attached to the early-century radical press. The widening of the news agenda, driven by the late-century popular press, created a keener appetite for titillation and sensation, and that shift in emphasis, from the worthy to the novel, also served to diminish the journalist's reputation. Although the search for novelty and controversy was less apparent in the weekly sector of the industry, the standing of the occupation, as a whole, suffered. The idealised image of the news-gatherer, portrayed in the literature surrounding the occupation, contrasted sharply with the reality of the practice of reporting as experienced by journalists, particularly those on the weekly provincial press. In practice, the job of reporting comprised a significant element of drudgery and repetition. The poor social status and practical realities of the occupation were compounded by low wages, especially for the newcomer or the man unable to rise beyond the level of provincial reporter, in essence, the majority of journalists. The open nature of recruitment, with

limited expectations of an apprentice's educational attainments, left the occupation open to intense, unregulated competition, and that in turn acted to depress pay rates. The means of increasing earnings through lineage also served to act as a check on regular wages and introduced an added element of competition, with contributors attracted from outside the ranks of the newspaper journalist.

The terms and conditions that became attached to the occupation were bound to attract a class of recruit drawn primarily from the lower reaches of the middle classes – men and boys with restricted prospects due to a lack of family influence, limited financial support, and a curtailed education. Many journalists who wrote of their experiences, prompted, admittedly, by their relative success, boasted a genuine vocation for literary work and journalism, but how central that vocation was to their success, and whether the less successful journalist lacked that occupational drive, are issues open to conjecture and further research. What does emerge, though, is that a vocation for reporting broadened the appeal of the occupation to attract a limited number of recruits from higher up the economic scale.

The sports journalist was embedded among the serried ranks of the general reporter at a time when editorial specialisms were only slowly evolving. In contrast to the specialist sporting press of the 1870s, sports reporting on the general press was either in the hands of freelance agencies or subsumed within the day to day assignments of the news reporter. In that environment, the sports reporter can best be recognised in the context of the Saturday

evening sports special. It was the most obvious product of the commercial union between sport and the general press. The growth of the evening press, in particular, was accompanied, and facilitated, by the adoption of sports news and by the synchronisation of industry practices with the sporting calendar, whether on a daily or seasonal basis, to make full use of the selling potential of sporting information. For example, the edition structure of the evening press was fully utilised to bring up to date sports news to the reader, and the journalist responded to a new daily imperative for local and national sports news by mastering and adapting the communication techniques of the day to be first with the news. The sports journalist was central to the development of the new 'Saturday specials', seemingly from inception to production.

The thesis has illustrated how the majority of sports journalism in the period under review was conducted on casual employment lines. Much of the work, especially on the meagrely-resourced provincial press was in the hands of juniors, drawn from the editorial department and supplemented at times by the efforts of other low-status newspaper employees such as young compositors. Responsibility for a paper's sports coverage, especially in the early years of this study, was treated as an employment rite of passage. Sport came to be accepted as an essential part of the modern press, but the central role played by office juniors at the practical level of gathering the sporting news suggests an ingrained and persistent misgiving on the part of more senior journalists as to sport's true worth in comparison with other news assignments, together with doubts over the occupational status conferred by reporting games.

The Victorian press, in particular, offered limited scope for the sporting specialist. The gradually evolving position of sports editor, a title encompassing the roles of reporter and columnist, the commissioning of articles, and sub-editing, meant the full-time sports 'department' of most newspapers comprised one employee. On smaller papers, the sports editor might also be charged with other, non-sporting responsibilities. The Saturday sports specials, in particular, exposed the staffing limitations of the press regarding the coverage of sport in the decades spanning 1900. The concentration of the week's sporting fixtures on one day stretched the limited resources of the average evening newspaper.

The widespread accusation of poor writing in many sports reports of the period serves to highlight the limited pool of expertise and talent to be found among the young enthusiasts and the pressed men who reported fixtures from the playing field touchlines in late Victorian and Edwardian England. It is perhaps difficult in a period marked by the saturation media coverage of sport, by opportunities for organised play for youths, and time-tabled school involvement, to appreciate the novelty attached to the growing popularity of newly-codified games pre-1900. The limited knowledge and perhaps playing experience to be found among the country's journalists, was compounded by a limited experience of original composition. Freed from the literary straitjacket of verbatim reporting, the standard lot of many journalists, the expectation of lively, creative and authoritative writing appears to have been beyond the scope of many. The failing was an indictment of the industry's recruitment system and the schooling of the youths drawn to the provincial press, the

haphazard selection of staff to cover games, and the low status attached to games coverage. The problems of competition and status anxiety created by the open nature of lineage work for general news reports, were exacerbated in the field of sports journalism by the casual nature of much sports reporting, outlined above. An increased demand for sports news created a need to invite work from outside contributors, and that in turn was bound to undermine the status of the sports reporter and to undermine standards of reporting.

There was a belief among some sports journalists of the inter-war years that the standard of composition in match reports had improved. The change was ascribed, in part, to the adoption of the personality-led and less verbose style of writing associated with the 'new journalism'. The decline of the first generation of sports reporters, and the emergence of a new corps of journalists with a commitment to, or vocation for, the by then well established genre of sports reporting, were also perceived as factors. But the improvement was only partial and, as with so much associated with the press, improvements were not uniform across the industry. As a consequence, the stigma of poor writing remained an issue even at the close of the period under review. The industry's questionable recruitment policies and concern over the status of the journalist remained, impacting on the ability to attract the right calibre of trainee. Little had been done to eradicate the casual nature of Saturday sports reporting, and the role of juniors and outside contributors remained significant.

Perhaps the clearest sign that sports reporting occupied a marginal position within the occupational structure of newspaper journalism, came within the

pay negotiations conducted by the National Union of Journalists in the second decade of the twentieth century. There was an acceptance on the part of the union, and by inference its members, and on the part of newspaper proprietors and managers, that the sports reporter would earn less than his counterpart covering news, at least in the early years of his career. The union hoped any shortfall would be made up through a separate pay band for those writers talented enough to compose a regular column of sporting notes, anecdotes and comment. What had no doubt been widely accepted as the common lot of the sports reporter, in practice and in principle, was becoming embodied in the written pay structure of the industry. The sports reporter was, in monetary terms, worth less than the news reporter, and only those men talented enough to master original composition, as a 'columnist', were deemed valuable enough to warrant the standard pay of the newsroom.

But there were compensating factors, not least in the appeal of sports journalism for the enthusiast, with the opportunity to watch sport and report on the drama of the playing field, track or ring. There is a suggestion of a certain leeway in the running of the sporting department, a 'happy independence' of reporters freed, for a time at least, from the commitment to cover news, whether matters of controversy and of a sensitive nature, with the inherent risk of confrontation and disagreement, or a potentially tedious round of civic business and court proceedings. If, as the above evidence suggests, sport was seen at times as secondary to the more important business of news gathering, then promotion to sports editor, the first rung on the newspaper management scale, might come earlier in a less crowded discipline than news

writing. There was the added appeal of a platform to express one's views and to attempt original composition, using the inherent drama of competitive sport as an excuse to indulge a penchant for descriptive writing, admittedly with widely varying degrees of success. The recognition by newspaper managements of sports news as an aid to circulation created a demand for 'sporting information', and the opportunity to supplement an income by competing in the lineage market, crowded as it might have been.

Documenting the successes and failures of local sporting clubs and athletes brought with it a degree of kudos within the sporting sub-culture. There was an acceptance of the reporter, with reservation, within the sporting circles he covered, especially if the sport, individual or club was in need of publicity or support. That acceptance was accompanied by an expectation of favourable comment and, just as in the sphere of news reporting, there was a potential for misunderstanding and conflict. But judging from the reminiscences of sports journalists of the period, there was a widespread air of proprietary concern on the part of journalists and a willingness to represent a positive public image of many sports and sports clubs, especially at the level of the local newspaper, and especially at a time when the worth of sport in wider society was open to question.

The composite picture that emerges of the sports journalist, from the second half of the nineteenth century through to the inter-war years, is one beset by contradictions. Sport became recognised as a means of expanding the popular press's constituency, especially further down the social and economic scale, and yet, among journalists, sports reporting conferred an uncertain

status on the writer, both in economic and professional terms. Original composition, the descriptive element that covering sports facilitated and even encouraged, was widely accepted as a higher form of journalism than that associated with the verbatim reporting of the council chamber and courtroom, but much of the sports reporting of the time, in the eyes of both contemporaries and historians, was laboured and hackneyed. Sports reporting attracted the enthusiast, and yet much of the work was in the hands of juniors and 'pressed men'.

The reality of sports reporting left little scope for the adoption of any of the trappings of the traditional professions. The occupation was bereft of protective mechanisms to moderate the impact of unregulated competition. Brief examinations of the workings of the press box and the reporter on the road reveal meagre evidence of an associational culture or successful strategies to enhance status or protect standards. There can be little doubt, though, that a widening of the news agenda, technological advances in communications, in printing technology and in transport, together with a growth in the numbers of newspapers, bringing with it increased competition to be first with the news, forced change on the journalist. The practical business of reporting demanded a 'professional' outlook in order to cope with the expectations of an industry undergoing unprecedented change, and in order to meet the daily or weekly impetus to put together a readable product. Nevertheless, journalism was an occupation marked by individualism, where 'personality' was valued and where there was immense scope for initiative.

It is perhaps only when the above industry imperatives and individual characteristics are examined together, in the detailed context of a man's career rather than the aggregated experiences of many, that the various nuances and facets of that 'professional' outlook become clearer. It is through, in this instance, the life and career of James Catton that the finer details of sports journalism's professionalisation emerge. The second half of the thesis has shown how Catton was able to enhance his occupational standing and rise above the socially and economically insecure lower levels of journalism. The product of a family occupying the shifting middle reaches of the middle classes, his working life took a slightly unexpected course, with entry to poorly-paid provincial, weekly journalism following a truncated education. It would appear his choice of career was prompted by a genuine vocation for reporting. A sports enthusiast, Catton's introduction to sports writing followed predictable lines, with casual shifts on the touchlines in Preston and Nottingham, and a growing acceptance by, and understanding of, late-Victorian urban England's sporting sub-culture. Catton exhibited a willingness to relocate in order to advance his career, with sport a sideline until circumstances and, perhaps, a disenchantment with news reporting and an enthusiasm for sport and its 'cleaner' image, saw him take to sports journalism full-time. But even then, in a reflection of sports reporting's limited career horizons, a relocation to Manchester saw sports writing, again, a sideline. The Hulton newspapers, built on the commercial potential of popular sport, eventually presented Catton with a second chance to specialise. Catton immersed himself in the world of professional football and cricket, in particular. He made himself an accepted authority on the games' histories,

rules, personalities, economics and ethics. The *Athletic News* and *Sporting Chronicle* provided him with an opportunity to report sport at its highest levels, together with a platform upon which to air his views and, in a sense, publicise himself. He wrote books on the development of football, he mixed with leading athletes and administrators, he pontificated on the controversies of the day and indulged himself with regular comment on his pet topics. He imposed his own views on how to write about sport on his staff and, seemingly, played a part in the development of a more modern, personality-led style of reporting. In later life his reputation helped secure employment as a sports reporter and columnist on Fleet Street, with a wealth of experience and knowledge as his stock in trade. In late career, respect for Catton's newspaper experience and his intimate understanding of commercial sport's roots in the 1870s and 1880s together, no doubt, with his standing as a former editor, spared him the demeaning treatment meted out to contemporaries in an industry seemingly beset by prejudice against veterans and, especially, 'old-timers' on journalism's lower rungs.

In analysing James Catton's obvious success as a sports journalist, due weight has to be given to the element of chance and good fortune associated with any career. That proviso is especially relevant for the late-Victorian press, an industry in a state of permanent flux. Catton appears to have benefited significantly from his association with the Hulton newspaper group. The success of the *Sporting Chronicle* and *Athletic News* provided Catton with the chance to work at the highest levels of British sports journalism. At the most basic level of occupational competence, Catton was able to take advantage of

that opportunity by dint of an ability to meet deadlines, to utilise the technology of the era, and to adopt a 'professional' attitude to the day's work. His undoubted ambition, understanding of sport and enthusiasm for the job of reporting were key additional attributes in the make-up of a successful sports journalist. Catton was an omnivorous reader and a student of sport history, and those hobbies helped lend a certain gravitas to, and widen the horizons of, his journalism. But his career success was further propelled by personal characteristics and writing talent. Catton appears to have been a lively conversationalist, gregarious and sociable, good company, and self-confident, despite a certain sensitivity regarding his height. These are all important attributes for a man seeking to make a living in reporting, in gaining acceptance and insight and information. Catton's writing talent is evident in the journalism he produced. His classically based, private school education set him above the run of the mill recruit to the provincial press. It enabled him to successfully master original composition. Catton cannot escape the charge of formulaic sports reporting endemic in the third quarter of the nineteenth century – if the limited work currently attributed to him in the early years of his career is representative. But he had the talent to develop his reporting style and to infuse his journalism with personality and humour. In a specialist field of journalism, marginalized by many within the press, the man who could boast even a handful of the above attributes stood a good chance of success. To possess them all made Catton, and men like him, true masters of their craft and consummate professionals.

Looking beyond the confines of this work, detailed studies of Catton's Victorian contemporaries, men like Arthur Binstead and Martin Cobbett, together with post-1900 sports journalists such as B. J. Evans, Trevor Wignall and John Brierley, are needed to test the findings of this thesis and to make the picture of sports journalism's professionalisation clearer still. The journalism of these men is accessible and their life stories, to varying degrees, can be traced. Research into their careers will hopefully throw further light on the complex issue of the vocabulary and style of sports reporting and the manner in which the genre could be said to have matured and adapted to a changing society and changes within the press itself. The findings of this thesis, in relation to James Catton and the *Athletic News*, have made the need for a similar investigation into the working life of an editor on a competing sports title, or the sports editor of a national title, particularly pressing. The thesis has touched upon the development of the press box and the life of the reporter on the road, and both require further analysis to identify elusive evidence for the development of an associational culture or strategies to enhance status and protect standards. The role of the sportsman-journalist deserves further research, too, in part to build a picture of a fascinating hybrid in the development of popular journalism and in part to examine the status anxiety surrounding the journalist's own sports-playing credentials. The issue appears to have been a matter of keen debate throughout the period under review. The role of the journalist as guardian of sporting probity and defender of the sporting sub-culture at a time when the worth of sport was openly questioned by wider society requires further study in order to assess the pressures the sports journalist was subject to, from both within the sporting

world and outside. A detailed study of the type of job specifications outlined in the *Daily News*, for both journalists wanting work and proprietors seeking to fill vacancies, together with their frequency and style, would prove worthwhile in reaching a deeper understanding of the changing nature of press work over the period under consideration and the development of editorial specialisms, with the frequency and number of advertisements possibly signalling significant trends in the industry's development that currently lie hidden. The development of a specialism within sports reporting, that of the racing correspondent, deserves a detailed study. The race reporter's intimate association with gambling and the myriad controversial aspects of horse racing made him a figure both admired and derided, both within the newspaper industry and the wider sporting sub-culture. Such a study appears a natural sequel to this thesis.

This study has provided the groundwork upon which much of the suggested further research can be built upon. It has opened up the territory and provided a detailed assessment of the trade of sports reporting and one man's role in it, at a time of immense change in the newspaper industry. The working life of James Catton has been traced, along with his family background, and placed in context. This study of Catton's career and the development of sports reporting should help inform later research into both the newspaper industry and the growth of sport, that has recourse to the journalism produced by Catton and his contemporaries.

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