

The Gazette

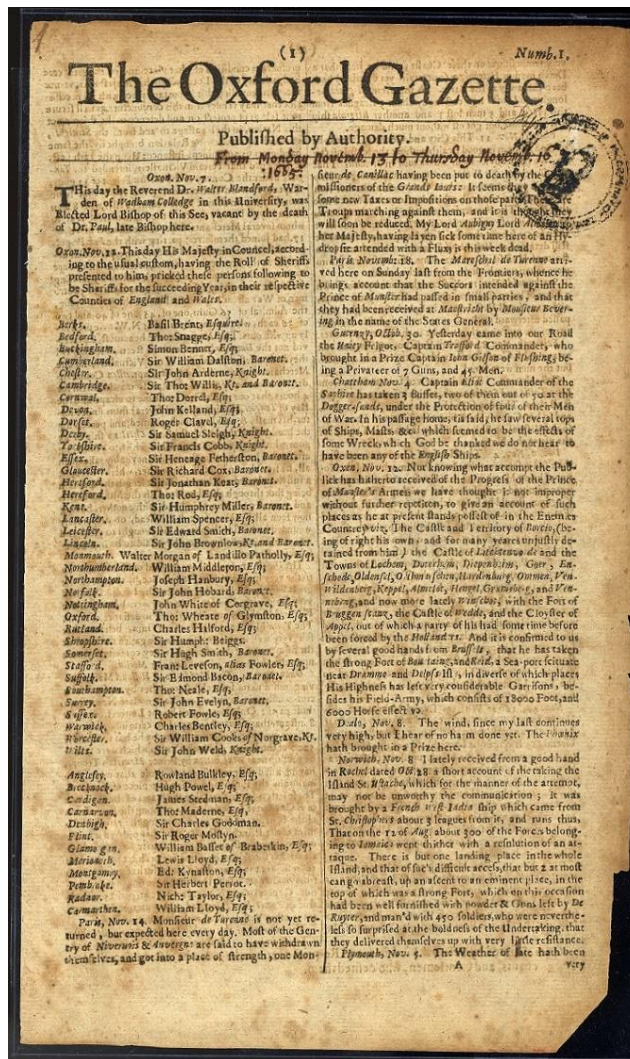
Joe Saunders

The Gazette, an official public record, is an excellent resource for historians in Britain for the seventeenth century onwards. It contains notices of all manner of authorised announcements relating to matters of public interest such as about bankruptcies, highways, lost and found notices, death notices and lecture announcements: [The Gazette | Official Public Record](#)

In the seventeenth century, newspapers burst into English daily life in a different way than earlier newsheets and pamphlets. Regular publications covered news and gossip from across England and far further afield. Early periodicals existed alongside pamphlets, ballads, and posters, but began to carve out a place for themselves lasting until the present day, providing historians with a wealth of information. The Civil Wars escalated the demand for news and by the Restoration, many news sheets were circulating. Rumours were often printed as 'news', issued in pamphlet form. This led to a climate where 'the printing of any news not pertaining to the coverage of events abroad, natural disasters, official royal declarations and the most sensationalist of crime reporting was largely prohibited' for fears of national security.¹

In 1665 an outbreak of plague arrived so deadly that it is thought to have killed 15% of the population in London. King Charles II removed his court, effectively the government of the day, from the capital and relocated to the relative safety of Oxford. The Oxford Gazette emerged from this turmoil. When the plague finally dissipated the court returned to London and from 5 February 1666 (number 24) the *Oxford Gazette* became the *London Gazette*.

¹ [A history of The Gazette | The Gazette](#)



The Oxford Gazette Oxford, England (reprinted in London) November 13-16, 1665 (No. 1)
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The *Gazette* became the first 'journal of record and the newspaper of the Crown' under the Licensing Act of 1662.² The 'official' news sheet, it was at first published on Tuesdays and Fridays before being published daily and distributed to most parts of England, even in its earliest years.³

The state already held incomparable sources of information from overseas. British embassies and generals provided despatches which continued to be used to good effect in the *London Gazette*. Indeed, when the *Times* newspaper carried the report of Wellington's 1815 victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, it reproduced the despatch which had already been previously published as a 'Gazette Extraordinary' ([Gazette issue 17028](#)).

² [A history of The Gazette | The Gazette](#)

³ David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (1996), 292.

The Gazette is also famous for being the bearer of official War Office and Ministry of Defence events, including listing those 'Mentioned in Despatches' where notable individuals were recognised for their activities in the theatre of war. Indeed, when a person was appointed to a new military post, or for committing acts of particular gallantry, they were said to have been 'gazetted' when their name reached its pages.⁴

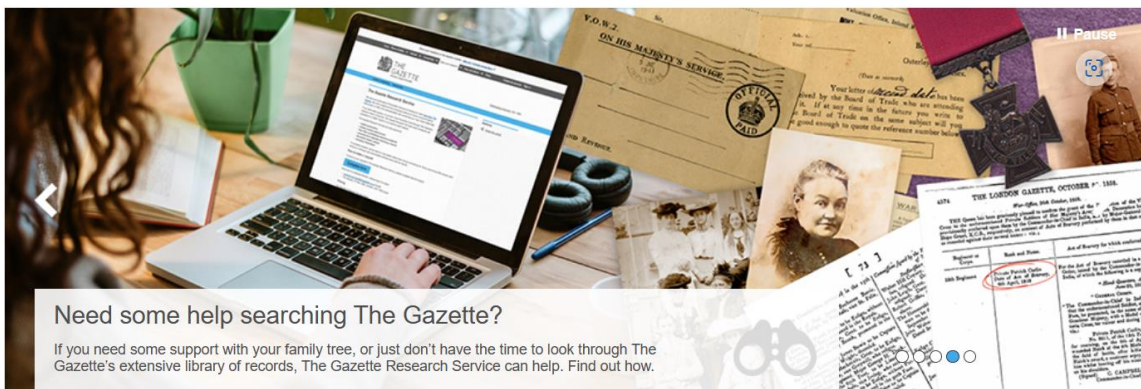
An easing of publishing restrictions, and the general success of the *London Gazette* in providing reliable official information, led to the creation of two further journals, enabling a more detailed focus on material of relevance to Scotland and Ireland. In 1699, the *Edinburgh Gazette* first appeared, though it only settled into a pattern of uninterrupted production in 1793. The *Dublin Gazette* was in continuous production since 1706. The 1920 partition of Ireland led to the production of two separate official publications, the *Iris Oifigiúil* and the *Belfast Gazette*.

From 1889, all three Gazettes were published by His Majesty's Stationery Office. Today, *The Gazette* is published by The Stationary Office, on behalf of The National Archives.

Continuing its long history, the present *Gazette* continues to publish all manner of 'official' information, including that related to the military and business. Once again at the forefront of communication, it has embraced digital transformation and is now more accessible than ever before. Historians are often rewarded by searching within its digital archive.



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⁴ [A history of The Gazette | The Gazette](#)

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References and Resources:

Information for this post was taken from: [A history of The Gazette | The Gazette](#)

P. M. Handover, *A History of the London Gazette, 1665-1965* (1665)

David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (1996)

See also our How-to on [Early English Newspapers - by Anna Cusack](#) for more context and reading suggestions.