History in the Periodical Press Online: A Revised Informal Introduction to HiPPO

Leslie Howsam
*University of Windsor*

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This essay is a revised introduction to an expanded database and reference work containing accounts, reviews, and analyses of history published Victorian periodicals – magazines, journals and reviews aimed at various reading publics. An initial tranche of records, limited to fifteen periodicals, was released in the spring of 2012, and this late-2014 release completes the project. The genres of historical writing include book reviews, scholarly narratives, anecdotes, comic and satiric discourse, and other kinds of text, all building on Victorian Britons’ preoccupation with the past of their own country, of their empire and of the world.

Each entry in HiPPO relates to a single article in a specific periodical and includes four aspects: the article’s date; the name of the author (if the piece is signed, or later attributed by scholars); the title; and a brief summary note on the content written by HiPPO researchers. The work includes 2720 articles, distributed among nineteen periodicals ranging in date from 1809 to 1916. The entries are supplemented by this informal introduction and by a brief headnote to each periodical covered. More extensive explanations of the choice of the methodology appear below (section 4). At this point it is only necessary to stress that I make no claim to comprehensiveness, and indeed invite others to add their research to my own.

I call this essay an ‘informal introduction’ because it is written in the first person, with minimal citation of related scholarly works, and it includes commentary on the research experience as well as the methodology and results.

(1) Public History in Print Culture
A widespread shared awareness of the histories of Britain and the world pervaded Victorian culture, along with an ardent commitment to historical knowledge. Narratives of the past, tales, lives, accounts and epics of various kinds were made public not only in history books and historical novels, but also in daily, weekly and monthly journals, magazines and reviews. These publications constituted the popular media of the period. They were inexpensive to produce and purchase, and often profitable as a business undertaking. I find it helpful to use the concept of ‘public history in print culture’ to think about the range and depth of coverage of history in the Victorian periodical press. Terms like ‘public history’ and ‘popular history’ were not commonly used in nineteenth-century Britain, but these twenty-first century concepts are useful in drawing attention to media, genres and approaches which have been overlooked for too long.

My search for history in the Victorian periodical press dates from the moment when I discovered in the archives a letter from the historian Mandell Creighton to his colleague Oscar Browning, regretfully
observing (in 1883) that ‘existing periodicals publish only popular and sketchy articles’. At that time Creighton and Browning, along with other historians established in academic or university-based careers, had been part of a 20-year long discussion aimed at initiating a dedicated periodical for scholarly or ‘scientific’ history-writing. They identified what they wanted as an ‘English Historical Review’. That project is well known to students of historical practice in late-Victorian Britain. What struck me, however, was that the two men were also identifying – and casually dismissing – the existence of another kind of history. Popular and sketchy articles were published in magazines, journals and reviews; they were written by journalists, essayists, and other writers who may or may not have been trained in the discipline of history; and they were read by men, women, girls and boys who nourished an interest in – and perhaps a passion for – knowledge of the world’s past. Such articles have been largely overlooked, on the one hand by historians whose interest has been focused on the introduction of discipline-specific journals as part of the formation of a rigorous scholarly practice. On the other hand, students of the Victorian periodical press have been interested primarily in the genres of literature and criticism (and more recently of science and natural history) in the periodicals. The English Historical Review, founded in 1886, was indeed the beginning of a dedicated journal for history, but it may also have marked the end of self-styled historians’ participation in, and awareness of, a rich body of writing addressed to a much wider audience.

(2) Terms and assumptions

The five points that follow are matters of terminology, and ways of thinking about the work I’ve been doing, that may be helpful to users of HiPPO:

● ‘Popular’ as a modifier for ‘History’ in the context of print culture. The term ‘popular history’ can have many meanings. Often it is set up in opposition to academic, or scholarly history, to refer to books and articles (as well as films, broadcasts, websites, game platforms and other media) designed for an audience of general readers and other users seeking entertainment. But since the consumers of such products (or texts) do not usually think of themselves in negative terms such as ‘not academic’, it is desirable to make a positive definition. Here is what I suggest: Popular history tells stories from the past, in a variety of writerly genres including both the factual and the fictional; these stories take shape in such material forms as manuscript, print, broadcast, web-based and other kinds of texts. Jerome DeGroot’s book Consuming History is an ideal starting point for research on ‘popular history’. In my own work, I have found the chapter on ‘Public History’ in Ludmilla Jordanova’s History in Practice an indispensable resource.

● ‘History’, as modified by ‘popular’ in the context of print culture. For the purposes of HiPPO, accounts of ‘history’ in the Victorian periodicals are limited to those which claim to be true, and to reviews and other articles referring to such accounts. Historical fictions are not included. It is important to
recognize, however, that such a distinction makes more sense to the professional historian, then and now, than it does to the general reader, listener or viewer who feels an affinity for narratives of the past. Many people have been instructed, as well as entertained, by historical novels and poetry, and by their counterparts in film and other media. I recognize the artificiality of the distinction, but still insist upon it in the context of this research – in order to make the point that it was conventionally ‘historical’ and respectably ‘true’ accounts that formed such a large part of the Victorians’ reading experience. (And from a practical point of view, to incorporate the writings of creative writers who drew upon history would add substantially to the truth-claiming material gathered here.)

‘Print culture’, in the context of popular history. The term ‘print culture’ has been problematic since Elizabeth Eisenstein coined the phrase to convey what she saw as the transformative way that the European world of the Renaissance, Reformation and Scientific Revolution was affected by the advent of the technology of printing with moveable type. The phrase is widely used in scholarship about nineteenth- and twentieth-century communities where the book and journalism trades were at the centre of communication networks. As I observed in my 2006 book, Old Books & New Histories, the print media and the people who contribute to its constituent publications, along with their readers, have been variously described as making up a ‘circuit of communication’ or a ‘literary field’, living in an ‘imagined community’ or producing and consuming texts in a pattern of ‘literary replication’. For me, print culture is a transaction – an exchange of ideas and money, texts and objects, businesses and institutions, individuals and societies. The concept is useful when it makes visible the networks of people who produce meaning out of print: the readers, the publishers, editors and booksellers, and the writers and compilers who put together a text. The major limitation of the concept is that it implies that books and periodicals exist only in the form of print. The term ‘book culture’ is more capacious, extending back to manuscripts and forward to digital media. But, on the surface at least, it seems to exclude newspapers and periodicals.

‘Victorian’, in the context of the long nineteenth century and of the British Empire. Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901, while the ‘long’ nineteenth century arguably began with the French Revolution in 1789 and continued to the outbreak of war in 1914. The territory governed by the Queen and her ministers included not only England, Scotland and Wales, but also Ireland, whose status was neither a colony nor part of the United Kingdom. Their rule extended to the British Empire – to the settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as to ‘possessions’ in India and elsewhere. While I agree with those who find the term ‘Victorian’ troubling for its ambiguity, I continue to use it because it remains a part of the way that both academic and popular readers and
writers understand the period. The periodicals covered in HiPPo are limited to titles published in Great Britain, and the articles range in date from 1819 to 1916.

● ‘Periodical press’, in the contexts of Victorian Britain and popular history. My criteria for the selection of specific periodical titles are discussed in section 5 below. However at a more general level, it is worth noting that I am talking about a quite specific material genre in the wider context of periodical, or serial, publishing in the period. There may well be significant coverage of history in nineteenth-century British (and/or colonial) newspapers, for example, but that question awaits its own historian. The titles I have selected come not from the daily press, but from the weeklies (often designated as ‘journals’, sometimes as ‘papers’), monthlies (many of them called ‘magazines’) and quarterlies (most notably ‘reviews’) which were read by people of both genders, all ages and all levels of the social class hierarchy.

(3) Background to the HiPPo Project

As a student of the history of the book, I have long admired the way in which scholars in the history of science (James Secord, Adrian Johns, and Jonathan Topham among others) made interdisciplinary use of the methods and approaches of book history to address questions in the history of science. Topham was part of the team that created SciPer: The Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Project (www.sciper.org). In the late 1990s, I began to think that similar insights might be gained by applying the methods and theories of the history of the book to my own discipline’s genre, that of history. Book historians think about how written texts appear in the context of publishing form, how they change from one edition to the other, how what might seem to be the same text can vary drastically in the hands of editors and publishers, and can be experienced very differently by different readers. The word ‘book’ is an elastic term, applicable to manuscripts, digital texts and, as in the present case, periodical titles and the articles they contained.

My first foray to build on this insight was conceptualized initially in terms of history-writing in book form. I sought out the correspondence of historians in the archives of British publishers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and letters from publishers in the archives of historians. The result was Past into Print: the Publishing of History in Britain 1850-1950 (British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2009), which argued that publishers had agency in the composition of works of history, and that the market demand for popular history was an important factor in the commercial world of publishing and bookselling. That research on historians and their experience with publishers also discovered the germ of the present project. Scholars knew that historians in Britain were anxious to establish a periodical journal, an English historical review. That medium would allow them to write pieces that could be addressed to a serious professional audience, and that would be shorter in length, and narrower in subject matter, than a book manuscript. We had not realized, though, that the historians,
alongside journalists and other writers who did not think of themselves in academic or disciplinary terms, had been writing history for the periodical press for decades already.

This insight brought me to the study of the Victorian periodical press, a branch of scholarship that had been developing for almost fifty years, and in the early twenty-first century was very rich in both empirical research and theoretical insights, and on the verge of new methodological possibilities as digital versions were in the process of being prepared. RSVP, the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, became an important part of my scholarly network (www.rs4vp.org).

Victorian studies in general and periodical studies in particular were founded in the 1960s, as self-conscious and ambitious interdisciplinary programs with publishing projects and periodicals of their own. Walter and Esther Houghton, Michael Wolff, Eileen Curran, John North and others undertook to chart what Wolff called ‘pearls from the golden streams’ of Victorian periodicals. Wolff initially thought there might be 15,000 titles, perhaps more. Meanwhile the Houghtons at Wellesley College in Connecticut had undertaken the project of indexing forty-three of the most important periodicals in what became the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals. And at the University of Waterloo in Canada where the School of Computer Science was as prominent as the Faculty of Arts, John North had the vision to amalgamate those two resources and began the monumental Waterloo Directory (www.victorianperiodicals.com).

Rosemary Van Arsdel called the Wellesley Index ‘one of the twentieth century’s great and enduring feats of collaborative scholarship. Houghton had written a formative work called The Victorian Frame of Mind, published in 1957. Needing to attribute particular ideas to specific individuals, Houghton had been frustrated by the convention of anonymous authorship in periodicals, and determined that any records that could determine attribution should be uncovered and linked to their articles in an index. In the spirit of the times, the Wellesley Index became a collaborative and transatlantic project, with both North American and British scholars involved, and a Canadian university press as the publisher. The last of five volumes was published in 1989 after both the Houghtons had died, though corrections and additions are still being made in the Curran Index (created by the late Eileen Curran). Wellesley meticulously indexes and cross-indexes 43 Victorian journals, reviews and magazines. They are key periodicals, now sometimes designated ‘canonical’; but 43 is indeed a handful of stones in a golden stream that is now estimated to run to 125,000. (See articles by Rosemary T. Van Arsdel, ‘John North, the Waterloo Directory and an RSVP History Lesson!’ Victorian Periodicals Review 36:2 Summer 2003, 100-107; ‘The Wellesley Index Forty Years Later,’ Victorian Periodicals Review 39:3 Fall 2006, 257-265.)

The estimate of 125,000 titles, still provisional, comes from the indefatigable John North. Computing was flourishing in the 1960s, too, and ‘Humanities Computing’ had yet to be so designated, though it was happening just the same. North received three-by-five cards from Wolff and others and transferred the data to punch cards and then (the high technology of the 1970s!) computer tape. Since that time various iterations of the Waterloo Directories have appeared, and are still in print. A searchable on-
Another technology that flourished in the 1960s, though it had been developed earlier, was microfilm. The University Microfilm Corporation in Ann Arbor, Michigan began with early modern books and later extended its program to Victorian periodicals. Complete runs, starting with the ‘canonical’ titles captured in the Wellesley Index, were photographed in Britain and made available around the world. It is important not to underestimate the effect on scholarship of this technology. Scholars working outside the UK, even in centres well-endowed with libraries, could not expect to have access to nineteenth-century periodicals. Microfilm, like digitization a few decades later, changed scholarship profoundly. Very soon, however, we took it for granted, while complaining loudly of headaches and nausea induced by the reading equipment. Presumably the much-vaunted digital editions we are now celebrating will also be regarded as commonplace, and inadequate, by impatient researchers five or ten years from now.

Most of the scholars who founded Victorian Studies and periodicals research were students of English literature; a substantial minority were historians, followed by students of music, the arts, food, architecture and so forth. They all found common cause in their studies, but the preponderance of weight on the literary side of the equation had a powerful effect. An early announcement of the Wellesley project appearing in the Times Literary Supplement reported ‘New essays’ by ‘major figures’ being discovered: ‘Coventry Patmore in the Edinburgh Review, Matthew Arnold in the Quarterly Review; two articles by H.E. Manning in the British Critic; and six by J.A. Froude in the Westminster Review’. But no one seems to have been thinking about the historian Froude’s articles in terms of how the Victorians understood their deeper past. In those days, the major nineteenth-century historians were coming to the attention of scholars like John Burrow and Doris Goldstein, and it was their books that seemed important, along with the self-evident need for a professional journal.

To arrive at the moment of digitization is to arrive at a moment of tremendous enthusiasm. Now we seem to have the past at our fingertips. Two publishers have been the pioneers of extensive digitization of the Victorian Periodical Press, ProQuest (the British Periodicals database) and Gale Cengage (Nineteenth Century Periodicals). An early ProQuest brochure spoke of creating an ‘exhaustive database’ that sought ‘to present a veritable digital history of British and global society. ... It [would] revolutionize the type and scope of research’. Gale Cengage’s marketing was equally enthusiastic.

A more temperate view has been taken by Patrick Leary in his influential 2005 article ‘Googling the Victorians.’ He observed that ‘The extraordinary power, speed, and ubiquity of online searching has brought with it a serendipity of unexpected connections to both information and people that is becoming increasingly central to the progress of Victorian research, and to our working lives as students of the nineteenth century.’ Nevertheless, Leary cautioned that ‘Despite enormous recent improvements in the accuracy of optical character recognition (OCR), even the most sophisticated digitization project leaves the electronic text with a substantial residue of errors whose manual correction
imposes enormous additional costs. This is particularly true of any project involving newspapers and periodicals, whose smudged, uneven, and inconsistently formatted columnar text often presents special problems.’ Moreover, the experience of reading online is fragmented, not linear. While the resulting ‘inherent disaggregation of texts’ can be incredibly useful for research, Leary pointed out, it’s also disquieting from the point of view of theory.

The project of looking for narratives of history has allowed me to reflect on the implication of mass digitization of nineteenth-century texts for the theory and practice of book culture. Students of the history of the book will be familiar with Robert Darnton’s ‘communication circuit’, a model for envisioning the way that books and print ‘work’ in any given culture. Useful as it can be, this is not altogether appropriate for what happens with periodicals. They do travel from author to editor to publisher-printer-binder-wholesaler-retailer (although all these functions are rather different when work appears periodically – and often the illustrator was another central participant) and around the circuit to the reader. And certainly the reader influences the writer and thus completes the circuit. With periodicals, however, this happens very quickly, and on a repetitive cycle. Each periodical, or group of periodicals, revolves in its own tight orbit, constrained by social class, gender and ethnicity as well as intellectual, political, artistic and other kinds of reader interests. And in addition to all that, the text of a single article is apt to be replicated, most often in book form, with revisions. Even within the periodical format, though, some articles re-appeared in the annual volume after first coming out in weekly or monthly issues. And when the periodicals came to rest in libraries, they were bound together in volumes that look, to the uninitiated, a lot like books. Most unfortunately, the binders of those ‘books’ normally stripped away the advertisements and paper covers from individual issues.

These and other aspects of the theory of periodicity have been treated extensively, by Margaret Beetham among others, mostly in the context of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, still flourishing almost half a century after its foundation. These scholars have stressed the hybrid and heterogeneous nature of periodicals, the way in which articles and reviews were embedded in news stories, among items picked up from other publications, and framed with advertising. Above all, they were framed by their very periodicity. They appeared and reappeared with the predictability, and yet the novelty, of the rhythm of the working week, or of the seasons of the year. Periodicals, says Beetham, were the first-ever date-stamped commodity. She stresses their mediated, and mediating quality, but she also notes the political point that proprietors, editors and contributors to the nineteenth-century periodical press had a good deal of power, the power to ‘make their meanings stick’. These are economic commodities, embedded in capitalism; they are also cultural products, engines of signification. They are material, and in fact they are notably flimsy and ephemeral objects, never intended for preservation even in their original versions, let alone by microfilming or digitization. They are both an open-ended form, flexible and fluid, and one that is closed, formalized, and conventional. (‘Towards a Theory of the Periodical As a Publishing
(4) The research method that built HiPPo, its opportunities and problems

What I proposed back in 2006 to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) was not exactly what happened, although I did warn at the time that refining the methodology would be part of the project of seeking out accounts of history in the Victorian Periodical Press. I hoped then to create a flexible set of keywords that would turn up a body of research material. As I remarked in the proposal, to search the full digital texts of articles on the term ‘history’ would be too general, whereas to search on ‘Alfred the Great’, for example, would miss out references to ‘King Alfred.’ I had already identified the serious, perhaps insoluble, problem of searching a body of digitized text not for a specific term, but rather for an abstract concept: history.

Faced with the daunting body of material and my first couple of research assistants funded and ready to start a three-month task in the summer of 2007, however, I fell back on a much more rough-and-ready methodology. I asked them to search the titles of articles in the databases on the term ‘history NOT natural’ – in order to avoid cluttering our results with articles about ‘natural history’, the Victorian term for science. They found plenty of promising articles and book reviews, and got started reading and summarizing them for the HiPPo database. Beyond the crucial instruction to limit the search to article titles, I also instructed my RAs to ignore fiction, to avoid so-called ‘sacred history’ (biblical accounts) as much as possible, and to steer clear of literary and art history. In other words, I was implicitly defining the ‘history’ I was looking for in terms of political and social history. I hoped to tease out evidence of contemporary prejudices (such as British superiority over the French) and disciplinary prejudices (such as the superiority of academic over popular history). In the case of book reviews, I asked the RAs to succinctly identify the book under review, including the publisher’s name if possible, but not to attempt to provide full bibliographical information.

My first few research assistants were limited to the ProQuest database (British Periodicals) because the University of Windsor’s Leddy Library had made that their initial subscription. ProQuest also supports a bibliographical program called RefWorks, so I asked the RAs to download their selected citations to RefWorks and draft their own summary comments in the appropriate field of that database. I later moved the material out of RefWorks and into ProCite, a different bibliographical software with which I felt more at ease. Another factor was that the materials in the Gale Cengage database (Nineteenth Century Periodicals) could not be downloaded to RefWorks, although they could be saved in a pdf format. From about 2012, however, the ProCite program was no longer updated by its manufacturers. I considered switching to EndNote, but discovered that it would be impossible to sort by date within the entries I had created earlier. In retrospect I now believe I should have moved to a generic database program, but at the time ProCite was familiar and comfortable.
Gradually, I revised the ProCite databases (one for each periodical, later combined in a single file) so that they formed the basis for the pdf documents in HiPPo. *The task of reviewing and revising the summaries drafted by my RAs was time-consuming; even a Master’s student in History is unlikely to be familiar with all the nuances of meaning in the articles they had to read. I’m sure I missed quite a lot of them myself.* Aligning the attribution of authorship of specific articles with the appropriate entry also proved to be a lengthy and difficult job. The ProQuest system identifies Wellesley *Index* attributions, but these were not captured when the items were downloaded to RefWorks.

Although I have striven to be thorough, it has proved impossible to make any claim to comprehensiveness for HiPPo. *The problem of searching on an abstract concept has continued to plague the research.* Even within the limitations of a title-word search, some items will have been missed by the weaknesses of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) working with badly-printed documents on cheap paper. Others have been lost by human error. Moreover, over time I initiated some digressions from the initial methodology. In the case of the periodicals for children in the Gale Cengage database, I asked my research assistant to use some additional search terms (words like king, queen, constitution, ancient and so forth) so that the records for those periodicals are not listed to items with the word ‘history’ in their title. And in ProQuest I added some searches on the names of prominent historians (Freeman, Froude and others) and captured some further articles by that means. *Because of the unstable nature of the materials, then, I strongly advise anyone who finds something of interest in a given periodical to use HiPPo only as a starting point, and also to search the full text of that periodical directly.*

Finally, I am very much aware that mine is a straightforward, conventional and limited approach to a body of digitized material, and that there is another more ambitious and much more satisfactory way to do it. *I would have liked to be able to publish HiPPo as an online database.* Faced with limited time and minimal technical support, however, I decided to create a set of pdf files: “HiPPo19,” containing all 2720 entries sorted by date (so that reviews can be identified across periodicals); and also nineteen separate files, one for each periodical, again sorted by date. Users can search through my pdf documents for recurring words or terms, but a full-fledged online database could be manipulated by users in various ways. (One example might be to distinguish stand-alone ‘essays’ about history from the much larger number of articles which appeared as book reviews.) Databases with that sort of capacity have been appearing year after year, as I have been struggling to come to terms with my material and to keep it under control. It’s worth noting, too, that mine is a modest initial foray into a whole genre of Victorian writing in the periodical press. Hundreds of scholars work on fiction and poetry; dozens work on science (the SciPer project and its offshoots), but not very many work on history. I hope that will change, and that collaborators and successors will come forward to expand on this modest beginning.
5) Identification of periodicals for research

I selected the nineteen periodicals eventually to be covered in HiPPo because each of them contained substantial amounts of historical content and because together they represented a broad swath of approaches to popular history addressed to readers of various ages, classes, religious denominations and levels of education. More are to be found in the ProQuest system (16) than in Gale Cengage (3). In the ProQuest website, it is possible to use a broad general search term (like ‘history NOT natural’) and then identify how many ‘hits’ appear within the article-title fields of various periodicals. Most of the ProQuest titles were chosen by this criterion. Some of the larger files come from the influential Fraser’s Magazine, Fortnightly Review, The Academy, and Nineteenth Century – and the wonderfully irascible Saturday Review. The extent of attention to historical subjects in the Roman Catholic Dublin Review is worth noting, and a little-known Methodist periodical of the 1820s and ’30s called The Imperial Magazine also proved remarkably fruitful. I was fascinated, too, with The Practical Teacher which gave advice for instruction in history to those faced each day with a classroom full of boys or girls.

In the case of the Gale Cengage titles, I was particularly interested in gaining access to periodicals directed towards children and women. Entries from the Boy’s Own Magazine, Boy’s Own Paper and Girl’s Own Paper have been drawn from this collection. I expected to add the English Women’s Review, but was surprised to find remarkably few accounts of history in its pages, and hence left it unlisted. **However this decision points to an important research lacuna: eventually it will be just as important to identify which categories (or genres) of periodicals do not contain history.**

I have omitted certain titles that some colleagues might have expected to find, along with a whole category of periodicals, namely newspapers. Certainly the influential weekly paper The Athenaeum does contain numerous articles with ‘history’ in the title. However most of these are brief ‘Notices’ of new books; they do not contain the extensive commentary of the book reviews in other periodicals, and their very large number would make them both difficult and unrewarding to capture in the database. Newspapers, broadsheet dailies, are another matter. Although they certainly appear periodically, and contain opinion and cultural commentary along with actual ‘news’ – and may well contain significant discourse on historical subjects – newspapers and journalism are sufficiently different from the weekly, monthly and quarterly publications researched here to justify being left for future research.

(6) Agenda for further research

_I hope to be able to collaborate with others who are working on similar questions with these kinds of materials. I would welcome the opportunity to share the raw materials of my research with a colleague who might want to refine and/or expand it._

I also look forward to productive conversations about the methods and approaches of Digital Humanities, whereby scholars could make complex searches on the aggregated full texts of the various
databases. One concern with which I have been preoccupied is the potential expense of working with commercial databases. My access to the ProQuest and Gale Cengage materials comes as a result of my association with the University of Windsor, and the University has paid substantially to make them available to its students and faculty. There is of course nothing wrong with this situation; the companies made considerable investments to digitize the microfilm or print materials in research libraries. It’s worth noting, though, that many of the texts in question will also have been digitized by Google Books and made available through that portal with no cost except exposure to advertising; the detriment here is the lack of appropriate metadata, and of course links to such scholarly materials as the Wellesley Index and Waterloo Directory are lacking altogether. A few have been digitized by Open Access scholarly projects, such as Nineteenth Century Serials Editions (NCSE), where the funding comes from governments and universities. In those cases the texts have been enhanced, not only by proper classification but also by corrections to the digital scans, so that search accuracy is much increased.

Another factor affecting such for-profit databases as those of ProQuest and Gale Cengage is their limited usability for large-scale textual analysis. I have tried to imagine a project whereby large numbers of these sometimes-very-long articles might be aggregated, analyzed and made available for visualization – let’s say a search for those phrases about King Alfred the Great, or perhaps for comments on the historicity of Asia or Africa. The research methodology would have to be controlled in order to capture the date of publication, the place of publication of the periodical, the title of the periodical, and many other factors. I can’t quite work out, however, how the researcher would undertake complex analysis of the whole mass of text in a database, if such analysis would require the dismembering of what has been packaged up in units of one article at a time, one issue at a time, and one periodical title at a time.

(7) Tentative Conclusions

I’ll close with some impressionistic observations, based on extended experience with the materials in HiPPO, but I must stress that they are only impressions. The challenge of future research with these materials will be to find ways to translate impressions into defensible arguments.

- historical culture – Nineteenth-century Britain was a culture steeped in knowledge of history, as Peter Mandler, Billie Melman and others have demonstrated. Although Macaulay’s phrase ‘every schoolboy knows . . .’ was used ironically by his countrymen to refer to a priggish pedant, in fact every former schoolboy – and schoolgirl – had absorbed a considerable amount of knowledge of the past. The reviews, articles and other pieces written and published in the periodical press served to reinforce and deepen that knowledge. People knew their history, especially the history of England.
• journalism and historical writing – It’s difficult to know what to call the men and women who wrote the articles captured in HiPPo. A few were proud to embrace the title of ‘historian’ and quick to deny it to others who had not undergone a rigorous academic training. Many were people we would now call ‘journalists’ – people who were steeped in the culture of their own time and able to write about it, when that culture included the rich element of historical knowledge. Further research on this aspect of authorship is badly needed. Meanwhile, I think it is crucial to remember that the men and women who wrote about history in Victorian periodicals were being paid for it, that they were part of the commercial network of authorship in London and other centres. Public history, as Ludmilla Jordanova reminds us in History in Practice, is very often a business proposition, which means that the expectations of the audience, and their pleasure in the experience, have to be taken into consideration.

• ‘social’ history earlier than conventional historiography recognizes – While the Victorian periodical press was being rediscovered in the 1960s, academic historians were fashioning a new ‘social history’ – sometimes called ‘history from below’, which aimed to recover and celebrate the lives of ordinary working people. Earlier attempts to write such a history, such as J. R. Green’s insistence in the 1870s on eschewing ‘drum and trumpet history’, seemed sparse and unsatisfactory. But if you search through HiPPo15 using terms such as ‘social’, ‘society’, and ‘domestic’, you will find that readers of periodicals throughout the period were exposed to reviews and articles about everyday life in the past.

• individual periodicals reinforced their readers’ identities – It is well known that some reviews were Tory and others Whig, some for men and others for women; it is also well known that many girls preferred to read the magazines aimed at their brothers, because the prose was a little less cloying and more racy. But when the lens of history is laid over those of class, gender, race and nationality, it is possible to see those identities much more clearly. Allegiances to Elizabeth or to Mary Queen of Scots, for example, justified in extraordinary levels of detail, show how writers expressed their contemporary politics in the context of the past.

• Researching history in the periodical press is both risky and rewarding – Perhaps the databases should come with “health warnings” like cigarette packages: Victorian Periodicals cause bewilderment! Risk of anachronism! Periodical research damages preconceived ideas! Reading this will raise more questions than it answers!