

‘Be a gen’l’m’n and a Conserwative Sammy’: Political Remediations of the *Pickwick Papers* in the Provincial Press (1836–1837)

Dr Katie Holdway

University of Southampton, Highfield Road, Southampton, SO17 1BJ, K.Holdway@soton.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Throughout its serial run, Charles Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* (1836–7), was repurposed hundreds of times by the provincial press. From acting as innocuous filler material to making strategic political statements, provincial newspaper editors evoked, excerpted and adapted *Pickwick* as quickly as Dickens was penning the instalments, showing a keen responsiveness to political topicalities relevant to their reading communities. This article contends that these types of journalistic re-use benefit from being read collectively as a form of remediation, defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin as ‘the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms’. It argues that these remediations are vital to understanding the politics of the provincial press because they became one method through which provincial newspapers articulated a localised response to the national political debates that raged following the 1832 Reform Act. As well as reflecting the political priorities of specific communities, these remediations nuance our understanding of *Pickwick*’s popularity by drawing attention to aspects of its construction that lent themselves to re-use. While explicit engagement with party politics is conspicuously absent from *Pickwick*, provincial editors capitalised upon this generality and imbued their re-workings of the serial with a partisanship that Dickens himself avoided, while using his name to substantiate and authorise their own pieces. In this respect, these remediations invite us to place *Pickwick* at the heart of political debate in the papers, by foregrounding the close relationship between newspaper politics, serial literature, and provincial identity in the 1830s.

KEYWORDS: Dickens, Newspapers, *Pickwick*, Provincial, Remediation, Excerpt

From the moment of its initial publication in March 1836, Charles Dickens’s first serial novel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836–7) was re-purposed extensively by the newspaper press. From acting as filler material, to making strategic political statements, *Pickwick* led a rich periodical afterlife, with newspaper editors evoking, excerpting and adapting Dickens’s words and tropes as quickly as he was penning the instalments, and re-deploying them in the service of their own agendas. The various journalistic ends to which *Pickwick* was put in the newspapers benefit from being read collectively as a form of remediation, a term defined by J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin as ‘the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms’.¹ Understanding these journalistic forms of re-use as remediations enables us to place them at the centre of *Pickwick*’s extensive, networked reception trajectories, which in turn enhances our understanding of the serial’s construction and its cultural impact.

¹ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000) p.273.

A survey of thirty stamped English newspapers reveals that, between March 1836 and December 1837, 310 examples of remediated *Pickwick* appeared in the newspapers, including evocations in letters; transcribed political speeches and court cases; remediated extracts; and even some short adaptations that have previously eluded critical attention.² By 1836 an estimated 397 stamped titles were in circulation in Britain.³ This fact suggests that as many as 4,102 remediations of *Pickwick* may have appeared in the stamped press alone during its serialisation, with the potential for many more examples in unstamped publications. These figures identify newspaper remediation as a significant branch of the *Pickwick* phenomenon, and yet it has received markedly less attention than other forms of Pickwickiana, including theatrical adaptations, spinoff serials and merchandise.⁴

This article demonstrates that an analysis of *Pickwick*'s remediation in the press contributes to our understanding of the political aims of provincial or non-metropolitan newspapers in the 1830s, particularly the ways in which such papers articulated a response to the Great Reform Act. In doing so, it builds upon recent work by Mary Hammond on the journalistic reception of novels by Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell in the late 1840s and 1850s, as they circulated through provincial newspapers in excerpt form. Hammond argues that such excerpts formed part of a 'rich, intimate mosaic [...] of local and regional self-fashioning', suggesting that we can use them to nuance Ian Duncan's definitions of provincial and regional novels, because they enable us 'to switch the focus from form to function, and to redefine the regional and the provincial as literary subgenres at the point of reception.'⁵ Similarly, this article argues that measuring *Pickwick*'s cultural impact at the point of its journalistic reception offers a unique insight into its provincial potentialities. Drawing the discussion back to the early days of Dickens's writing career, I argue that, although we continue to think of Dickens as an essentially metropolitan author, *Pickwick*'s remediation is a particularly significant area of study, because of the specific ways in which newspapers politicised and localised references to or excerpts from the serial, in order to define themselves against other provincial communities, as well as legislation and debate relating to Reform politics issuing from the metropole.

² This figure is based on results from keyword searches undertaken using the British Newspaper Archive. I searched the monogram 'pickwick' in thirty titles between March 1836 and December 1837. A complete list of the newspapers I have consulted appears as an appendix at the end of this article.

³ Andrew King, Alexis Easley and John Morton (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Nineteenth Century Newspapers and Periodicals* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016) n.p.

⁴ For work on theatrical adaptations see particularly: H. Philip Bolton, *Dickens Dramatized* (London: Mansell, 1987); Jacky Bratton, *Dickensian Dramas: Plays from Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For work on spinoff serials, see Adam Abraham, *Plagiarising the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Elliot Engel, *Pickwick Papers: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1990). Two recent articles have also begun to draw attention to the *Pickwick* remediations in the newspaper press, although much work remains to be done. Firstly, Laura Kasson-Fiss has discussed the humour of reprinted Wellerisms in the newspaper press, arguing convincingly that the 'periodical' fragmentariness of *Pickwick* facilitated its re-appearance in the papers, to the extent that newspapers pieced together an 'alternative serial' in which Sam's anecdotes overshadowed both the centrality of *Pickwick*'s character and the main narrative, in the minds of readers. See, Laura Kasson Fiss, "'Out with It," as the Subeditor Said to the Novel: Wellerisms and the Humor of Newspaper Excerpts', *VPR*, 50.1 (2017) pp.228-237. Secondly, William Long's study is the latest in a series of survey articles in the *Dickensian* working to recover reviews and advertisements of *Pickwick* from the press, as well as excerpts. See William F. Long, 'Pickwick in the Provinces', *Dickensian* 116.3 (2020) pp.273-294.

⁵ Mary Hammond, 'Wayward Orphans and Lonesome Places: The Regional Reception of Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton and North and South', *Victorian Studies*, 3 (2018) pp.390-411 (p.393; p.395). Hammond also discusses the excerption of *Great Expectations* in her book, which includes a summary of the usefulness of 'remediation'—in Bolter and Grusin's sense—as a key term for describing these forms of journalistic re-use. See, Mary Hammond, *Charles Dickens's Great Expectations: A Cultural Life* (Abingdon; New York: Ashgate, 2019) pp.7-8.

In *A Fleet Street in Every Town*, Andrew Hobbs argues that an understanding of local identity is essential to the study of the nineteenth-century provincial press, since 'media history is beginning to adopt the "spatial turn" or to move beyond a study of newspaper mobilities to consider the rootedness of individual publications and their reading communities in a sense of place'.⁶ In what follows, I argue that *Pickwick's* particular style and structure enabled provincial editors to repurpose the serial's words and tropes to imbue it with this 'sense of place', so that it became both politicised and localised, and was able to participate in newspapers' composite responses to the politics of the 1830s.⁷ Indeed, the localisation and politicisation of *Pickwick* were not unrelated processes, as when *Pickwick* was imbued with a political partisanship, through changes to its content or context, it often incorporated local geographies as part of its commentary. Nonetheless, for a provincial paper to create this sense of geographical rootedness through literature, it was necessary for other texts, such as *Pickwick*, to circulate. In this way, as Hobbs has also noted, the cultivation of a 'sense of place' often paradoxically relies on print mobilities.⁸

In the first part of this article, I will discuss some of the strategies provincial newspapers used to both localise and politicise *Pickwick*, arguing that they relied on the serial's combination of familiarity and adaptability to imbue their publications with geographical and political specificity. In the second section, I will examine one particularly illuminating remediation that has hitherto eluded critical attention: a short adaptation of *Pickwick* which appeared in the *Hampshire Advertiser* in April 1837.⁹ In this example, the strategies used to localise and politicise *Pickwick* begin to raise questions about the intersections between newspaper remediation, authorship and genre, as the adaptation is presented as a verbatim extract, lifted directly from Dickens's *Pickwick*.

I. PICKWICK AND THE PROVINCIAL PRESS

Marshalling *Pickwick* to meet new agendas required creativity from newspaper editors, as well as *Pickwick's* unique combination of familiarity and adaptability. Recognisable tropes and characters, such as the Wellers, often contribute to the value of the pieces, but equally *Pickwick's* anecdotes and character sketches are portable and easily modified. While containing some political scenes and anecdotes—such as the Eatanswill Election—the novel is also disinclined towards political partisanship. There are no explicit references to the Reform Act, or to real political parties in the text, which tends instead to satirise institutions and the establishment in general.¹⁰ This left space for authors and editors with different agendas to

⁶ Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900*, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018) p.13.

⁷ Laura Kasson Fiss has suggested that because excerpting *Pickwick* necessarily involved re-contextualisation, when readers encountered an excerpt in the press, they needed to fill in the gaps. This afforded, she argues, 'not only the pleasure of a cognitive leap but also the pleasure of belonging'. I argue that provincial editors cultivated this sense of belonging by imbuing *Pickwick* with a geographical and political specificity relevant to their readers, and thus filled in some of these gaps themselves. See Kasson Fiss, p.229.

⁸ Hobbs, p.31.

⁹ 'The Pickwick Papers, No. 13,' *The Hampshire Advertiser*, 8 April 1837, p.4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000494/18370408/032/0004>> [Accessed 17/06/2019].

¹⁰ For comments on Dickens's anti-establishment politics, see Paul Schlicke (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p.463. *Pickwick* does contain an oblique reference to 'Schedules A and B' – an allusion to the list of boroughs that were to be completely or partially disenfranchised, which accompanied the Reform Act legislation when the bill was engrossed. See, Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp.142-3.

re-shape and adapt the same scenes to suit a variety of local political contexts. A review of *Pickwick* published in the *Norfolk Chronicle* reflects this malleability: ‘we should not be acting fairly towards the publisher’, it states, ‘were we any longer to abstain from adding our tribute to the general fund of eulogy, which it has already secured from all quarters without distinction of party’.¹¹ The *Chronicle*’s verdict, while laudatory, establishes that *Pickwick*’s suitability for remediation arises from its political *potential*, rather than its partisanship, and it is this potential that is tapped by provincial editors.

In this respect, *Pickwick*’s form and circulation, particularly among provincial titles, is a product of the specific political and cultural conditions of the 1830s. 1836 saw the advent of both the Provincial Newspaper Society and the reduction in Stamp Tax which helped to facilitate a period of strengthening for the provincial press. At the same time, the 1832 Reform Act gave rise to an unprecedented reconfiguration of the voting franchise. Debates about the benefits and limitations of Reform, and the potential for further legislation, played out in the press throughout the 1830s, with provincial papers looking for different ways of articulating their political identities as well as demonstrating how these identities chimed with those of other localities, and with political agendas issuing from the metropole. This in turn meant that the 1830s saw provincial newspapers advance a composite response to political issues, which included reports of political association meetings and events, articles about the movements of favourite politicians, political news taken from other newspapers, and, crucially, remediated literature.¹²

As well as an awareness of the ways in which *Pickwick* could benefit their publications, provincial editors were also eager to show themselves to be equal to Dickens’s thinking by demonstrating that the subjects of his jokes and satire were familiar to them, or that his writing spoke directly to their communities or those of their rivals. As Malcolm Andrews has suggested: ‘[n]ot to be in on Boz’s jokes implied exclusion from the circle he was so successfully drawing around him—and risked the reputation perhaps of a slight lack of sophistication’.¹³ This keenness to show understanding means that the newspapers are replete with ‘real life’ equivalents for Dickens’s scenes, which for provincial papers often means the introduction or emphasising of local specificity. For example, on 7th October 1837, the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* published an article entitled ‘Pickwick in Devon’ which it claims ‘bids fair to rival the peregrinations of this illustrious original [i.e. *Pickwick*] in another part of the kingdom’. The article tells of ‘Two Cits, lovers of the picturesque’ who visit the area. Stopping in a local place to eat, they snobbishly ask for duck and fish because they disdain beef. As a reward for their scorn for local culture, they are presented with a cooked bird they believe to be a combination of the two, because it has a fishy flavour, until one of the party discovers they have been served seagull.¹⁴ While not an overtly political example, this piece shows a common way

¹¹ ‘The Pickwick Papers’, *Norfolk Chronicle*, 15 October 1836, p.2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000244/18361015/003/0002>> [Accessed: 01/08/2020].

¹² For further discussions of the ways in which the newspaper press helped to balance the local and the national in the 1830s, following the Reform Act, see Matthew Cragoe, ‘The Great Reform Act and the Modernization of British Politics: The Impact of Conservative Associations, 1835-1841’, *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (2008) pp.581-603; Peter Brett, ‘Early Nineteenth-Century Reform Newspapers in the Provinces: The *Newcastle Chronicle* and *Bristol Mercury*’, *Media History*, 3.1-2 (1995) pp.49-67; Carole O’Reilly, ‘Creating a Critical Civic Consciousness’, *Media History* (2018) <[10.1080/13688804.2018.1530975](https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2018.1530975)> [Accessed: 04/02/2020].

¹³ Malcolm Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter: Essays on Dickens & Humour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p.9.

¹⁴ ‘Pickwick in Devon’, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 7 October 1837, p.3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000267/18371007/004/0003>> [Accessed 01/08/2020].

in which *Pickwick* was deployed to champion local identity: by reducing the serial to only its most useful themes, characters or incidents and interpreting their familiarity as local topicality. Here the writer retains only *Pickwick's* picaresque narrative as an analogy to contrast the condescension of the wandering city gentleman with the unfairly patronised, yet more knowing, Devonshire community. The former is aligned with the metropolitan Pickwickians' own snobbish naivety, and the latter with Dickens's keenness of eye in exposing it.

A similarly selective reading of *Pickwick* can be found in another Conservative paper, the *Oxford University and City Herald*. This time, the remediation appears as a joke letter to the Editor, published on April Fool's Day, and signed, 'Samivel Veller' after Mr Pickwick's cockney manservant. The letter imitates Sam's cheerful idiolect: 'Mr. Pickvick reads your Peaper, and'll stand by the Church, as the drunkard said ven he reeled agen the steeple', it opens. The letter continues:

Mr. Pickvick ses to me to-day, Sam, sit down an read it, for my head's *reyther* akey. So down I sits...and ven I read the names about the ballet and comes to Mr. Pickvick's name, Mr Pickvick sent me with a note to mr. Perker, the loyer chap and said all the world was inspired agenst him.¹⁵

'Sam' goes on to request an apology from the newspaper for mistakenly including their names on the 'ballet' (ballot) list, and states that Tony Weller is bringing Mr Perker's summons to them 'by the Oxford coach, vich he drives'. The editor responds gamely with an apology, but uses the opportunity for some political flag-waving by adding: 'Mr. Pickwick may well be angry with the Ballot List, which we have every reason to believe contains a good many other names, besides his own, upon no better authority'. Sam's accent, signature analogies, and malapropisms make him instantly recognisable to readers of the serial. Indeed, familiarity is essential here: both to the comedy of the letter and to ensure that its political messages (encouraged by the editor, who might very well have written or commissioned the writing of the letter itself) are understood. Readers need to know the Pickwickian characters to appreciate the nuance of the joke, and equally, the fictional Pickwickians need to be sufficiently familiar with Oxford culture to practicably appear accidentally on its ballot lists. Mr Pickwick, we are to suppose, reads the *Herald* regularly, and Tony even drives the Oxford coach. This cluster of metropolitan Pickwickian characters and tropes are so much at home here, in the columns of a provincial newspaper, I would suggest, because the fragmentary structure of *Pickwick* the serial remained close to the journalistic, parochial tendencies of Dickens's earlier work. Whereas, for example, Dickens's 'Our Parish' tales—which were initially published in the *Evening Chronicle*—ultimately appeared together in a collected form, as part of *Sketches by Boz*, *Pickwick* moved in the opposite direction, with its range of episodes leading to its several, provincial circulation trajectories.¹⁶

As well as a comic promotion of the local area and half-serious inflation of the *Herald's* popularity through the suggestion that it is read by Dickens's immensely popular fictional characters, the letter and its response also subtly foreground the paper's political interests. Pickwick reads the paper because he 'stands by the Church', and 'Sam' ends his epistle with

¹⁵ 'To the Editor', *Oxford University and City Herald*, 1 April 1837, p.2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000992/18370401/014/0002>> [Accessed 01/08/2020].

¹⁶ The Parish Sketches were published in two parts in the *Evening Chronicle* in February and May 1835. For a complete itemisation, see the appendices to Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (London: Penguin, 1995) p.567.

the neatly constitutional valediction: ‘a chip of [sic] the old block, and an Englishman and no ballet man.’ The support of Church and Constitution (and especially the maintaining of Church Rates) are key features of the Conservative ideology propounded in other parts of the paper. On the same page is a report of a Conservative dinner organised by an operative Conservative association in Leeds, at which ‘our glorious Constitution in Church and State’ is toasted and the continuation of Church Rates advocated. There are also details of the recent Warwick election, which the Conservatives lost.¹⁷ The article laments Warwick’s corruption, and the fact that ‘Whig-Radicals’ abandoned their claims to have it disenfranchised when the seat unexpectedly came up for re-election, but hopes that the small majority is evidence of the Conservative movement’s gathering popularity in the area. Finally, there is a reprinted article from the *Brighton Gazette* supposedly written by a dissenting minister who supports Church Rates.¹⁸ In just one issue, therefore, the *Oxford Herald’s* principles—constitutional values, support of Church Rates and Conservative local governance—are expounded in a meeting report, an editorial, an article lifted from another newspaper, and remediated literature. Each piece discusses these issues differently according to its genre: the editorial about the Warwick election propounds the *Oxford Herald’s* opinions about Conservatism, the report of the meeting in Leeds and the article from the *Brighton Gazette* show the *Herald’s* views to be shared by other provincial communities. Finally, the *Pickwick* remediation exploits the recognisability of a piece of popular fiction to exaggerate Oxford’s geographical significance and deliver an indirect commentary on its political opponents. For this reason, while it is tempting to see this *Pickwick* remediation, with its ludicrous confounding of ‘ballets’ with ballots, as an antidote to serious politics, it instead becomes part of the paper’s response to electoral reform.

And yet, one of the most common ways in which *Pickwick* was remediated by the newspaper press required no alteration to be made to Dickens’s text at all. Remediated extracts comprise 277 of the 693 references to *Pickwick* recorded across my thirty case studies—or about 40% of all references—either appearing alone or as part of a review. They are outnumbered only marginally by advertisements for the serial, with 279 references (again, about 40%). Extracts were reprinted verbatim from Dickens’s serial, so did not permit the same scope for invention as the above examples. Nonetheless, provincial papers used strategic recontextualisations of *Pickwick* to imbue it with a sense of place, and to further the interests of the political communities that the newspaper supported, within that place. An example of this recontextualisation appears in the Reform-supporting *Kendal Mercury* of 27th August 1836, but many other newspapers with different political affiliations shared the same strategies. These strategies include the addition of a news-like heading (in this example ‘Picture of a Contested Election’) that blurs the boundary between fact and fiction; and the strategic placement of surrounding material. The *Mercury* remediated two lengthy extracts from one of the most decidedly political episodes of the *Pickwick Papers*: the Eatanswill Election, in which the Pickwickians are caught up in the anarchic contest between the Buffs and the Blues. When

¹⁷ ‘Conservative Manifestation at Leeds’, *Oxford University and City Herald*, 1 April 1837, p.2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000992/18370401/014/0002>> [Accessed 01/08/2020]; ‘The Warwick Borough Election’, *Oxford University and City Herald*, 1 April 1837, p.3 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000992/18370401/014/0003>> [Accessed 01/08/2020].

¹⁸ ‘Opinions of a Dissenting Minister on the Abolition of the Church Rate’, *Oxford University and City Herald*, 1 April 1837, p.2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000992/18370401/013/0002>> [Accessed 01/08/2020].

the *Mercury* introduces its excerpts, it emphasises both its politics and the political climate of its Westmorland circulation area:

In the 5th part of that amusing work, "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club," there is a most laughable sketch of the proceedings of a contested election in the glorious days when boroughs were unreformed. Some of our readers may, perhaps, have witnessed something like the following scene in this county.¹⁹

This sarcastic reference to glorious pre-Reform days is supported by the *Pickwick* extracts that follow, which illustrate the corruption rife in Eatanswill and at other elections Sam has witnessed: we hear about tavern owners drugging the brandy of opposition electors with laudanum; of townspeople dragging voters who have been set drunk by the opposition out to the pump and running cold water over their heads in a vain effort to bring them round so they can vote; and on the final day of polling, the 'Blues' soberly call undecided voters into a quiet room, where they are bribed. The *Mercury's* preamble adeptly capitalises on *Pickwick's* familiarity and adaptability. In Dickens's *Pickwick*, it is never made clear precisely when or where Eatanswill is set, and conjecture about this continued to rage into the twentieth century.²⁰ Indeed, part of Dickens's initial joke is that nobody knows where Eatanswill is, and that 'Boz'—as the supposed 'Editor' of *Pickwick*—has been unable to trace Pickwick's footsteps to Eatanswill, because he has censored his notebook:

In Mr. Pickwick's note-book, we can just trace an entry of the fact, that the places of himself and his followers were booked by the Norwich coach; but this entry was afterwards lined through, as if for the purpose of concealing even the direction in which the borough is situated.²¹

The irony of course is that, while Dickens claims that nobody knows where Eatanswill is, the newspapers never tire of delightedly arguing that Eatanswill is everywhere, or that Eatanswill is *them*. Across my thirty case studies, I have catalogued nineteen extracts from *Pickwick's* Eatanswill chapter that were reprinted during its serialisation. Not all these examples localise it as the *Mercury* does, but it is certainly not alone. For the *Mercury*, Eatanswill is in a decidedly pre-Reform Westmorland, and its preamble brings the extract into dialogue with a particular time and place that is meaningful to its readers.

As with the *Oxford Herald* example, the *Mercury's* political strategy becomes clearer when we turn our attention to the equally carefully choreographed material surrounding the piece. Following the *Pickwick* excerpts, the article moves directly to transcriptions of parliamentary debates, drawing us from past anarchy into present topicalities, and revealing that debates about legislation intended to bolster the Reform Act and combat bribery and corruption at elections were raging in Parliament only days before: most notably, the County Election Polls Bill—which proposed new borough divisions and polling electors in a single day—had been read a third time and passed by the House of Lords, and the Bribery at Elections Bill

¹⁹ 'Picture of a Contested Election', *Kendal Mercury*, 27 August 1836, p.4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000429/18360827/023/0004>> [Accessed: 14/08/2019].

²⁰ See for example, when Walter Dexter discussed Eatanswill in the *Dickensian* in 1939. Walter Dexter, 'WHEN FOUND', *Dickensian*, 35.250 (1939) p.71.

²¹ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.143.

had been passed by the House of Commons.²² On the first page of the paper, this legislation is further contextualised by the *Mercury's* overview of the parliamentary session, which blames the Tories for the slow progress of electoral reform, but concludes that '[t]he present prosperous condition of commerce and manufactures, and the general contentment which prevails through the kingdom, are the happy result of the principles of Reform, which the country will never so far stultify itself as to abandon or forget.'²³ In this context, the *Pickwick* extract becomes a way of avoiding this forgetfulness, as the anarchy of the Eatanswill scene is presented as historical evidence of past corruption, serving as a frightening reminder of what might ensue were the Reform Act not in place. In this respect, the localisation of Eatanswill also contributes to the way the *Mercury* represents its sense of Westmorland's role in the national Reform debates it discusses on other pages; a 'sense of place' becomes a stable point of reference so that the *Mercury* can position itself in relation to national political networks influenced by metropolitan legislation.

II. THE CASE OF THE HAMPSHIRE ADVERTISER

As these examples have shown, *Pickwick* enabled provincial newspapers to articulate the place of their local ideologies in political debate. Evocations of *Pickwick* such as the *Oxford Herald's* letter achieved this by selecting familiar tropes from the serial that would benefit their own writing, whereas excerpts used familiar writing and recontextualised it. Sometimes, however, neither of these methods proved satisfactory: editors could not make Dickens's writing fit their particular requirements, so they preferred to create their own, but nonetheless did not want to alert readers to the fact that they had written a *Pickwick*-themed piece themselves. This is what happened with a short adaptation that appeared in a Conservative paper, the *Hampshire Advertiser*, in April 1837. This peculiar piece details a conversation between Sam Weller and his father which takes place at a fictional inn—'The Flying Dungprongs'—that the author locates in Havant, Portsmouth. Closely following the idiosyncratic speech patterns of Dickens's characters, in the scene, Tony Weller encourages Sam to learn about politics and to 'be a Conservative'. The Reform Act is attacked, and the names of Hampshire and West Sussex politicians are dropped in.²⁴ However, what makes this piece more intriguing than the others we have seen, is its generic hybridity. Indeed, a close reading reveals it to be an adaptation, and yet it is presented as a remediated extract reprinted directly from Dickens's *Pickwick*. This means that the *Advertiser* benefits from the creative freedom of adaptation, but adds credence to its political opinions by styling the piece as though it had been written by Dickens.

The adaptation appears in the paper's 'Literary Notices' column, and is introduced by a laudatory review:

Boz maintains his high renown, and has given us in this number an excellent display of the lofty manners and high breeding of a Bath bone-polisher, which he has ably contrasted with the idiomatic wit of that prince of attendants, Sammy Weller, the younger. By some strange mistake, however, the publishers have omitted the article which has most pleased us, and which we subjoin for the benefit of our readers.

²² *Journals of the House of Commons*, (London: House of Commons, 1836) p.547.

²³ *Kendal Mercury*, p.1.

²⁴ *Hampshire Advertiser*, p.4.

Before reading the unconvincing reason for printing the adaptation, the reader has been led through a heading—"The Pickwick Papers No.13"—a short review, and accurate information on the most recent number (extracts from the scene about 'the Bath bone-polisher' were widely remediated by the press during April).²⁵ However, because the article is well-disguised through the careful *mis-en-page*, a reader skimming through the review to get to the extract, or reading quickly, might not have noticed the tenuous claim to the publishers' forgetfulness at all. The editorial voice in the introduction is also that of a reader rather than a creator, talking about the section that 'most pleased us', and referring to 'our readers'. This paratextual detail parallels the adaptation with contemporary trends in excerpting, validating the piece as part of the same pattern. The *Advertiser's* strategy might seem unconvincing here, however, there is some evidence that other editors may have fallen for the ruse, as on the 19th of April, another Conservative paper, the *Londonderry Standard* reprinted the adaptation as a remediated extract, attributed to Dickens, and triumphantly headed 'Mr. Weller, a Conservative.'²⁶

This structuring acts as preparation for another unlikely revelation of which the *Advertiser* must convince its readers: they must believe that there is a scene in *Pickwick* that is not only set in Portsmouth, but in which two of Dickens's most popular characters, Sam and Tony Weller, discuss the benefits of Conservatism, with reference to some local politicians. The piece opens with a clear focus on exposition:

The elder Mr. Weller had been for some time ruminating in the easy arm chair, which stands on the right hand side of the fire place, in the little back parlour of "The Three Flying Dungprongs," an hostelry of some repute in the market town of Havant, in Hampshire.

Here, the context adds authenticity to the adaptation, since where readers of the *Advertiser* would have been familiar with Havant and perhaps even the hostelry based on the 'Three Flying Dungprongs' that is here so meticulously described, not every reader of Dickens would have had the same local knowledge. This opening therefore serves as the sort of introduction Dickens might have made to readers unfamiliar with south Hampshire localities, similar to his description of the Great White Horse in Ipswich in the eighth number of *Pickwick*.²⁷ Nonetheless, the exposition would also have been familiar to local readers, as it progresses from hostelry, to town, to county in a single sentence.

Following this local exposition, the next paragraph sees Tony Weller throw himself into an unexpected political diatribe:

Take the right side, Sammy; be a gen'l'man and a Conservative, Sammy 'avoid Destructioners and all them sort of fellers, Sammy. Afore that very expensive economical Reform Bill came into hoperation, we always used to drown them 'ere noisy Radicals." "Drown 'em?" interrogated Mr Samuel. "Yes, drown 'em, Sammy, in heavy

²⁵ See for example, 'Mr Weller and the Bath Footman', *Kentish Gazette*, 18 April 1837, p.1 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000235/18370418/001/0001>> [Accessed: 09/05/2020].

²⁶ 'Mr. Weller, a Conservative', *Londonderry Standard*, 19 April 1837, p.4 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001318/18370419/030/0004>> [Accessed: 28/06/2019]. The *Londonderry Standard* is clear about its Conservative stance in its inaugural editorial. See 'The Standard', *Londonderry Standard*, 30 November 1836, p.2 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001318/18361130/006/0002>> [Accessed 07/05/2020].

²⁷ *Pickwick*, p.271.

wet to be sure, first of all stuffin' out their lanky chitlins with plenty of beef and puddin' and then they would go home quietly enough, and sweat in their grease 'til next 'lection. Now them supplies be stop't short by that same Reform Hact, and the Radicals, every man Jack on 'em is got so lean and hungry as a bear a'ter a winter's paw suckin' and is just like a sheep's head besides, all jaw.

While Tony's character is extended in order that he may be used as a political tool, it remains underpinned by a quintessential comedy wrought through his cockney idiolect. Indeed, in this context, these familiar features almost make him appear more trustworthy. At the same time, the oxymoronic reference to the 'very expensive economical Reform Bill' leads the piece into a complicated political discourse about metropolitan legislation, with the extended metaphor about 'drowning Radicals' presented as a widespread electoral strategy. The anecdote itself seems to refer to the Radicals' tendency to gluttony and corruption at election hustings, with the greasy beef and pudding and 'heavy wet' (malt liquor) reminiscent of Dickens's own nod to election greed in 'Eatanswill' (Eat and Swill).²⁸ The 'we' seems to suggest that this tendency is encouraged by Conservative supporters, to reveal inevitable Radical corruption. The suggestion that the Reform Act has 'stopped the supplies' is more obscure, but may refer to those newly enfranchised Radicals, who, rather than attending hustings to gorge themselves on food and drink, are instead ravenous for political power, the sheep simile 'all jaw' referring simultaneously to their sunken features, and propensity to rhetorise.

The first two sections of the Advertiser's adaptation of *Pickwick* incorporate Dickens's metropolitan characters, a local setting and a national Conservative agenda. However, the provincial community and its response to metropolitan legislation ultimately acts as the locus for Tony's cautionary tale which ends with a final triumphant piece of advice for Sam:

"No, Sammy," concluded Mr. Weller, rather out of breath at his long harangue; "be a Conservative, Sammy 'stick to your colours, and King and Constitution, Sammy; always act as that 'ere Chichester man down here says, Sammy. "Do that what's right and you'll always be respected."

In this episode, the strategy of the *Advertiser's* careful efforts to situate Sam and Tony in the local community becomes clear, as the piece gives the illusion that Dickens's metropolitan characters (and maybe even Dickens himself) not only support Conservatism, but perhaps even view Hampshire or Portsmouth as paradigmatic for the advancement of the cause. As Ruth Livesey notes in her introduction to this collection: '[p]rovincialist cultural politics, the provincial press, and provincial fiction might seem embedded in smaller scale localities, but the force and durability of these formations lies in their capacity to circulate at large and to spark a sense of attachment and identity across geographically dispersed peoples'.²⁹ The *Hampshire Advertiser's* piece constantly negotiates these different scales, and it does so because—rather than in spite of—its provinciality. Tony becomes almost poetical in the final lines of his speech, with the alliterative 'Conservative', 'Colours', 'King' and 'Constitution' resounding like political propaganda, and aligning the *Advertiser's* local politics with an emerging, national Conservative ideology. Yet we are not left with the words of a national

²⁸ 'wet, n.', OED (2019) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/227968>> [Accessed: 29/06/2019].

²⁹ Ruth Livesey, 'Provincialism at Large: Reading Locality, Scale, and Circulation in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Journal of Victorian Culture*

agenda but with the words of the 'Chichester man'. It is possible that this refers to the Whig first member for Chichester, Lord Arthur Lennox, who became a Conservative in 1837 when re-elected for a final term.³⁰ At this point, Lord Lennox would have been an example, not only of the traction the Conservative movement was gathering, but of the composite nature of the party. For his name to be known by Pickwickian characters, therefore, gives an inflated sense of the standing of the local area and local politicians in the Conservative movement nationwide. It is only through the medium of adapted fiction posing as a remediated extract that this doesn't resound with the clatter of vested interest: if Dickens wrote this piece, as the *Advertiser* would have us believe, then positive words about Conservatism are simply being borrowed from a likeminded source, not invented by the *Advertiser* to be used as a political tool. In this respect, Tony Weller's modified character places him as an outsider—a Londoner who nonetheless has some clear provincial knowledge—and this balanced the *Advertiser's* need for a character who is both objective and informed, and who therefore acts as proof both of the validity of the paper's political sympathies and the benefits of their manifestation in local communities relevant to the *Advertiser's* readership.

III. CONCLUSION

Remediation was a way for provincial editors to realise *Pickwick's* political potential as geographically specific political polemic, and for the ambiguity of the censored sections of Mr Pickwick's notebook to be replaced with the gleeful revealing of real-life locations and politics that others may not have noticed. This politically motivated detective work depended on *Pickwick's* portability, but also the creativity of provincial editors. For this reason, these remediations have an oddly fraught relationship with genre, and therefore with Dickens himself. They are both close to Dickens—capitalising on his style, characters, tropes and even his identity to add credence to their pieces—and distant from his influence, as they re-shape, recontextualise and imbue with new meaning. This in turn calls into question our received understanding of Dickens's ability to curate the circulation and reception of his works, when politically attuned and creative examples of *Pickwick* which moved far beyond his influence appeared in the press almost every day during its serialisation. These remediations also change the way we think of Dickens's work as being most relevant to representations of metropolitan life, by revealing *Pickwick*-themed narratives which were alert to provincial concerns and effectively deployed to address them. Finally, these examples, as part of a wider phenomenon, do not only encourage us to re-think our understanding of Dickens, but also reveal popular literature to have been at the centre of political debate in the provincial press: gaining power from other politically motivated material, and deftly balancing the ability to be creative with the ability to be authoritative.

FUNDING:

The research that appears in this article was kindly funded by the Wolfson Foundation

APPENDIX 1: NEWSPAPERS CITED

All newspapers were consulted using the British Newspaper Archive's electronic databases.

Brighton Gazette

Bristol Mercury

³⁰ Collin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts, 1832-2006* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016).

Cambridge Chronicle and Journal
Carlisle Journal
Chester Chronicle
Coventry Standard
Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette
Durham Chronicle
Evening Chronicle
Exeter and Plymouth Gazette
Hampshire Advertiser
Hereford Times
Kendal Mercury
Kentish Gazette
Manchester Courier
Morning Chronicle
Morning Post
Newcastle Journal
Norfolk Chronicle
Northampton Mercury
Nottingham Journal
Oxford University and City Herald
Reading Mercury
Royal Cornwall Gazette
Sheffield Independent
Shrewsbury Chronicle
Staffordshire Advertiser
Suffolk Chronicle
Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser
Yorkshire Gazette

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at *Journal of Victorian Culture* online.