

THE HISTORY OF JOURNALISM

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OBJECTIVES

AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL UNDERSTAND:

- » why we need well-educated journalists
- » the ephemeral nature of news
- » the importance of free speech and free media
- » how journalism, history and democracy are linked
- » technology's demands and rewards
- » that we live in exciting times in the evolution of journalism.

News has never travelled so far so fast nor been available to so many people at the same time as it is today. That fact is driving a demand for balanced, accurate, ethical and informative journalism. Whether we hunt and gather news online, on our mobile phones, in newspapers or on radio or television, we are addicted to it and the 24/7 news cycle. We rely on the skills of well-educated and professional journalists to inform, educate and entertain us. That is because humans are inherently curious with advanced language skills. Our primal survival instincts are influenced by news. We have an instinctive urge to know what is happening next door, down the street, in our suburb or town, other parts of the state or territory we live in, nationally and internationally. We have a compulsion to hunt, gather and consume information that affects our lives and feeds our need for new knowledge. News is such a valuable tool in our quest for survival, food, shelter and daily living that journalists are sometimes killed to stop them collecting or reporting it. Yet, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3, news is intangible and difficult to define.

Asking what is news is like asking what is art, what is air, what is life? It is both concrete and abstract. Qualitative and quantitative. From primary sources and secondary. We get news from words, pictures, sounds, smells, taste, touch—anything that arouses our senses, stirs our intellect or sparks our emotions. Primarily, news happens when an event, action or circumstance has an impact, or likely impact, on people or their way of life and a journalist reports on it. News is knowledge, rumours, discoveries, jokes, predictions, revelations, interpretation and analysis. It is our brightest hopes and our worst fears. Yet, while news is difficult to define, it is a commodity. It is bought and sold, given freely and often stolen. It helps us make sense of our world by developing our understandings, learning and intuition. The work of journalists is published in newspapers, online, in magazines, and broadcast via radio, television, computers, wi-fi, personal mobile devices and word of mouth. It inhabits our memories, guiding us and helping us navigate our daily lives. But news is different things to different people at different times and in different places. What is important, perhaps life-changing, news for one person in one place at one time might be only of passing interest—if relevant at all—to someone else, somewhere else.

So where, when and how did ideas about news and our need to find it and repeat it to others originate? The earliest medium humans used to transmit news was probably touch, followed by the language of gestures and grunts. Then came primitive drawings and diagrams scratched on the ground, rocks and cave walls—something that over time came to closely align news and history. As humans evolved, news came to be transmitted by word of mouth and much later through written symbols. At first, news would have been shared information about problems and basic survival issues—where to find food, avoiding dangerous wild animals, lighting fires, identifying poisonous plants, where good

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.

KOFI ANNAN, 1997

News is created when someone, most commonly a professional journalist, reports on an event, action or circumstance that has an impact, or likely impact, on people or their way of life.

water could be found and so on. Often there would have been news about rival tribes and groups—if there was a fight looming, perhaps who killed whom and why. There would also have been an element of gossip—who was on with who, who made his wives go and dig in the gardens more often than other men's wives, who went to sleep under a tree when she was meant to be fishing, who was moving into a new, more upmarket cave with a better view! About 3400 BC, while word of mouth was still important, news started to be transmitted as handwritten hieroglyphic inscriptions in clay. Much later, first in China and later in Europe, came paper-making and a massive leap forward with the invention of printing, inks and moveable type. That meant news could be printed on handbills and pamphlets, then in 'news' papers. For the first time, many different people were able to access the same news stories, told in the same way by the same person. Mass media, or more correctly McLuhan's media for the masses,¹ had arrived (McLuhan 1964, p. 348).

■ JOURNALISM, HISTORY AND DEMOCRACY GO HAND IN HAND

Journalism, history and democracy each evolved in Ancient Greece. The trio grew to be inseparably linked. Similarly, although there have been growing pains at times, history tells us that advances in communication technologies are inevitably coupled with advances in journalism and news dissemination. Over time, governments—legislatures, executives and judiciaries—developed an ambivalent relationship with mass media. On one hand, politicians relied on news media to help them win re-election or maintain their hold on power by providing the governed with information about the popular and benevolent decisions of government. On the other, those in power came to fear news media and their capacity to hold politicians and government to account. It is therefore significant, when we look back from our current era in the first decades of the 21st century, that there has never been any previous period in history in which advances in information technology have allowed ordinary people to be so well informed about those who govern them and the decisions of government. The internet, web and mobile technologies have revolutionised the world. In no other era has so much up-to-the-minute news and news analysis been at the fingertips of so many citizens. Never has there been such a significant upheaval in the dissemination of knowledge and such a focus on the workings of government and society. It is an upheaval that is only in its infancy: there is more and better to come. But change, even when for the better, is not always embraced. In fact many individuals and institutions still try to hold back the tide and restrict the flow of news and information. Some—such as the Taliban, which sought to outlaw internet access in Afghanistan, or the communist governments in China and North Korea, which seek to shelter their people from learning about what they consider to be the evils of democracy—have struggled desperately to block or control internet access, censor the web and impede freedom of speech on social networking platforms. On the other hand, political and terrorist groups have effectively used social networking and their online presence to promote their causes, recruit fighters and solicit money. In that context, it is instructive to reflect on the words of former United Nations Secretary-General and winner of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize Kofi Annan when he said:

[I]t is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes enemies of men. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes fighters of children. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that leads some to advocate tyranny over democracy. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes some think that human misery is inevitable. It is ignorance, not knowledge, that makes others say that there are many worlds, when we know that there is one. Ours.

Annan 1997

1 See p. xii of the Introduction for an explanation.

To understand the scale of the upheaval continuously evolving digital communication technologies have caused—and will continue to cause—in the realms of politics, journalism, education, entertainment and news dissemination, it helps if we view the current era from a historical perspective. As one of Australia’s most formidable investigative journalists, Bob Bottom (2005), said, ‘the past conditions the future’. One of the interesting things about the past is that before the current communication revolution was conceived and born in the 20th century, humans suffered from a lack of information. Books tended to be scarce and expensive, there were newspapers but the news they carried was often old, and there was no radio, television or internet. No computers, mobile phones and no tablets. Few homes had telephones. Handwritten letters were the main means of communication with family and friends. Today, however, we have the opposite problem: information overload. We are incessantly bombarded with information, much of it useless, inaccurate, unwanted and unnecessarily time consuming. That is why professional communicators such as journalists have come to have such an enormously important role in society. It is journalists who sort through the fog and garbage, hunt and gather accurate and reliable information and bring it to us as news, feature articles, current affairs programs, documentaries and podcasts.

■ JOURNALISTS AND HISTORIANS SEEK TRUTH

It is generally accepted² that the first journalist was an Ancient Greek historian called Thucydides. He was born around 400 BC in Athens, a city that became the birthplace of a form of direct democracy in the fifth century. However, Thucydides and the great philosophers Plato and Aristotle were critics of early Athenian democracy. They thought it was not sufficiently democratic because it was cumbersome, with those who were eligible to vote having to actually attend meetings of the governing assembly to cast their ballots. For the system to work effectively, voters needed to be well informed about current affairs and have a good grasp of relevant issues. But disseminating news and commentary about affairs of state was difficult. Printing had not been invented and documents had to be handwritten and copied. One way people such as Thucydides circumvented that problem was by writing speeches that they either delivered themselves to mass audiences or that were delivered by other orators. Over time, however, democratic rule evolved and changed. The system of direct voting, which had been criticised by Thucydides as ‘the severest form of mob rule’ (Richard 2003, p. 86), was replaced by systems of representative democracy in which a group of leaders who put themselves forward as ‘the best’ was elected to govern and make decisions on behalf of all people. Key elements that allowed this evolution to take place were the spread of political information to citizens and the handing down of ideals and principles from one generation to the next. This dissemination of information and its handing down to later generations is where journalism, history and politics intersect.

It is therefore significant that as well as being thought of by many as the first true journalist, Thucydides is also regarded as the first true historian (Richard 2003, p. 86). That link is notable because there are still deep-seated ties between journalism and history, particularly (as explained in Chapter 2) between the evolution of each as academic disciplines. As Windschuttle (1999, pp. 52, 54) said:

The origins of journalism lie in exactly the same place as the origins of history. The first true historian is widely acknowledged as Thucydides, the Athenian who wrote *The History of the Peloponnesian War* sometime between 424 and 400 BC... This is all first-hand observation and, to my mind, there is no doubt it is journalism. In short, as well as the first historian, Thucydides should be recognised as the first journalist...

In addition to being the first true journalist, Thucydides is also regarded as the first true historian. This is significant because there are still very close ties between journalism and history, particularly (as explained in Chapter 2) between the evolution of each as academic disciplines.

² Although not by US media historian Mitchell Stephens (1997, p. 48) or some others who argue that Herodotus was the first; although they overlook the fact Herodotus regularly coloured his accounts by making things up!

Much of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* is a running commentary on the course of the war as it unfolded. Thucydides described his methods as follows:

[W]ith regard to my factual reporting of events of the war, I have made it a principle not to write down the first story that came my way, and not even to be guided by my own general impressions: either I was present myself at the events which I have described or else I have heard of them from eye-witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible. Not that even so the truth was easy to discover: different eye-witnesses give different accounts of the same events, speaking out of partiality for one side or the other or else from imperfect memories.

Thucydides 1972, p. 48; also in Windschuttle 1999

Thucydides was seeking truth and doing his best to write fair, accurate and balanced reports. As de Burgh (2000, p. 3) said, 'It is often said that journalism is the first rough draft of history'. Similarly, Startt and Sloan could have been referring to journalism when they said 'historical study contains at least three elements: (a) evidence, (b) interpretation, and (c) narrative' (Startt & Sloan 1989, p. 2). But, as noted previously, printing had not been invented—and neither had paper—so Thucydides could not circulate his handwritten reports to the masses.

It was to be about 1000 years before that problem was resolved. The invention of printing and moveable type happened first in China. It led to the earliest mass printing of documents in the period from 600 to 700 AD. From about 600 AD, China became the most advanced nation on earth. It was also a golden age of poetry, literature and art, and a time when a public service system developed in which government employees were selected on merit. It was a period in which the Chinese invented paper, ink and printing—three essential ingredients in the development of newspapers—hundreds of years before similar technology appeared in Europe. In fact, the first newspapers, which were just a single page, were published in China during the Tang dynasty, from 618 to 907 AD. A thousand years later, the Worcester Society of Antiquity reported:

The Chinese, who were the earliest printers, issued the first newspaper printed. It was in the form of an Official Gazette, giving the political news, government changes, series of events and items of general public interest, and was continued for centuries.

Worcester Society of Antiquity 1908

Those first 'news' papers were printed with symbols carved into wooden blocks. Later, the wood was replaced with ceramics. Incongruous as it may seem today when news is so heavily censored and controlled in China, that nation was actually upheld for centuries as the model of a free press and freedom of speech, being described in 1766 by leading Finnish/Swedish scholar³ Anders Chydenius as 'the richest kingdom in the world in population and goods' and 'the model country of the freedom of press' (in Lamble 2002). In essence, China was a benevolent dictatorship. It was governed by a succession of ruling monarchs or emperors, at least some of whom could be seen to parallel the philosophical ideals of Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle in their belief in a system of government based on 'rule by the best' in the interests of the people.

In the same era printing was invented, Chinese inventors also gave the world gunpowder, spinning wheels for making yarn, the magnetic compass, the abacus, suspension bridges, specialised ship-building techniques, cast iron, the toothbrush and toothpaste, silk, rice, printed books and tea. In his book *A Short History of the World*, eminent Australian historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey said paper came to be regarded as such a valued commodity that in 751 AD several Chinese papermakers were kidnapped and taken to central Asia, where they were forced to reveal their secret techniques (Blainey 2000, p. 284). Previously, writing had been preserved on parchment, which was made from animal

³ Finland was a part of the Swedish realm at that time.

skins, with Blainey estimating that a book of 200 handwritten pages ‘might consume the skins of about 80 lambs’ (Blainey 2000, p. 285).

Once the secret of paper-making was revealed, the process made its way to the Middle East and then Europe. In 1456 Johann Gutenberg, whose real name was Johann Gensfleisch, ‘invented’ a printing press with moveable type in Germany. Originally it was only used to print the Bible. That was partly because, just as the web and the internet are feared today by repressive rulers, printing was then regarded with deep suspicion and was closely regulated by governments. They feared it could be used as a tool to educate and inform the masses, thus leading to discontent, questioning of authority and civil unrest.

Over time, however, printing presses proliferated and technology improved. Governments were unable to restrain progress and presses were used to print many different kinds of books. Stationery was also printed, as were pamphlets and handbills. Many of those who wrote pamphlets were printers or would-be politicians. Gradually their pamphlets evolved, with some being published regularly and circulated among a growing proportion of the population who had learnt, or were learning, to read. Some pamphlets evolved into ‘news-sheets’ and then ‘news-papers’—literally, printed papers that carried news. The World Association of Newspapers (2005) said the first real newspaper, *Relation*, was printed in 1605 in Strasbourg by Johann Carolus, a writer who purchased a print-shop in 1604. The Worcester Society of Antiquity (1908) had a different interpretation. It said:

The Germans are said to have been the first in Europe to issue a news-sheet, in the year 1563; their first issue in numbered sheets appeared in 1612. The first French paper was published in 1632.

The first regularly published English newspaper appeared in London issued by Nathaniel Butter in 1622, a small weekly quarto of eighteen pages. It was called *Certain News of the Present Week*.

Most early newspapers were short-lived. Printing and paper were expensive, printers had yet to find ways to recover costs, and relatively few people could read. Journalism was also a risky business. Those in power did not welcome criticism or scrutiny—something British printer and pamphleteer John Gwyn discovered. He met a fate literally worse than death in 1663 after upsetting authorities. Described as ‘a poor man, with a wife and three children’, Gwyn was accused of printing an article criticising the conduct of government and magistrates (Thayer 1897, p. 152). Found guilty of threatening King Charles II, Gwyn was sentenced to be ‘drawn to the place of execution upon a hurdle, and there hanged by the neck’. While still alive he was to be ‘cut down, castrated, and disembowelled. And you still living... your entrails are to be burnt before your eyes, your head to be cut off, and your head and quarters to be disposed of at the pleasure of the king’s majesty’ (Thayer 1897, p. 153). Despite a plea for mercy, Gwyn was executed in accord with his sentence. His head and limbs were suspended over the gates of London as a warning to others.

Another English writer who fell foul of the rich and powerful was London bookseller Benjamin Harris, a pamphleteer who published a newspaper in 1679. About the same time as his first newspaper hit the streets, Harris wrote a seditious pamphlet openly critical of the king and his connections with a supposed ‘popish plot’ (Ingelhart 1998, p. 71). Arrested and tried before Chief Justice Scroggs, who convicted and fined him, Harris did not have the money to pay the fine. He was jailed, but later released because of a legal technicality. Bravely or foolishly, he then published a new pamphlet, this time criticising Scroggs. Arrested and charged again, Harris was described by Scroggs as ‘a wretch who would set us all by the ears for a groat’⁴ (Mott 1962, p. 9). This time, Harris was put in a pillory in front of his own office, where his friends prevented bystanders from hurling rubbish at him. After being released, Harris gathered his wife, children and a collection of books and sailed to Boston. There, on September

⁴ A groat was a silver coin.

25, 1690, he began what some consider was the Americas' earliest newspaper, *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick*. It was banned after its first issue. Harris then turned to publishing almanacs and other informative books. He returned to London about eight years later, published another newspaper, 'declined in wealth and fame' and turned to selling patent medicines (Mott 1962, p. 10).

■ NEWSPAPERS COME AND GO

Through the 17th and well into the 18th centuries, printing and education were regarded with equal suspicion by many in authority. For example in 1671, in the then British colony of Virginia, Sir William Berkeley, the Colonial Governor for what must have been 38 long and dreary years, wrote a report to his superiors in Britain in which he said:

I thank God, we do not have free schools nor printing; and I hope we shall not have them these hundred years. For learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them and libels against the government. God keep us from both.

Mott 1962, p. 6

Even Daniel Defoe, one of the most notable writers of his time and the person regarded by many as the father of English journalism, was punished by the courts as a result of his writing. A prolific writer probably best known as the author of the classic novels *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe was also a pamphleteer. From 1704 to 1713 he published a pamphlet that came to resemble a newspaper. Originally a weekly, the paper later appeared three times a week, and although its main focus was on politics, it also included entertainment-oriented articles. But, like Harris before him, Defoe was literally pilloried for his writing. He was also jailed twice because he wrote articles that offended the government, and he was twice convicted of libel (written defamation; see Chapter 16).

But the journalism genie was out of the bottle. Printers and writers started winning converts in their quest for free speech and freedom of the press as an increasing number of newspapers appeared on the streets. In the US, the first continuously published newspapers were *The Boston News-Letter*, which was established on April 24, 1704; *The Boston Gazette*, established on December 21, 1719; *The American Weekly Mercury*, which appeared in Philadelphia on December 22, 1719; and *The New England Courant*, which was launched by James Franklin—an elder brother of US founding father Benjamin Franklin—in Boston on August 21, 1721 (Thayer 1897, p. 98). Writing about the establishment of *The New England Courant*, which Benjamin Franklin later edited while still only a teenager, his biographer WM Thayer said:

There was not a little commotion when James Franklin launched *The New England Courant*. It was regarded generally as a wild project. It was not thought that three newspapers could live in America. The field was not large enough.

Thayer 1897, p. 98

However, *The New England Courant* thrived for a time, partly because the newspaper was cheeky and brash, often taking a swipe at those in authority. But trouble was looming for the Franklin brothers. In the early 1700s colonial newspapers were published 'by authority' of the British-controlled colonial government. James Franklin was a printer who had learnt his trade in England. Coincidentally or otherwise, he followed in the footsteps of Benjamin Harris and Daniel Defoe and offended the government of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. He did so by publishing a letter ridiculing the government's 'dilatatoriness' in dealing with pirates who were wreaking havoc with shipping. The government did not catch the pirates, but James and Benjamin (who was James' apprentice) were summoned to appear before the Legislative Council. Members of the legislature were determined to discover who wrote the letter, but James was equally determined to protect his source so he refused

to tell. He was threatened with jail. He again refused, saying he was determined to defend the freedom of the press. He was convicted on the spot of ‘a high affront to the Government’, seized by the sheriff, and taken to Boston jail (Thayer 1897, pp. 148, 149).

The New England Courant had supported moves for the North American colonies to break free from Britain, and it maintained that stance after James was jailed and Benjamin—then just 15—took over as editor. The jailing of James, who was released after four weeks, created great consternation in the colony and widened the rift between the colonial population and its British rulers. It was a rift James fuelled even further after his release from jail. He stepped up his attacks, particularly taking aim at the British Governor and members of the legislature who had voted to lock him up. Exasperated, the parliament passed a law forbidding James from publishing any more newspapers or pamphlets. That might have been the end of *The New England Courant*, but the newspaper was popular. Benjamin, who had turned 16, was again appointed editor, and publication resumed under his name. Sadly, however, while the fight for press freedom continued, and despite Benjamin’s key role at the paper, he was bullied and mistreated by James. Forced to work 12- to 15-hour days, Benjamin was also physically beaten by his brother. Finally, in 1723, after eight months as editor, and at the age of 17, Benjamin ran away. He sailed to London and continued his own training as a printer. James never edited the *Courant* again in his own name. The paper closed in 1726 and James, too, left Boston—moving to Newport where he established the *Rhode Island Gazette*.

In 1726 Benjamin returned to the US. He went to Philadelphia, and in 1728 opened his own printing business. A year later he became sole owner and publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* newspaper. As editor, he implemented three new policies. First, he dramatically improved editorial content, giving readers something to whet their appetites and make them want to buy the next edition. In doing so he adopted a snappy, simple and direct style of writing and reporting. Second, he became a pioneer of the idea of paid newspaper advertising. This was an extremely significant development and led to newspapers becoming profitable business enterprises. Benjamin Franklin had realised that news and business could go hand in hand—that well-researched, accurate and well-written news, feature articles and informed comment made a newspaper popular, and if a paper was popular and circulated widely, businesses and individuals would pay to advertise in it. Third, he implemented a broad, largely non-judgmental, non-interventionist policy of editorial impartiality. This policy was clearly articulated in an editorial column in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1731 titled ‘An Apology for Printers’. Like Franklin, most early printers of newspapers were also journalists. The ‘apology’ was a defence of journalistic freedom as relevant today as it was then. Franklin wrote, in part:

If all Printers were determin'd not to print any thing till they were sure it would offend no body, there would be very little printed... [and] Printers are educated in the Belief, that when Men differ in Opinion, both Sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the Publick; and that when Truth and Error have fair Play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter.

Franklin 1731

Franklin was the son of a humble candle-maker. In addition to his work as a journalist and printer he went on to earn a formidable reputation as a gifted scientist, inventor, writer, diplomat and statesman. Guided by a strong social conscience as well as an astute business sense, he built his newspaper and printing businesses into highly profitable enterprises. He ‘sold’ them in 1748 but remained a silent partner in the printing business—something that provided an income for the next 18 years as Franklin devoted himself to affairs of state.

In the meantime, pressure for press freedom and freedom of speech had mounted in Europe. One of the most influential advocates for those freedoms was a remarkable Finn called Anders

Chydenius. An extraordinary visionary, who coincidentally shared many interests with Franklin and also came from a humble background, Chydenius was a scholar and Lutheran clergyman who became a medical doctor, among other things developing a vaccine to inoculate people against smallpox. He also pioneered cataract surgery. In addition, Chydenius was a politician, economist, historian, writer and pamphleteer. He studied China and its progressive systems of newspaper publication and press freedom. In 1765 he wrote a pamphlet that said, in part:

No proof should be necessary that a modicum of freedom for writing and printing is one of the strongest pillars of support for free government, for in the absence of such... learning and good manners would be suppressed, coarseness in thought, speech and customs would flourish, and a sinister gloom would within a few years darken our entire sky of freedom.

Chydenius 1765

A year later, Chydenius persuaded the Swedish and Finnish parliament, or Diet as it was then called, to pass a radical new law, the *Freedom-of-Press and the Right-of-Access to Public Records Act*. The legislation specifically aimed to create an open society and was framed in such a way that it became embedded in the Swedish Constitution. Today, a variation of the same law, the *Freedom of the Press Act*, remains in force as one of Sweden's four 'fundamental laws'. It guarantees freedom of speech, media freedom and freedom of access to government information.

Back in the US, Benjamin Franklin had become an influential leader in the push for independence from Britain and a member of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. In 1776 he was one of the signatories of the American Declaration of Independence—a document he helped draft. In 1782 he helped negotiate the peace treaty that ended the War of Independence. In 1787, just three years before he died, he became a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, which led to the creation of the US Federal Constitution—a document Franklin also had a hand in drafting, along with James Madison, George Washington and others. Two years later, in 1789, the US Congress ratified 10 amendments to the Constitution. Those amendments became known as the Bill of Rights. The first amendment protects the rights of free speech, free assembly, freedom of religion and press freedom. It says:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

US Constitution

Thus, in a period of just 23 years, two remarkable individuals in two different continents—Europe and North America—who spoke different languages and had been educated in different ways, helped embed notions of freedom of speech and media freedom deep into the constitutions of their respective nations.

■ NO GUARANTEE OF FREE SPEECH IN AUSTRALIA

Australia had neither an Anders Chydenius nor a Benjamin Franklin. We do not have a guarantee of media freedom, nor even a right to free speech embedded in our Constitution. There is little to prevent our state and federal governments tinkering with media regulation and censorship laws. Writing in 1990 in his book *Sense and Censorship: Commentaries on Censorship Violence in Australia*, journalist, author and social commentator Michael Pollak lamented the fact that: "The subjugation of thought in Australia through stringent censorship and draconian defamation laws has existed throughout the 200 years of white settlement" (Pollak 1990, p. 7).

Australians do not have a guarantee of free speech or media freedom embedded in our Constitution. There is little to prevent our state and federal governments tinkering with media regulation and censorship laws.

Perhaps one reason we lack a guarantee of media freedom in Australia stems from our beginnings as a convict colony. Convicts had few rights or freedoms. Many were illiterate and only a handful would have had money to spend on luxuries such as newspapers. It is hardly surprising, then, that although a printing press arrived with the First Fleet in 1788 it was not used to print newspapers. Instead, news was recorded on ‘pipes’: handwritten sheets that contained critical comment and were circulated from person to person throughout the colony of New South Wales. It was not until March 1803 that our first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, was published. At the time Sydney had a population of about 7000, but only 1000 were free citizens (Kirkpatrick 2003). The paper was ‘published by authority’ by the government printer, who was a convict named George Howe. Prior to being transported after a conviction for shoplifting, Howe had trained as a printer and worked on *The Times* and other English newspapers (Byrnes 1966, pp. 557–9).

The *Sydney Gazette* was heavily censored and mainly published government notices. By 1831 it was printed in three editions a week, but publication was suspended between August 30, 1807 and May 15, 1808 as a result of a dispute between the infamous Governor William Bligh and some of his enemies (Byrnes 1966, pp. 557–9). In 1824 restrictions on newspaper publication were lifted and the *Sydney Gazette* faced its first competitor with publication of *The Australian*, a newspaper not related to today’s paper of the same name. Highly respected newspaper historian Rod Kirkpatrick (2003) said the first Tasmanian newspaper appeared in Hobart in 1810. *The Perth Gazette and West Australian Journal* was launched in 1833 and became the *West Australian* in 1877. Incongruously, the first paper in South Australia (SA), the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, was actually printed in London in 1836 and shipped to Australia. Its editor and part-owner subsequently emigrated to Adelaide in 1837, where he printed the second and following editions of the newspaper in ‘its own country’ (Kirkpatrick 2003, p. 33). The handwritten *Melbourne Advertiser* arrived in 1838. *The Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, Victoria’s first daily, was published in 1839. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, Australia’s oldest surviving newspaper and its oldest daily, first appeared as a daily in 1840, the *Moreton Bay Courier* (forerunner to Queensland’s *The Courier-Mail*) in 1846 and Melbourne’s *The Age* in 1854, by which time it was that city’s third daily newspaper.

By 1860 Australia had more than 50 newspapers, although Mayer said the effective number at any one time was only about 12 because many of the new publications were ‘ephemeral’ (Mayer 1968, p. 10). One paper that became far from ephemeral was *The Ballarat Times, Buninyong and Creswick Advertiser*. Launched in March 1854 by Henry Seekamp—an Englishman who said he had an ‘Arts Bachelor’ degree when he emigrated to Victoria from Britain in 1852 (Seekamp n.d.)—and his Irish actress wife Clara, the newspaper was later accused of helping incite an uprising that was the nearest Australia ever came to a war of independence: the bloody rebellion against British colonial authorities at the Eureka Stockade, Ballarat, in December 1854.

The short-lived but deadly insurrection happened because gold miners were fed up with the colony’s autocratic government and its decision to increase the tax on their licences to dig for gold. With the start of the Australian gold rush in 1851, three years after a similar rush began in California, thousands of Australian miners who had sailed to the US to dig for gold returned to their ‘own valleys and creeks with new eyes’ (Blainey 1980, p. 156). While in the US they had experienced life in a society no longer ruled from Britain by an oppressive colonial regime, but controlled by a democratically elected federal government. They had worked beside people from many different nations and walks of life. In particular, they mixed with Americans who took it for granted that there was a free press, and that citizens had a right to bear arms. As noted previously, thanks to the efforts of people like Benjamin Franklin, the US had become a nation in which rights

lacking in Australia were constitutionally guaranteed. Miners who subsequently returned from the US with the idea of finding a fortune in gold found British colonial rule and the lack of rights and freedoms stifling. That contrast, and the arrogance of petty officials—many of whom were former convicts employed by an unelected colonial government—contributed to the frustrations that erupted at Eureka.

Henry Seekamp—described as ‘a dapper little man with a fierce temper’—was a former gold miner. He used his position as editor of *The Ballarat Times, Buninyong and Creswick Advertiser* to become ‘a forceful advocate of reform’ of the goldfields administration and a proponent of votes for diggers (Beggs Sunter 2005, pp. 335–6). Within months of establishing the newspaper, Seekamp became a foundation member of the Ballarat Reform League, a miners’ group that called a public meeting attended by 10,000 people at Bakery Hill, Ballarat on November 11, 1854 (Clark 1962, p. 58). Among other things, the meeting resolved: ‘That it is the inalienable right of every citizen to have a voice in making the laws he is called to obey. That taxation without representation is tyranny’ (Clark 1962, p. 58). More public meetings were held. On November 30 a meeting erupted into a riot. Shots were exchanged between diggers and military—although no one was hurt—and the *Riot Act* was read to the diggers (Clark 1962, p. 60). The miners set up a stockade. Authorities called in two regiments of troops and ‘two howitzers’. Early on the morning of December 4, the troops—redcoats—attacked the stockade (Clark 1962, p. 60). More than 30 miners, redcoats and police were killed. Pollak (1990) said government officials later ‘snuffed out much of the comment relating to the incident’.

After the uprising, Victoria’s then Governor, the unpopular Sir Charles Hotham, ordered Seekamp’s arrest on a charge of insurrection because of the editorials he had written in support of the miners. Pollak said: ‘Seekamp’s “crime” was that he had urged citizens to mount a “vengeance deep and terrible” in retaliation against the “foul massacre” of innocent lives at Eureka’ (Pollak 1990, p. 7). It is noteworthy that of the 13 people arrested and charged in the days after the uprising, Seekamp was the only one convicted. Found guilty of ‘seditious libel’, he served three months of a six-month jail sentence.

While Australia no longer has a colonial government and, as discussed in Chapter 15, we are supposedly a democratic federation of states and territories, journalists are still sometimes jailed and governments—especially those which fear criticism or are unpopular—are tempted to meddle with media regulation. The reasons why are discussed in Chapters 16, 17 and 18. In summary though, Australia’s news media are more heavily restrained by our government and legal systems than media in many other nations.

■ NEW TECHNOLOGIES FUEL ADVANCES IN JOURNALISM

Consider the fact that ‘the American Declaration of Independence was not reported in England until more than six weeks after the event’ (Quinn & Lamble 2008, p. 9). Compare that time-lag with how quickly we use mobile devices today to literally see news in the making as breaking stories are reported as they happen, often with sound, video and photos.

US physicists Bill Brinkman and Dave Lang from Bell Laboratories said the foundations of communication technology lay in the discoveries of the first electromagnet in 1825, and independent discoveries in 1831 by Michael Faraday and Joseph Henry that electric current could be induced in wires moving in a magnetic field. In turn, that led to the invention of a telegraph system by Samuel Morse in 1837. By 1861 Western Union had built a transcontinental telegraph line that crossed the US. The first successful trans-Atlantic telegraph cable was laid in 1866 (Brinkman & Lang 1999, p. 2).

Blainey said that by 1876 overland and undersea telegraph lines had connected nearly all the main cities of Asia, Africa and South America (Blainey 2000, p. 480), and:

Nothing so far in the history of the world had done as much to unite all lands as this slender thread of wire crossing steppes and plains, jungles and icy valleys, factory suburbs and mountain villages, and the very bed of the sea.

Blainey 2000, p. 482

In Australia, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Tasmania were all connected by telegraph lines by 1860, but the southern network was self-contained and messages had to be sent in Morse code because there were no telephones. News could be sent from city to city within the network, but ships were the only carriers of news from overseas. Sea transport was slow and it commonly took up to five months for news from Europe to reach Australia. It was not until October 1872 that the nation was first linked to other parts of the globe by a submarine telegraph cable. It came ashore at Darwin, but completion of the undersea link was only half the story. The other half was construction of the Overland Telegraph. In a truly remarkable engineering and logistical feat of enormous national significance, the 3000km line—a single wire—was strung on 360,000 poles snaking south through the Outback from Darwin down to Port Augusta in SA. Work on the project began in 1870 and was completed in two years. At the heart of the system were 11 repeater stations dotted along the line at 200–300km intervals. It was impossible for a telegraph signal to travel more than that distance, so every message was received at each remote station, then tapped out again in Morse code and sent on to the next station. In many ways the telegraph operators, their wives and children shared much with isolated light-house keepers and their families. Stations were staffed around the clock and telegraph operators worked in shifts because messages were constantly going up and down the line. Thanks in part to the work and dedication of the operators, a message sent from Adelaide would arrive in England only seven hours later—something of a miracle compared with the months it took ships to carry mail and news. And like most technology, there were constant improvements, with Blainey noting that by the 1880s ‘news was occasionally relayed across the world in less than two hours’ (Blainey 1982, pp. 223, 224).

The undersea cable and Overland Telegraph forever changed journalism in Australia (and later in New Zealand, after a cable was laid under the Tasman Sea). Access to the international telegraph network meant at least as much in its day as access to the internet, web, mobile devices and global satellite communication mean today. Newspaper reporting was brought into line with developments in Europe and North America. In his classic history book *The Tyranny of Distance*, Blainey explained the impact of the new technology on reporting thus:

The main job of Australian newsmen had always been the boarding of incoming ships and the collecting of the latest English newspapers... however, the submarine cable replaced incoming steamers as the fastest carrier of news. In Australian cities, telegraph offices replaced the waterfront as the receiving centre for world news.

Blainey 1982, p. 222

Canadian media academic Marshall McLuhan said growth of the telegraph network marked the start of a new era that unchained news media. He said that in the UK, ‘The telegraph freed the marginal provincial press from dependence on the big metropolitan press’ (McLuhan 1964, p. 225). Further:

By 1848 the telegraph, then only four years old, compelled several major American newspapers to form a collective organisation for newsgathering. This effort became the basis of the Associated Press, which, in turn, sold news service to subscribers.

McLuhan 1964, p. 224

What McLuhan was talking about was the first step towards development of what we know today as newswire services such as Australian Associated Press (AAP), which aggregate news and feed it to publishers and broadcasters. Apart from the telegraph, greater literacy and improvements in printing technology also contributed to the development of mass media in Australia, the UK and the US during the second half of the 19th century. Then came the telephone. It was patented in 1876 by US inventor Alexander Graham Bell, but voice transmission over long distances was complex and erratic at first. It was not until 1976 that Australians living in capital cities could directly dial overseas telephone numbers. In the 1970s and 1980s, fax machines came into widespread use. Coincidentally, about the same time as Australians were getting used to the idea of direct dialling their international calls, a US college dropout called Steven Jobs, then just 21, and a friend, Steven Wozniak, 26, founded the Apple Computer Company in the Jobs' family garage. In 1977 the pair started selling the world's first mass-marketed personal computer. By 1980 both were millionaires. In 1981 IBM made its first personal computers (PCs). Mobile telephones were invented in 1983, but were expensive and resembled a brick in a bag so at first they were more a curiosity than a necessity. It was not until November 2000 that the first camera phone hit the market, but they did not become widely available until 2002. Although the first email was sent in 1971, it was not until 1993 that email became available to the public. Internet service provider America Online (AOL) had its first customer in 1985. The world wide web was created in 1990. The first Yahoo! search occurred in 1995. Google.com was not registered until 1997.

Without these developments, the current era of news production and almost instant dissemination of news would not exist. There would be no Information Age or Communication Revolution, no internet, no web, no smartphones or tablet computers, no online news and no social networking. If it had not been for the invention of the electromagnet, followed by the telegraph, the evolution of the telephone, the invention and laying of trans-oceanic submarine cables, manual then automatic switching in telephone exchanges, concepts of digital encoding developed by Morse, the invention of the vacuum tube and its replacement with the silicon chip transistor, the invention of coaxial cables, microwave links, satellite repeaters and fibre-optic cables—to list just a fraction of the relevant technology—it would be impossible for today's journalists to connect to the web, send and receive emails or SMS messages, transmit photographs and video, search and research online, or file their stories from remote locations; or for news organisations to publish online and to mobile devices. The implications for present generations of journalists of digital technology are enormous. Technology has given journalists an ability to circumvent political restrictions and new weapons to use in the continuing battle for greater media freedom and freedom of speech. It has enabled and empowered them to gather and report news as it happens, and for the public to access that news on demand.

DISCUSSION
POINTS

- 1 Why is it important for today's journalists to understand the contributions made to their profession by people such as Benjamin Franklin and Anders Chydenius?
- 2 What would be the repercussions for society if Australian journalists were as free to report on, discuss and criticise individuals and corporations as journalists in the US and Sweden?
- 3 If US news media are so free and that nation has such great guarantees of freedom of speech, why do US newspapers appear to be boring when compared with Australian papers?
- 4 Are today's bloggers and social media commentators the equivalent of what early pamphleteers were to journalism and the dissemination of news, or are they all just self-opinionated, self-important crusaders who push their own ideas onto the rest of us? Why?
- 5 Newspaper circulations in many parts of the world are falling and many papers have closed while others have published online editions. What does the future hold for the print editions of newspapers? Why?
- 6 Where is information technology heading at present and what are the implications for journalists and news dissemination?
- 7 Are online news publishers really going to help bring democracy and freedom to totalitarian regimes such as those in China, Afghanistan and North Korea, or is that a pipe dream and they will just cause trouble by encouraging people to yearn for things they cannot have?

NEWS
PRACTICE
POINTS

- 1 This chapter has touched on how Benjamin Franklin, Anders Chydenius and others created a legacy of media freedom and free speech. Make a list of five other people who are not named in this chapter, including at least two Australians, who helped to create that legacy. Under each name write a sentence or two explaining what each of those individuals did and why.
- 2 In Australia, people who oppose the introduction of a Bill of Rights argue that it would put too much power into the hands of judges as opposed to elected members of parliament. How does this argument compare with the real-life situation in the US?
- 3 What happened, when, how and why to destroy media freedom and freedom of speech in China? Explain in exactly 450 words.
- 4 Australia and the US originally inherited their media laws from the UK. Why is the situation so different in each nation today?
- 5 Find an online copy of Benjamin Franklin's 'An Apology for Printers'. Read it, discover the context it was printed in, and then discuss: (a) the document's relevance today; and (b) whether you think Franklin's opinions as expressed in the document were purely altruistic or whether he had a commercial motive.
- 6 Benjamin Franklin is credited with being one of the first newspaper owners to use advertising revenue to pay for the production of news. But since news has been published online, that recipe has started to fail. What are newspapers doing today to try to regain lost revenue from advertising? Is there any one model that stands out as working well? If so, what is it, and why does it work better than other approaches?
- 7 *The Ballarat Times, Buninyong and Creswick Advertiser's* editor Henry Seekamp was charged with insurrection after the Eureka Stockade uprising. Have any other Australian news editors faced similar charges? If so, who, when and why?
- 8 Apart from journalists, news media and industry bodies such as the Australian Press Council, which organisations and credible individuals are concerned about media freedom and freedom of speech in Australia? How could they become more effective in raising public awareness?