

British Library newspaper archive puts 300 years of history online
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By Emma Barnett

Sixty-five million historic newspaper articles, covering the most significant events over the last 300 years, are now fully available online from today in a new archive created by the British Library.

People will now be able to search the '[British Newspaper Archive](#)', which is made up of four million pages - containing articles from local and regional papers going back to 1700, for details about members of their family who may have been eminent in their local communities hundreds of years ago.

The launch of the archive is the first time people will be able to digitally access and search through millions of newspaper articles from the comfort of their homes. Up until now, people have had to travel to the British Library newspaper depository in Colindale, North London, to access the entire collection of 200 local and regional newspapers.

Highlights of the vast collection include gems such as vivid accounts of General Garibaldi's UK visit to a "magnificent reception at Crystal Palace", published in the *Dundee Courier* on April 18 1864, and the creation of the phonograph by Thomas Edison, in the *North Wales Chronicle* on December 1, 1877.

Ed King, head of the British Library's newspaper collections, said: "People will find this archive extraordinary on both a personal and historical level. For the first time people can search for their ancestors through the pages of our newspapers wherever they are in the world at any time.

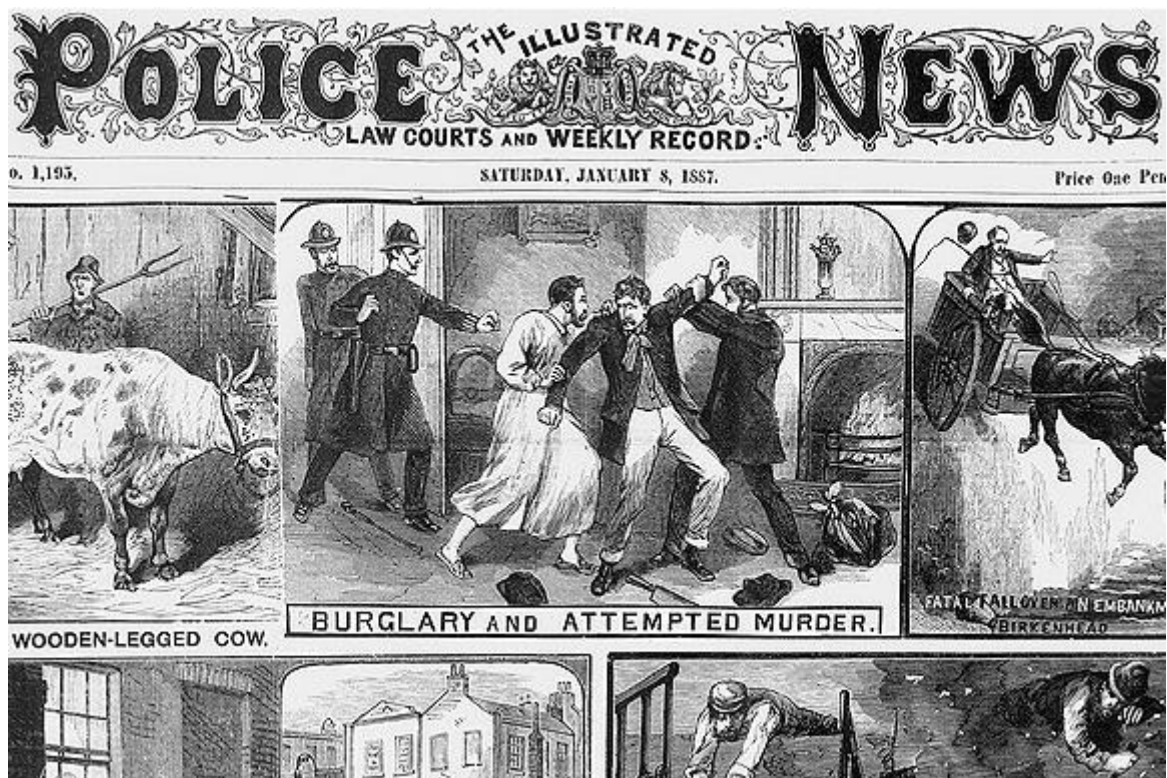
"But what's really striking is how these pages take us straight back to scenes of murders, social deprivation and church meetings from hundreds of year ago, which we no longer think about as we haven't been able to easily access articles about them."

The archive also features hundreds of letters from soldiers in varying war zones, which were published in local papers as a way of bringing attention to their needs and informing people about life at war. One such letter, published in *The Reading Mercury* on January 27, 1855, was from a soldier fighting in the Crimean War begging for food to be sent to him as the British army's supplies had dwindled to record lows.

However, anyone wishing to fully access the newspaper archive will have to pay to do so. People can search the site for free but will need to pay either £6.95 for 48 hour access; £29.95 for 30 days or £79.95 for an annual subscription. Once logged in, users can download a pdf of a particular page to keep forever. The archive can be accessed for free in the British Library's Reading rooms.

The digitisation project, which started last year, will take 10 years to complete, with a total of 650 million articles on 40 million web pages expected to be in the finished archive by 2020. British company Brightsolid, which also owns Friends Reunited and Genes Reunited, is responsible for digitising the archive - a painstaking process as much of it needs to be done by hand as so many of the pages of the newspapers are too fragile to be processed by machines.

Ed Vaizey, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, praised the project, saying: "The British Newspaper Archive is a rich and hugely exciting resource, packed with historical detail. It's a great example of the public and private sectors collaborating to deliver something that neither party could have delivered by themselves. I searched for my own constituency of Wantage and within seconds had 42,000 results – an indication of the breadth and variety of material featured. I'm delighted that the British Library and Brightsolid are working together to transform access to the nation's published memory."



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