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Braddick, Michael J., principal investigator; Marcus Nevitt and Bridgette Wessels, chief investigators; Keira Borrill, research associate. George Thomason's Newsbooks. Other

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George Thomason's Newsbooks is a dataset and search interface resulting from an AHRC-funded project, run by Sheffield University, called Participating in Search Design: A Study of George Thomason's English Newsbooks.[1] According to the project website (dhi.ac.uk/projects/newsbooks-project), the interface was developed through a process called "Participatory Design," a technique that involves "users and potential users in the design of a new interface, system and/or service."[2] The interface was designed with the aid of a series of focus groups and meetings with key stakeholders and users.[3] Though the project took place in 2012, the associated resource has just been released. The project team took as its pilot dataset a portion of the Thomason Tracts: a collection held by the British

1. For more information on the project see Wessels et al.

2. Wessels et al., "Executive summary."

3. See Braddick and Nevitt, 155–56.

Library of seventy thousand printed items bound in two thousand volumes, collected by the bookseller George Thomason, microfilmed by ProQuest, and eventually digitized and incorporated in the online resource Early English Books Online (EEBO). Specifically, the project focused on improving access to a digitized corpus of "newsbooks": the name generally given to the printed, serialized news publications reporting on parliamentary debate and other domestic concerns that appeared in England from 1641 (similar publications, called *corantos*, appeared in England from 1621 but were restricted to foreign news).[4] For the prototype, the team chose a subset of Thomason newsbooks: all those printed in 1649, plus the entire run of a single title, *Mercurius Politicus*, totalling 1,179 issues, or about fifty thousand pages. This corpus was chosen to enable, according to the resource website, both "synchronic and diachronic study."[5] These newsbooks were transcribed using double-rekeying, and a bespoke interface was designed for their search.

The resource itself consists of three elements: 1) a prototype search interface, 2) a list of all newsbooks, suitable for browsing, and 3) a downloadable dataset of the transcriptions. The website has a refreshingly minimal design and loads quickly: there are no "related results" or other such detritus to clutter up the screen. The search instructions, documentation, and dataset are all well-described and easy to find. The search facility is where most of the attention has clearly been paid. Users are presented with a search box with an option for filtering by date. The search itself has a number of standard but useful options such as boolean searches, wild cards, and fuzzy matching. A search query will result in a series of titles with search terms highlighted. Alongside each result are two icons, allowing users to either discard, or only return results from, the relevant issue, title, year, or month of publication. Signing in (with a Google account) allows for saving individual search results: users can create their own folders and add annotations.

Clicking on a result brings up the individual transcription pages which display the rekeyed transcriptions alongside a digitized image of the page. The embedded images did not work at the time of the review, though links underneath the transcription allow the digitized image to be opened in a new

4. Raymond, 7–8, 20.

5. "A Description of the Resource," accessed 23 June 2021, dhi.ac.uk/newsbooks/nbcontext?about=resource.

browser window, provided the user has a subscription to either JISC Historical Texts or EEBO through ProQuest. Again, a range of useful features can be found alongside the transcriptions, including saving chosen pages (if logged in), adding annotations, and even correcting the transcription.

Alongside the search, the resource also allows for browsing by individual issues, sorted by title. This is particularly useful in the case of serialized news, where understanding an item of news (or the thread of an editorial argument, which often continues week after week) is made easier by browsing through titles in sequence. In addition, the project has made the transcriptions available for download as a single dataset, released as a compressed file (13 MB) containing a single text file per issue. Having the data available is useful for those interested in applying digital humanities techniques to early modern sources, and the simple structure (no markup save a single XML tag to indicate page breaks) makes it easy in theory for beginners or undergraduate students to plug straight into a web application for text analysis such as Voyant-tools.org. However, while the effort to release the data like this (with a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA licence) is commendable, as it stands the dataset is of limited use because there is no associated metadata. Simply adding a unique title ID, issue ID, and date to the individual text files would make it much more useful for those interested in digital humanities applications, particularly as its manageable size and easy access would make it ideal for teaching purposes. One can imagine tracing the use of a set of newsworthy terms over time in *Mercurius Politicus*, for example, or looking for instances of text reuse across the 1649 titles.

In terms of the content itself, the collection includes a number of notable and historically interesting titles, including Samuel Pecke's *Perfect Diurnall,* the longest-running of the period; a title called *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence,* published on a Friday specifically to exploit the new Saturday post service and the habit of sending newsbooks to friends outside London; the first "Irish" newsbook, the *Irish Mercury* (though not printed there); and the *Moderate*, a newsbook with Leveller sympathies possibly edited by the then Licenser of the Press, Gilbert Mabbot. There is a good range of news events recorded in the corpus, including extensive coverage of the trial and execution of Charles I in January 1649, Leveller and Digger uprisings and riots, and coverage—much of it propaganda—of the war in Ireland in the summer.

The content is not overall easy to read, which will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the texts. Newsbook editors, perhaps bound by

the implicit decorum demanded when putting one's name to a serialized publication, tended to publish dry, "objective" material, with little editorial voice. In 1649 there were a few exceptions, most notably the various Royalist and Parliamentarian "Mercuries": sectarian, polemical publications that resembled the newsbooks in form but inhabited a sort of sub-genre of their own, containing propaganda, political attacks, verse, and satirical writing—but only minimal news. These ranged from the long-running *Mercurius Pragmaticus* and *Mercurius Elencticus*, both Royalist titles, to ephemeral ones such as *Mercurius Carolinus* and *Mercurius Hybernicus*, both of which only lasted one issue. Other examples of more "literary" prose in the newsbooks are the opening essays added each week by the editors of several titles: chiefly the *Moderate Intelligencer,* the *Moderate*, and *Mercurius Politicus*. The latter of these, *Mercurius Politicus*, edited by Marchmont Nedham, is a particularly significant title and its inclusion is warmly welcomed. For much of its run (1650–60) it was the most reliable and consistent newsbook published in England, not least because Nedham acted as something of a "press agent" for Cromwell and was allowed access to the mail received by his secretary of state, John Thurloe. Its coverage of foreign news was particularly good, and its editorials, highlighting Nedham's classical Republican views, were well written.

These serialized news publications sit in a strange position within the history of print culture. They are hybrid, reassembled documents, generally consisting of a series of individual pieces of news, in separate paragraphs, often pasted together from various manuscript sources. In one sense, each title might count as one publication, having its own creator (an editor), and to some extent a voice of its own: what we might now call a "brand identity." At the same time, each individual issue is also a distinct publication. Finally, within each issue, each individual paragraph might also be considered its own unit, or document, because it is a discrete piece of writing by an individual—albeit usually anonymous—author. This strangeness might be part of the reason why these newsbooks have been somewhat neglected by transcription projects. EEBO-TCP, which transcribed large parts of EEBO, didn't include serials in either of its phases, though it does include large parts of the Thomason collection, mostly through one-off pamphlets.

The eccentricity of the newsbook format and its place in print culture also makes it difficult to produce useful search results. The use of "search" as a research tool is ubiquitous and rarely given second thought, but its basic premise

is worth revisiting. The purpose of a search engine is to retrieve the documents most relevant to a user-inputted query, often in some sort of ranked order of significance. A user interested in reactions to the first Anglo-Dutch war might search for a group of related words, say "Dutch + enemy," with the hope that the search engine will return relevant documents, because the co-occurrence of the two words in a single document is likely to mean it is related in some way to the war. This relies on a shared understanding of the definition of the individual "document," and in the case of early modern newsbooks, what should constitute a document is not always clear. In this resource, documents are defined as individual newsbook pages, which is more useful than returning issues, but in a news publication the co-occurring words on a given page may be from entirely different paragraphs. The inverse is also a problem: co-occurrences may be missed if they are from a single paragraph spread across two pages. These are issues which unfortunately this project and resource have not rectified.

The clean and very quick interface makes the George Thomason's Newsbooks resource a pleasure to use. Despite being a pilot project, which was primarily about search methodology rather than content, the documents that make up this corpus are a welcome addition to an often-neglected area of digitization, enabling meaningful search of a set of early modern newsbooks for the first time (the British Library's Burney Collection has some searchable text, produced using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), from digitized newsbooks, but the low accuracy makes it mostly unusable). Though its pilot status means there are some bugs in the interface and its content is modest, it still stands as a worthwhile resource for anyone keen on the history of the latter of the English Civil Wars, the Commonwealth, and will be of interest to historians of the early English newsbook. With a few tweaks to the metadata, the dataset would also make a valuable resource for digital humanities practitioners.

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Marked carefully as "work in progress," The Parish of St Saviour, Southwark is, in fact, a largely complete, open-access database of documents pertaining to the inhabitants of the Surrey (now South London) parish between 1550 and 1650. William Ingram and Alan H. Nelson's impressive project, partly funded by a University of Michigan grant, is affiliated with the London Metropolitan Archives and the Folger Shakespeare Library and combines meticulous scholarly archivism with both digital and intellectual accessibility. Its creators have published widely on early modern theatre and its urban, economic, and documentary contexts: Ingram is professor emeritus at the University of Michigan, Nelson at the University of California, Berkeley. Their site collates, either directly or through summary, all local extant records that relate to the St. Saviour parish, its members, and its key institutions: the church of St. Saviour (now Southwark Cathedral) and the Southwark free school. Fortunately, a good amount of documentary evidence has survived for the period, certainly relative to adjacent London parishes, and the site incorporates diverse sources, including parochial presentments, wills, the school governors' book, certificates of residence, and vestry minutes, among a significant number of other records. With the exception of wills and lawsuits, where information is summarized, these are presented in their entirety, having been transcribed by Nelson