

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

PLYMOUTH'S DAILY NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR FOUNDERS.

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My last presidential address dealt exhaustively with the subject of "Early Newspapers in Plymouth and the West". I was able to trace the West Country history of the press for nearly two and a half centuries, from the beginnings, at Exeter in 1707 and 1714, to the establishment of *The Plymouth Weekly Journal, or General Post* in 1721, thence through the evolutionary growth, despite restrictions and taxations, until the abolition of taxes in 1855 prepared the way for the start of the local daily newspapers in 1860.

There was available, after exhaustive and intensive search, such a wealth of historic fact and valuable reference, that there was no time on the last occasion to deal adequately with the developments of the last eight decades. Therefore, with your indulgence, I propose to devote this second Presidential address to a continuation of the history of our local press, and confine it to the achievements of our daily newspapers, principally those produced at Plymouth for circulation in Devon and Cornwall.

To get the picture in proper perspective, we must first review the first half of the last century and the conditions which led to the disappearance of so many weekly newspapers and the emergence of the dailies. Remember, first of all, that newspapers in the old days were costly. In 1810 the *Plymouth Chronicle and Telegraph* cost 6½d. a copy. Stamp duty absorbed 3½d., and an increase of price by ½d. had been permitted by the legislature, which passed an act to allow proprietors to increase the price of their papers from 6d. to 6½d. In 1819 the *Plymouth and Dock Weekly Journal* cost 7d. a copy, as did also the local *Gazette*. Even half a century later, in 1860, the *London Times* cost 5d. a copy, and was let out at 1d. or 2d. an hour in Plymouth, and was sold on the following day at about half price.

It is a remarkable fact, as previously indicated, that though this Institution has been in continuous session since 1812, there is no trace, so far as I can find, of either Presidential address, or sessional lecture, devoted exclusively to local press history. Plymouth produced eminent editors, some of whom attained national reputation, but no one seems to have delved sufficiently deeply to produce a local book upon the history of the press, and the only records extant are newspaper articles and personal recollections. The position has been rendered more difficult by the destruction by enemy bombs and incendiary fires of precious old newspapers and dependable books. Indeed, I have been astounded in my search to find how few are the available records that have survived destruction.

There is ample evidence, in my opinion, to prove that the establishment of the daily newspapers locally arose out of the golden opportunity provided by the lifting of taxation, and the growing indignation of worthy citizens at the degeneracy of the weekly papers. Local weeklies had been secured by rival political partisans, and devoted their columns to disgraceful abuse of each other. Henry Francis Whitfeld, author of *Plymouth and Devonport in Times of War and Peace*, when compiling his work half a century ago, spent a lot of time, according to local recollection, in the old Plymouth Proprietary Library in Cornwall Street, making extracts from the valuable files there of the old Plymouth and Devonport newspapers, which—alas!—all perished in the recent air raids. Whitfeld wrote that the enfranchisement of Devonport and extension of the suffrage in Plymouth, led to the multiplication of local newspapers, described as ephemerals and mushrooms, of the catch-penny order. There were over thirty such between 1832–6. In 1840 the local political newspapers described each other's writers in offensive terms, and words such as rabble-rash, dirty work, dirty tail, chattering jackanapes, etc., were used in abundance. It is due to add, however, that some of the weekly newspapers were laid on more enduring foundations, and tribute must be paid to the enterprise and progress of the old *Devonport Independent*, the *Plymouth Herald*, the *Plymouth Journal*, and the *Dock Telegraph* of those distant days. Nevertheless, matters had reached their head about 1853, when the *Plymouth Mail*, for a while, was edited by a well-known literary figure, described as a gifted poet and novelist, Mortimer Collins, a native of Plymouth. Collins, says Whitfeld, was a fine, handsome man, who was known as "the King of Bohemians", by reason of his indifference to the canons of social behaviour. Collins possessed a caustic wit, was a scholar, and had a ready command of varied stores of knowledge. Reveling in personalities, he treated his political opponents mercilessly. In this respect, Isaac Latimer, his opponent, was no match for him, but Collins was vulnerable on one point—he was invariably in debt. During one election in the borough, Mortimer Collins began a "squib" with

"Isaac the editor, Isaac the Ass,
Asseverator of things that do not come to pass."

All that was left for Isaac Latimer to do was to give in detail the writs for debt and the judgment summonses that had been issued against Mortimer Collins in more than one town in which he had lived, and the result was that the editor of *The Mail* suddenly left Plymouth.

"There is no doubt that this feud between the two chief newspapers of the town was not to the liking of the high-minded inhabitants, however much it 'tickled the ears of the groundlings'", says one record of the times.

The Western Morning News in its jubilee supplement of January 3, 1910, quoted from a rare volume, *Then and Now, or Fifty Years of Newspaper Work* by Mr. William Hunt, the newspaper's first sub-editor. He said "persistent bickerings and painful personalities in (the two Plymouth weeklies) the *Mail* and the *Journal*, which week after week recalled rival editions of Eatanswill, were very distressing to many of the most thoughtful, influential, and public-spirited Plymothians". Out of evil came good, for it led to the publication of the first Plymouth daily newspaper

I deliberately set out this undignified history because of its lesson for posterity. What undoubtedly was revealed in Plymouth was the awakening of public conscience and the earnest desire of citizens to cast aside unworthy publications, and assist in the production of journals which reflected credit upon the city and its institutions. It was curious that all through those earlier years citizens, while resentful of these scurrilous journals, could seldom be aroused to combine and produce something of which they could be justifiably proud. All our press history proves that newspapers always degenerate when they come under the control of politicians, whether local or national, because political abuse, when it appears in cold print, invariably does more harm than good to the cause it is designed to espouse.

The Western Morning News was the first of the permanent local dailies. Yet it is an extraordinary fact that in its jubilee supplement dated "1860—Jan. 3—1910" and marked "gratis", the paper had to rely for the data of its founding upon a book published in Hull in 1887, that to which I have already referred—Hunt's *Then and Now*. (Since my earlier address and references to this book of Hunt's, I find that, in addition to the two copies already mentioned, other copies of the rare volume have been found, one at Sheffield and two at Hull.) As Hunt played a prominent part in the beginnings of daily newspapers in Plymouth, it is well to pause and recall his activities.

William Hunt, though he rose to become President of the Provincial Newspaper Society of Great Britain and Ireland, began his newspaper work in a small amateur way at Honiton, in the early thirties of the last century, and later became a reporter upon the staff of the weekly newspaper *The Plymouth Times*, started early in 1842. After its demise, he transferred to the *West of England Conservative*. He also assisted in a secretarial capacity for several years a former Earl of Mount Edgcumbe. Finally, he became the full-time librarian of the Plymouth and Cottonian Library. In this last-named office he had succeeded Llewellynn Jewitt, F.S.A., whose books on art and antiquarian research were well known in their day, and copies of whose *History of Plymouth* are still found, despite raid losses, and often quoted because of apocryphal mayoral anecdotes culled from Harris's Diary, 1805. The only copy I have seen lately belongs to a well-known Plymothian, Mr. Percival White.

Hunt's recollections of Plymouth a century ago are fully documented, and would justify a separate paper before our members, more especially his conversations with prominent citizens and records of local events. There were, Hunt said, no tram-cars, no omnibuses, and no railways for reporters, and they had to ride by the coach, if there was one, or if not, by gig or on horseback. Sometimes two or more papers would unite in hiring a gig or chaise for a reporting journey. Hunt remembered when this was done for meetings at Kingsbridge, Liskeard, Tavistock, and Launceston, "as it was wearisome and disagreeable to ride on horseback some sixteen miles after reporting a long meeting".

One meeting Hunt was able to recall was at Exeter in 1835, when Lord John Russell, then Home Secretary, whom he described as "a little, insignificant-looking man with awkward manner", "a poor out-of-door speaker" with "a disproportionately large mouth", and the youthful

Montague Parker were nominated for the South Devon constituency. Charles Dickens reported the election proceedings for the London *Morning Chronicle* and Denison for *The Times*, and they had to ride in chaise and pair all the way to London with their reports. When there was a meeting in Bristol on railway development in the Westcountry, Hunt, in order to report it, had to go from Plymouth by a four-horse coach and driver by way of Exeter to the temporary terminus of the Bristol and Exeter railway on the horders of Somerset, where he was able to take a train to Bristol. His journey from Plymouth occupied twenty-four hours.

It is worth emphasis that at the time these morning papers began, the railways still had the broad gauge, indeed, it took from 1869 to 1892 for the old wide track to be gradually converted in the West, and the last broad-gauge train did not leave Paddington till May 20, 1892. There was, in the papers' early days, only a single line in Devon and Cornwall, and trains could pass each other only at a few stations. The moving train had to carry a wooden staff, and Mr. George Grant, the old Divisional Superintendent of the G.W.R., once related in the *Mercury* that in 1865-6, in a heavy fall of snow, it took a man four hours to convey the staff four miles to the other train.

Before branch lines were opened the public had to make long journeys even to reach a railway, and when Tennyson visited Hawker at Morwenstow, he had to drive all the way from Tavistock. Even in 1860 there was but one third class train each way daily, and passengers using the fast train had to pay extra fares, about 20 per cent more. There were no heating or lavatories, only one oil lamp in the roof to serve two compartments, and the only provision for comfort was for trains to stop ten minutes at Swindon. Before 1860 there was no covering to the third class carriages.

Before the start of the Plymouth morning papers the London national newspapers used Plymouth extensively as a gathering ground for news. Mr. Hunt, already mentioned, became the Plymouth representative of the *Daily News*, at the time of the second Kaffir War. One of his duties was to collect letters and newspapers from the Cape steamers on their arrival in the Sound, and proceed to London by train, making a summary of the news as he travelled. Sometimes it was necessary to engage special trains. Others engaged in similar work at the time were Robert White Stevens, correspondent of *The Times*, Richards of *The Morning Herald*, and Edward Aitken Davies, of Reuters Agency, for many years the shipping and masonic reporter of *The Western Morning News*.

As the daily newspapers here always have had close associations with the Royal Navy, it is appropriate to recall the state of our national defences at the time of the starting of these two morning papers. Archibald Hurd, for some years Naval Editor of the *Morning News* (who married his editor's daughter), now Sir Archibald Hurd, and happily still active, recorded in a jubilee issue that when these morning papers were started, British Commissioners appointed "To consider the defences of the United Kingdom", issued a report which, he asserts, exercised widespread influence on our history, and came near to losing us not only our Empire but our liberties as well. It was revealed that the Commissioners regarded the advent of the steam engine as a development which boded ill for this country's safety. "It is probably no exaggeration to state", said Hurd,

"that most of the senior officers of the Navy still looked upon the steam engine with distress and even alarm". The Lords Commissioners "felt it their bounden duty upon national and professional grounds, to discourage to the utmost of their ability the employment of steam vessels". They added that "they considered the introduction of steam was calculated to strike a fatal blow to the naval supremacy of the Empire". Their anxiety, in Sir Archibald's view, infected the nation generally. The statement "amounted to an admission that this country should no longer rely upon the fleet as its main line of defence, and a great scheme of fortifications was begun", as we know only too well at Plymouth. Fortunately, before the Great War of 1914, we had recovered our Service sanity, and the Royal Navy re-established naval supremacy.

I wanted in this way to re-create for you the atmosphere of the age which gave birth to the local daily press, because it helps you, in my opinion, to realize the spirited enterprise and high adventure of the pioneers.

Two stories have survived of the founding of the *Morning News*. One was told by Isaac Latimer, the distinguished journalist, who founded the *Daily Mercury*, and the other related by Charles Hunt. Here is Latimer's version recalled (presumably from the pen of Mr. R. A. J. Walling) in the diamond jubilee number of the *Mercury*.

"It was the starting of the *Western Daily Press* at Bristol by Mr. Macliver, who was afterwards Liberal Member for Plymouth, that suggested the foundation of *The Western Morning News*. Its founders, Mr. Saunders and Mr. Spender, who were brothers-in-law, and both men of Bath, were in Plymouth interested in other enterprises (one of which was Dr. Gale's invention for rendering gunpowder non-explosive), when it was suggested to them that they should consider the formation of a daily paper, and their attention was directed to the evident success of Mr. Macliver's venture at Bristol."

Mr. Saunders had literary associations and was a writer—he afterwards became well known throughout the country as a littérateur and a politician—and Mr. Spender was more familiar with the commercial affairs. They went to Mr. Macliver, and at Bristol obtained an insight into his literary and business methods. They formed a company, and *The Western Morning News* appeared at the beginning of 1860.

The Western Morning News bore as its first imprint "Printed and published at 26 Bedford Street, Plymouth, by William Saunders and Edward Spender, residing at Mannamead in the Parish of Charles, January 3rd, 1860". Hunt says its founders had little in common, save that they came from Bath and were related by marriage. Mr. Saunders had associations with the Bath stone industry, and Mr. Spender was the second son of Mr. J. C. Spender, a surgeon of Bath. Both made their first acquaintance with Devonshire as adventurers in a china clay works near Brent. Although the speculation itself proved a failure, it served to introduce them to Plymouth, though neither had family nor business connections with the town.

Foundation of the paper grew out of conversations between Saunders and Spender, Alfred Rooker, solicitor and leading resident, and afterwards

Mayor, and Hunt, then librarian of the Plymouth and Cottonian Library. Final decision was reached over dinner at Mannamead. Continued day by day at the library and at Mannamead were discussions upon the details of the projected newspaper. Hunt submitted plans for the arrangements of its contents, and a design for an illustration to be used over the leader headline. The drawing of the design was made by Lt.-Col. Hamilton Smith, F.R.S., etc. There was considerable difficulty in finding suitable premises, but eventually towards the end of the year 1859 a house and shop in Bedford Street, opposite the Frankfort Street side of the Glohe Hotel, were decided upon and leased.

Citizens, tired of petty party strife, warmly welcomed the journal that presented news in a wholesome "broadminded way, to interest, inform and uplift".

The venture was favoured by the fact that *The Times* and the few other London papers did not reach Plymouth until 5 o'clock in the evening. That was too late for general circulation in the Three Towns. Cornwall was worse off, for the newspapers did not reach most parts of the county till the day following publication.

It was reported that Mr. Isaac Latimer declared that a penny paper in Plymouth would never do, but within a few months he paid the venture the highest possible compliment by starting a daily paper in opposition. The jubilee supplement claimed that "from the outset *The Western Morning News* was a success. The idea fired the imagination of the people of two counties . . . it interested the newspaper world".

Mr. E. Spender was the first editor and leader writer, and Mr. Hunt, who assisted editorially, has set down in his rare book the first beginnings: "The general news came mostly by post or railway parcels, and partly in the shape of newspapers. The news then sent by telegraph was very limited, and consisted of a short report of Parliament and the principal items of foreign news. On many occasions during the early days we had to remake up the paper several times in the course of one night, in consequence of the arrival by later trains and other conveyances of news which we deemed more important than the matter which had been set up in the early part of the night". He mentioned that several local events, specially the Road Murder Case, assisted to push the paper into great circulation and repute.

Mr. Edward Spender remained in Plymouth until 1862, when he left for London, to take editorial charge of the Central Press, but maintained his connection with the newspaper. Two years after its start *The Western Morning News* absorbed *The Mail*; *The Plymouth Times*, started in 1842, ceased publication; and in 1862 *The Devonport Telegraph* also was amalgamated. *The Plymouth, Devonport, and Stonehouse Herald* ran in opposition for a short time in 1868-9, but soon expired; and a Conservative organ, disliking the independence of the *Morning News*, published their own daily journal, *The Western Daily Standard*, but it, too, existed for only a year—March, 1869, to March, 1870. Curiously, the *Standard's* able editor was the Rev. J. Hicklin, who was at one time secretary of the English Church Union; and members of the editorial staff included Mr. Edward Aitken Davies, previously associated with local journalism, whose daughter is a member of the Athenæum to-day.

When *The Western Morning News* in 1866 bought up the *Devonport Telegraph*, the *Devonport Independent* appeared twice a week, and it continued to do so for many years.

A share in the suggestion of the name of *The Western Morning News* was claimed by a Plymouth house agent, Mr. Robert Woolland, born two years after Waterloo, and founder of a business which has survived the war and exists to-day.

No review of the early years of the *Morning News* could be complete without laying stress upon the work of Edward Spender (1860-1878), who lavished his gifts as writer and organiser for more than seventeen years. In his forty-fifth year he was, with two of his sons, drowned while bathing at Whitsands. Newspapers of the time mentioned among other things that his high culture had been recognised in the scholarly addresses he gave in the Plymouth Athenæum, as well as in his literary contributions to the newspaper he had so firmly established as a means of education in public affairs. In Fleet Street it was acknowledged that "this day a great man has fallen in Israel". "There to this day he is remembered as the pioneer of modern London letter writers. His was a familiar figure in the House of Commons, and among his colleagues he was known as 'The Prince of the Lobby'. His contributions repeatedly revealed to them that he had the confidence of those in the innermost circles of politics, and never more convincingly than during great political crises. Perhaps no journalist ever had the compliment of quotations paid to him in such large measure."

Edward Spender was buried in Paddington Cemetery, Willesden, in which also his two sons had been buried two days previously. As editor, he was succeeded by the distinguished Albert Groser (1878-1895), the son, grandson and brother of Baptist ministers. There is no doubt that his editorship was conspicuous, locally and nationally, and the story of his life for a quarter of a century recalls that of his paper. His service of foreign intelligence in the *Morning News* won national recognition. "An early illustration of the facility of his mind . . . was furnished during the Ashantee War. From time to time we were able to publish news of its progress hours and sometimes days before our Metropolitan contemporaries and ere the official despatches reached Downing Street. Frequently in the House of Commons questions were put respecting the events chronicled in our columns, and ministers had to confess ignorance because our report had travelled faster than the government despatches. The Foreign Office grew tired of playing second fiddle. They decided to have the information at first hand. Accordingly they kept a steamer waiting at Cape Coast Castle for news of the capture of Coomassie, and directly that event took place the vessel steamed off to Gibraltar, from which point the intelligence was telegraphed in cipher to England. Then for the first time *The Western Morning News* was beaten."

Many other instances of Groser's alertness and readiness of decision are recorded. When H.M.S. *Serpent* was lost in 1890, he obtained the name of a leading merchant at Corunna, and got him to send a trustworthy man to the wreck. When in 1883 the Rev. Merton Smith, Vicar of Plympton, mysteriously disappeared while holidaying in the Pyrenees, he sent two of his staff to join in the search. A Stonehouse official

involved in the disappearance of several thousand pounds was arrested while enjoying a military review at Calcutta, and Mr. Groser sent a reporter to Gibraltar to board the steamer carrying the official home.

It was at Groser's suggestion that a copy of the *Morning News*, printed on satin, was sent to Queen Victoria, containing the report of the death of a great Court favourite, Sir Howard Elphinstone, General Commanding the Western District, who had fallen overboard from a steamer near Madeira. Groser was widely travelled and closely concerned in local affairs. His keen interest in improved coastal communication led to the *Morning News* and *The Times* commissioning the Plymouth Parliamentary representative to visit the principal lighthouses and coastguard stations, and report as to means of life-saving and greater efficiency. This led to the formation of public opinion, which resulted in lighthouses and coastguard stations being placed in telephonic communication. This was no new idea, for when the *Schiller* was wrecked off the Isles of Scilly in the '70s, with terrible loss of life, Sir Arthur P. Vivian, then M.P. for West Cornwall, demonstrated in Parliament that had the keepers of the Bishop Lighthouse been in ready communication with the Islands, very many lives would have been saved. The *Morning News* backed up heavily the local M.P., but at that time the Government and public would not be roused. Mr. Groser had a passion for the promotion of railway and postal enterprise, and it was recorded at his death "every railway development in Devon and Cornwall for thirty years owed something directly or indirectly to his influence". He went to Cairo in 1895, when in very bad health, in the hope that the change of climate might benefit him, but there was inevitable progress of illness, and he died there in his fifty-sixth year. Mr. R. Hansford Worth kindly reminds me that he and his father met Mr. Groser in the street shortly before the departure for Egypt. Mr. Groser was obviously conscious of his illness and that they might never meet again. The public and journalistic tributes were some measure of the deep loss of the West Country.

Other subsequent editors were Mr. R. J. Michie (1897-1902), who had succeeded Mr. T. H. Barrow, editor for two years, and then came the late Mr. T. Canning Baily, my predecessor.

Well-known managers were Mr. Edward Hawkings (1860-1898), whose name appeared in the paper's "imprint" for nearly forty years, a Plymouthian with American experience, who became one of the best known men in business circles throughout the West; and Mr. Ernest Croft. The managing director for many years was the late Mr. A. Edmund Spender, eldest surviving son of the journal's co-founder and first editor, who was Mayor of Plymouth in 1908, when the Institute of Journalists held its annual conference in this city. At the end of his year of office he and his wife were publicly presented with a silver cradle to commemorate the birth of one of their children. We recently had a call (October, 1945) from Mr. Edmund Spender's eldest son, on leave from the Front, where he served throughout the heavy fighting in Africa and Italy with the tanks of the South African Forces.

The *Western Daily Mercury* followed the *Morning News* six months later in 1860. Its first title actually was *Daily Western Mercury*, and it

was developed from a famous local weekly, *The Plymouth Journal*, at that time the property of Mr. Isaac Latimer, who had acquired it in 1841. This weekly had begun in 1819 under the title of *Plymouth and Devonport Weekly Journal*, reviving the title of the town's first newspaper of 1721, details of which I mentioned in my last address.

Tribute is due to the memory of Latimer, described by Mr. R. A. J. Walling as "a born journalist". A Londoner, he began his professional career with the *Morning Chronicle*, when it was publishing Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*, and he became a friend of Charles Dickens, even assisting him in choosing his staff when Dickens became editor of the old *Daily News*. Latimer came to Plymouth via Truro, where he wrote for the still surviving *West Briton*.

In the light of recent events it is fascinating to recall some of the contents of early issues. The first leading article in the *Mercury* dealt with Garibaldi's Sicilian campaign, and the second welcomed his resounding victory and the capitulation of the Neapolitan troops. Local news of importance included the opening of "a telegraph station" at Tavistock, the inspection of the route for the extension of the Cornwall railway from Truro to Falmouth, and the voyage of the *Great Eastern* across the Atlantic. The *Mercury* boldly asserted that no effort had been made to ensure that Plymouth should be the last port of departure of the *Great Eastern*!

Mr. Latimer remained in control of the *Mercury* until 1890, when a local company was formed, and three years later it was acquired by Mr. Thomas Owen, then M.P. for the Launceston Division, who formed the Western Newspaper Company Limited. He remained its Chairman until his death, when he was succeeded by Mr. (later Sir) Arthur Spurgeon, who remained Chairman until the paper was sold to the father of the present proprietor of the amalgamated papers.

Many notable journalists occupied the editorial chairs of the *Mercury*. To avoid a mere catalogue, I mention that a successor once removed of Mr. Latimer was Mr. Edwin Goadby, an eminent political writer, who became editor of the Liberal Publications department and later editor of the *York Herald*. Other editors included Mr. Latimer's brilliant son, John Paddon Latimer; William Digby, famous Indian publicist; the Plymouth historian, Henry Francis Whitfeld, whose grandson is still around; Robert Howill Walling, father of a later editor of the *Mercury*, *The Western Evening Herald*, and *The Western Independent*; Harry Jones, an old acting editor of *The Sun*, and a distinguished political journalist, for many years the Parliamentary Correspondent of the fine old *Daily Chronicle*. On the managerial side of the *Mercury* were two men revered in local life, J. R. Reynolds, prominent in Free Church circles, and John Reburn.

Less than a year ago Plymouth's surviving evening paper celebrated its jubilee, and though the war was in one of its grim phases, and war-time small newspapers still prevailed, illuminating retrospective articles were published. I cannot do better, because of its real importance and historic value, than read to you a résumé kindly prepared for me by the evening paper's founder, and for many years its controlling influence, Mr. R. A. J. Walling, J.P., now editor of *The Western Independent*, and the recently retired Chairman of our City Magistrates.

Entitled "*Start of Western Evening Herald*", Mr. Walling wrote for me :

"The evening paper was a late growth in the West of England and rather a slow one, unquestionably because in the middle of the nineteenth century communications were bad and slow and there were no very large centres of population except Plymouth.

"Plymouth would have been the natural birthplace of the first evening paper ; but it did not happen thus for a curious reason. While ample room existed for one paper to live and thrive, there was not room for two. To start one in George Street was to invite a competitor in Frankfort Street, and vice versa. The competition between the two offices being fierce, to say the least of it, neither would let the other make the experiment alone.

"Thus, the first evening paper started in Exeter, where the morning paper had not taken hold and the weekly paper tradition held firm in both the rival offices. This gave an enterprising little printer at Exeter, 'Ducky' Chambers, who was running the *Devon Weekly Times*, his chance to come in with a daily soon after the taxes were taken off, and he started the *Devon Evening Express*. It was a great success. At first, Chambers produced it on a machine worked by hand power—his own and my father's, who was his apprentice. But his circulation soon made the instalment of a Wharfedale driven by an engine necessary, and the original engine, a primitive gas engine, which worked by flinging a long ratchet up towards the roof which, in descending, turned the flywheel by the power of gravitation, was still in operation when I in turn became an apprentice there in the early eighties.

"In 1883, my father came to Plymouth to join the *Mercury*, and the family migrated with him ; so that my apprenticeship to the *Express* was broken, and I took indentures with Isaac Latimer & Son. I still have them, with all the grave phraseology in which I undertook (*inter alia*) 'taverns, inns or alehouses not to frequent, nor from the service of my said Master or Masters by day or by night not to absent myself without leave', and to accept as wages for the first year four shillings per week, and for the second six shillings, and for the third eight shillings. The witness to this indenture was John Henry Smale, the *Mercury* cashier, and the signatories were Isaac Latimer and his son, the late Alfred Latimer, who died not long ago.

"My father's long experience of evening paper work proved to be of priceless advantage years afterwards, when the proprietors took the plunge and produced the *Herald*, and chanced the consequences.

"The first shot at an evening paper in Plymouth was made during the Franco-German war. Both *The Western Morning News* and *The Western Daily Mercury* came out with evening editions. They were merely war bulletins. Even so, they proved to be so costly and unremunerative that by common consent they were dropped almost before the war was over.

"Many people looked with longing eyes at this unoccupied field, but an outside speculator would have had to face not one opposition but two, and nothing was done.

"It was sport that showed the way. We found that the *Evening Express* coming from Exeter was working up quite a large circulation in

Plymouth, especially on Saturday nights, when it published reports and results of football matches. I said, 'Why not a Saturday evening football paper for Plymouth, which could get into Cornwall by the Jubilee express?' They said, 'Why not. Go and do it ;' I don't think any of the seniors believed in it much, but I had one or two colleagues who were as keen footballers as myself, and we buckled to and astonished them. We soon had a circulation of 10,000, and then 15,000, and then 20,000. I did all sorts for it—football notes and articles, and even short serial stories. George Newnes had acquired or invented the notion (and applied it in the *Westminster Gazette*) that green paper was restful to the eyes in artificial light, and we (liking to be hang up to date) adopted green paper for the football edition. This gave it a distinction and was a good advertisement. Anyone seen reading a green paper was reading the *Football Mercury*.

"This was going very strong when a great upheaval occurred—Mr. Thomas Owen bought the *Mercury* and put in a new management. It was not an expert newspaper management, but drawn from his commercial businesses, and some disharmonies occurred. Not liking that atmosphere, I took advantage of an offer from Mr. William Iliffe to go and edit *Bicycling News* at Coventry, and left at the end of 1893. (By the way, I was second editor of the *B.N.* after the late Lord Northcliffe, Godbold came between. The present Lord Iliffe and his brother Coker were in the office).

"I had been at Coventry nearly a year when the new manager of the *Mercury* (Mr. William Kerry) asked me to meet him in London. I did so—when I went up to the two bicycle shows that winter, and saw at the Crystal Palace the first practicable motor-cycle with a Benz engine in it.

"Mr. Kerry said they had come to the conclusion that they could no longer leave the unfortunate people of Plymouth without an evening paper ; and as I'd had a success with the football paper, would I come back and run it ?

"The inspiration of that sudden decision was curious. Mr. Owen, M.P. for the Launceston Division, was a great Methodist. That autumn he was present at a ceremony in connection with some new building at the King Street Wesleyan Church, when a platform collapsed and large numbers of people were injured. Mr. Owen was used to evening papers in Cardiff, and it seemed to have struck him that here was an occasion of excitement and panic which could have been recorded to the public advantage by an evening paper, whereas in fact everyone in Plymouth had to remain in doubt about what had actually happened, and even as to the names of the victims, until next morning. He told Mr. Kerry to set about getting one. Hence the suggestion to me. I agreed to pack and come home, bringing my newly-wed wife with me, on a quite inadequate salary, of course. We left our brand-new little house in Coventry and arrived at Plymouth in one of the worst snowstorms of a most appalling January.

"The new evening paper immediately started getting itself born. The essence of its success was held to be secrecy. It was to be completely organized down to the last particle, and ready to appear before a soul in Plymouth knew anything about it. In fact, no one did know a thing until the morning of the day it appeared, the 22nd April, 1895.

"The surprise was complete. Nobody in the George Street office knew anything about it till the posters were on the walls. Six hours after the paper was on the street, and was certain of holding the field unchallenged for some days, and possibly for weeks, even if a challenge came.

"I always realize that we had preposterous luck. If Mr. Albert Groser had been at the head of things in George Street, he would almost certainly have smelt a rat. But he had been taken ill while on a tour in Egypt, and he died out there. The interregnum was not a good time for coming to so big a decision as the starting of a new paper involved.

"In the result, the *Herald* ran unchallenged for some months, and fortunate that was. I managed to keep the running expenses within my estimate, but circulation was hard to get steady and advertising still harder; the advertisers needed educating up to evening papers. The first excitement was the General Election of 1895, which occurred in July, when the paper was three months old. That seemed to the conductors of *The Western Morning News* a chance to try their hands, and they produced an evening paper for about a month during the election campaign. Unfortunately for them, they gave far too much space to politics, and the evening paper reader could not then, any more than he can now, be induced to take a fierce interest in purely party politics. That experiment was dropped.

"But a great political controversy of another sort gave the *Herald* its first big lift. It came towards the end of the year, when the Uitlander question was brought to boiling point by Dr. Jameson's Raid. That impassioned people on both sides in the West, for every town, village, and hamlet in Cornwall had some of its sons in South Africa. The *Herald* spent money on that story without stint. Its sales leaped up all through the district. When the excitement was over, it had added a solid ten thousand to its circulation, and after that never looked back. Every successive episode in the imperialist movement—from Kitchener's Soudan campaign to the outbreak of the South African War—piled up its figures. It started a morning edition, issued just before noon, during the Spanish-American War, and followed that practice during every international crisis.

"There were some outstanding days in the early history of the paper. One was the day of the relief of Ladysmith on the 28th February, 1900, when the presses were kept running all day and the sales reached six figures. Another was the day of the relief of Mafeking. The news did not reach England till late at night, but the *Herald* had plated up the machines with a special Mafeking Edition (history of the campaign and the siege, articles, and pictures about the town, the garrison, all the usual features), and when the snap message arrived between ten and eleven, the news was fudged and the machines started. They did not stop till well into the small hours of the morning. A third memorable day was Tuesday, the 22nd of January, 1901, when the world was suddenly hushed to hear the news from Osborne, where Queen Victoria had lain ill for four days. The ordinary issue of the paper had been disposed of, a special Memorial Edition had been prepared and was on the machines. The Queen died at half-past six. King Edward announced the event to the

Lord Mayor of London at a quarter to seven—the first public announcement. We got the flash soon after. At seven we were printing, and you can imagine that, with no wireless, the rush for the paper kept us going till late into the night.

"I ran the *Herald* for nine years. During that time the only real challenge was made by the *Western Evening News*, which ran for a year during the Boer War. It was in many respects quite a good paper, but once more too much like the morning paper, and it never caught on. They made the mistake of hesitancy at the beginning, so that before they made up their minds to start, we had got a big organization at work for producing and distributing in large numbers from 11 o'clock in the morning to the last of the 'finale', about 7 o'clock in the evening. The *Evening News* had, I think, three editors during that year, the best of whom was Newling Jones.

"When Harry Jones left the *Mercury* to go to the *Daily Chronicle* as its Parliamentary Correspondent, I took his place in 1904.

"Two or three points strike me. First, the great reduction in the number of editions. We started with six—apart from the racing edition—but reduced the number to five very soon. Ultimately, we came down to four. The immense popularity of the teatime edition became an embarrassment. We had to push it earlier and earlier in order to get printed in time, and a supplementary edition was started to pick up the street sales in the town. The *Herald* was quite early among the evening papers to get a regular house-to-house sale exceeding all its street ones by far. But I suppose that is general now.

"For many years we ran the early editions on buff paper, and the teatime edition, known as 'Extra Special', on green. Years after all editions were printed on white, and after the fallacy of the ophthalmic virtues of green had been abandoned, you would hear the boys in the streets shouting '*Herald, green!*'

"Our beginning was on a four-page sheet. We went to six, and to eight on occasions, but only exceeded that for special numbers."

May I add that the *Evening Herald*, despite war-time difficulties, successfully celebrated its jubilee last April, under the leadership of its proprietor, Sir Harold Harmsworth, the editorship of Mr. W. Owen Mills, and the secretaryship and managership of Mr. John Nott.

Amalgamation under one proprietorship of the daily newspapers at Plymouth, and their expansion and growth, was the natural sequence of their acquisition by members of the Harmsworth family, so outstanding in our Empire's newspaper life. The late Sir Robert Leicester Harmsworth, Baronet, and his son, the present Chairman of Directors, Sir Harold Harmsworth (nephew of Lord Northcliffe), laboured unceasingly and spent lavishly to ensure that these Westcountry daily newspapers should rank high in the newspaper world and in national life. The result was that, despite war-time bombs and fires, Leicester Harmsworth House, on the old site in Frankfort Street, Plymouth, survives not only as a newspaper centre, but houses the most modern machinery and equipment available within the industry, and is the equal comparatively of anything in the world.

When the two morning papers were amalgamated, I had the honour a quarter of a century ago of being appointed the first Editor, and later the Editor-in-Chief. It was a difficult editorial task, especially in the field of politics and local government, but it can be honestly claimed that the paper's circulation today is actually higher than that of the combined rivals of the old days.

Brief reference is due, I feel, to the local newspaper record in the recent crucifying war years, because, in my opinion, it will live in newspaper history.

Amid all the devastation of Plymouth by the enemy raids, and the cutting off of essential public services, like gas, electricity, and water, casualties among personnel and their homes, and complete destruction one night of all transport, the Plymouth papers never once missed an issue, and every town and village in the Westcountry always received its papers on day of publication.

When Plymouth burned fiercely there was removal by car to Exeter, and immediate production there. If Exeter had gone completely, there were plans for production elsewhere, and even again.

For several war years daily production of the morning paper was at Tavistock, staffs travelling nightly both ways over the Moor, sometimes during raids, and occasionally racing back after heavy bombing to see if home and family were safe.

The *Evening Herald*, after the restoration of power and facilities at Plymouth, continued, despite alarms and raids, to be produced at Plymouth, and when peace came both papers were in full production at the new office on the old site in Frankfort Street.

Therefore, I hope I may be forgiven if I claim with pride that the daily newspapers of Plymouth throughout those years of peace and war served the city and counties zealously and unflinchingly, setting a high standard of provincial journalism, and when their centenary year is celebrated, I hope it will be found that they enter the second century of their growth with added lustre, still forming an essential part of the traditional public life of the Westcountry.