

‘The Magnetic Pull of the Metropolis’: The *Manchester Guardian*, the Provincial
Press and Ideas of the North

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Abstract

The newspaper globally known as the *Guardian* began its life in Manchester as the *Manchester Guardian*. This paper examines the reactions of readers of the newspaper in the context of the decision to remove the word ‘Manchester’ from its title in 1959. It uses 251 letters on the subject sent to the newspaper to assess the usefulness of Anthony Cohen’s idea of readers as a symbolic community. This approach defines community in terms of a shared symbol whose meaning may be interpreted differently by individuals. The study concludes that there were two aspects to the readers’ relationship with the newspaper – they were attached to ideas about the symbolic nature of Manchester and the north of England more generally but the meaning they ascribed to being part of a community of readers differed in a nuanced way and according to individual interpretations. The newspaper’s determination to re-brand as a national rather than a provincial paper caused its readers to try to redefine their identities as members of the symbolic community of the *Manchester Guardian*.

Keywords newspapers; symbolic community; identity; provincial

Introduction

‘Manchester is not just a place, it is an idea’, wrote Michael Powicke, a Manchester-born Professor of History at Toronto University to the *Manchester Guardian* editor,

Alastair Hetherington in 1959.¹ The occasion was the decision by the newspaper to remove the word ‘Manchester’ from its title. The tensions between Manchester and London and the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Guardian* are encapsulated in a poem by Mercutio published in the newspaper on 31 August 1959, entitled O God! O Manchester! and written in the style of the satirical poet Samuel Butler:

We have outsoared the shadow of our Bright
Prudently passing from free trade to protection
Rising from local to national-provincial
We have at last grown from provincial to national
O God! O Manchester!²

The poem directly addresses the conflict between the desire to remain in the city of the newspaper’s birth and the economic imperative to move to London as a truly national publication. It serves as a reminder of the increasing national emphasis on London as a centre of political, economic and social power and the consequent decline of Manchester and other northern cities after the Second World War.

This paper examines the decision to remove the word ‘Manchester’ from the title of the *Manchester Guardian*, which was announced in August 1959. It seeks to understand the relationship between the ‘provincial’ and the ‘national’ and the tensions between these and ideas of national culture and identity. The central question is to what extent was the identity of the *Manchester Guardian* connected with Manchester and the north more generally? The strong correlation felt by the readers between the name of the newspaper and its identity as a provincial, independent challenge to the political and economic power of London and the southeast emerges clearly from their letters.

This article seeks to illuminate the agendas involved in such transitions and the reactions of the reader to this change, utilising material from the *Guardian*’s own

¹ John Rylands Library University of Manchester (JRLUM), *Guardian* Archives, Correspondence on the change of name from the *Manchester Guardian* to the *Guardian* GB133GDN/223/38/235.

² *Manchester Guardian*, 31 August 1959, 5.

archives. The move exposed the difficulties and frictions not only between a media organisation and its consumers but those that surround ideas such as ‘national’, ‘provincial’ and ‘metropolitan’ coverage. The study deploys Cohen’s idea of a symbolic community to interrogate the readers’ reactions to the change of title.³ In order to establish this, a thematic analysis was performed on 251 readers’ letters sent to the newspaper. These letters have not been previously used in scholarly research and represent a rare opportunity to examine how a group of readers perceived and described their relationship with a newspaper.

The analysis resulted in the identification of a number of keywords and themes around which the reactions cohered – readers associated words such as ‘progressive’, ‘independent’, ‘radical’ and ‘liberal’ with both the newspaper and the city of Manchester. Readers equated the character of the newspaper with the character of Manchester and, sometimes, with the north as a region. These letters allow a rare opportunity for individual readers to articulate their feelings about their relationship to a newspaper. The letters were written by a wide variety of people, judging by the kind of paper used – some were on embossed, personalised stationery, others on torn scraps of paper. Nonetheless, most were expressing a sense of anger and betrayal at the editor’s decision to change the title. Before turning to the letters, it is necessary to provide some context for the decision.

The Manchester Guardian and the Problem of the Provinces

³ A. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York and London, 1985).

The *Manchester Guardian* opened in the city in 1821 and quickly established itself as an independent voice in British journalism. The worries of the management of the *Manchester Guardian* about its provincial status were not new. ‘Provincial’ had been used as a pejorative term since the end of the eighteenth century.⁴ London’s contested relationship with the provinces was widely discussed in the nineteenth century. Speaking to a meeting of the Manchester Literary Club in 1877, the author and commentator, George Jacob Holyoake, attempted to characterise the differences between the provinces and the metropolis thus:

The provincial mind was the spring land of the nation. The metropolis was but the confluence of its mighty waters. They did not arise there. The metropolis had but the merit of attracting them. London was but the mirror of the provinces, where every man of genius who looked into it, saw his own face.⁵

Holyoake identified the north as the source of inspiration and ideas but London as the mechanism for promoting them. His talk continued to suggest a more nuanced relationship between the two: the north could see itself and its own narrow locus clearly, but the metropolis had a wider range and thus, ‘a lighthouse, a revolving eye’, as opposed to the ‘fixed eye’ of the provinces.⁶ While far from fully evidenced, this view presents us with a useful insight from which to compare the two regions and the manner in which they related to each other. The provinces disadvantaged themselves by their restricted gaze while London benefitted from its more comprehensive and extensive scrutiny. Thus, there is a ‘firmly established tradition of seeing the North and South as two different countries within England’.⁷

⁴ D. Russell, *Looking North: northern England and the national imagination* (Manchester, 2004), 25.

⁵ Manchester Archives and Local Studies (MALS), Proceedings of the Manchester Literary Club, M524, vol. 4, 108.

⁶ *ibid.*, 111.

⁷ P. Taylor, ‘The Meaning of the North: England’s ‘Foreign Country’ Within?’ *Political Geography*, vol. xii, (2) (1993), 136-155.

Holyoake's sentiments were mirrored in an 1896 talk given by the President of the Manchester Literary Club, George Milner, to the annual dinner of the Stockport Literary Club. Milner emphasised that people in the provinces 'were able to form as a clear, sound judgement with regard to not only literary matters but all matters, as were the people in London'.⁸ The continuing need to defend provincial people and tastes during the late nineteenth century alerts us to the growing perception of a schism between the provinces and the metropolis that was to accelerate in the twentieth century. Such a feeling does not necessarily lend itself to the existence of an inferiority complex among those living and working outside London and the south-east per se, but an increasing awareness of the emergence of what Patrick Joyce has termed two 'kingdoms of the mind'.⁹

George Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* uses his own southern-ness as a basis for interrogating the north and for his ability to appreciate and identify its 'otherness'. The implication being that only someone from outside was capable of understanding the ugliness of the north, as those from the north had been conditioned to overlook it.¹⁰ This mirrors Holyoake's sense that the north and its inhabitants are defective and unable to comprehend their own state. There is little impression of this in the pages of the *Manchester Guardian*, which prided itself on its coverage of local, regional, national and international news. For all of its associations with Manchester and the north, its own gaze was more typically outward and wide-ranging. Manchester was its location but not its subject. Its status outside London was regarded initially by the newspaper itself, by its journalists and by its readers as a virtue. Hobbs has noted that,

⁸ MALS, Manchester Literary Club Archives, M524/11/1/5, 56.

⁹ P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: industrial England and the question of class, c. 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), 213.

¹⁰ R. Shields, *Places on the Margin: alternative geographies of modernity* (London and New York, 1991), 212

in the nineteenth century, the provincial press was less provincial and the national press less national than might be supposed from these categories, thus calling into question the usefulness of these classifications.¹¹ However, the attachment of the epithet ‘provincial’ to the *Manchester Guardian* was one that created economic and identity problems for that newspaper.

The period after World War One saw many Manchester journalists begin to move to London to further their careers during what was characterised by some Fleet Street journalists as a ‘Manchester invasion’.¹² A contemporary is quoted as saying that the southerners would ‘do our best to make as good Londoners of them as is possible with the material’.¹³ The undercurrent here is clear – the material from the north was not as good as that produced in the metropolis.

The structure of the British newspaper industry also reflected the north-south divide, as early as the 1920s. Newspaper owners had two separate bodies that attempted to negotiate pay and conditions with the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). The Newspaper Federation represented the proprietors of daily papers in the north and the midlands, while the Southern Federation negotiated on behalf of the southern dailies.¹⁴ Somewhat stereotypically, the owners of northern newspapers in Lancashire and Yorkshire were described as ‘hard-headed’ negotiators.¹⁵

The think-tank Political and Economic Planning’s report on the British press published in 1938 did not mention the *Manchester Guardian* in any of its discussion of the national press and listed it as among the ‘provincial class’ of newspapers.¹⁶

¹¹ A Hobbs, ‘When the Provincial Press was the National Press (c.1836-c.1900)’, *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, v, (1) (2009), 16-43.

¹² F. J. Mansfield, *Gentlemen, the Press: Chronicles of a Crusade* (London, 1943), 495.

¹³ Mansfield, *Gentlemen*, 496.

¹⁴ Mansfield, *Gentlemen*, 262.

¹⁵ Mansfield, *Gentlemen*, 263.

¹⁶ Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press: a survey of its current operations and problems with special reference to national newspapers and their part in public affairs* (London, 1938), 28.

Surveying the British newspaper landscape in 1943, Wilson Harris, the editor of the *Spectator*, included the *Manchester Guardian* in a list of provincial newspapers that also comprised the *Liverpool Post*, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Western Morning News*.¹⁷ The Royal Commission on the Press launched in 1947, noted that too much of the British press did not adequately reflect the entire nation.¹⁸ The overall impact of this was that any newspaper located outside of London could not be considered as national, regardless of its contents or emphasis.

By 1956, the *Manchester Guardian* was attracting new readers, most of whom lived in London and the south-east. In January 1956, the *Manchester Guardian* sold 30,000 copies in London and the Home Counties, rising to 41,300 by July 1959.¹⁹ By comparison, sales in the northwest of England remained static. Research on newspaper readership among university students at Oxford and Cambridge indicated that many experienced delays in receiving the paper. Undergraduates at Cambridge University in 1955 explained that they did not read the paper due to the ‘irregular times at which it arrived’.²⁰

At this time, two men were in charge of the *Manchester Guardian*, both of whom had ambitions for the paper that exceeded its status as a provincial newspaper. Laurence Scott (a grandson of the *Guardian* editor of the Victorian period, C. P. Scott) joined his father John Scott at the paper in 1944 and became Chairman and Managing Director in 1947. The paper appointed Alastair Hetherington as editor in 1956. They were determined to confront what they saw as serious opposition to the *Manchester Guardian*’s status as a truly ‘national’ newspaper.

¹⁷ W. Harris, *The Daily Press* (Cambridge, 1943), 56.

¹⁸ M. Conboy, *Journalism in Britain: a historical introduction* (Los Angeles and London, 2011), 181.

¹⁹ G. Taylor, *Changing Faces: a history of the Guardian* (London, 1993), 27.

²⁰ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, Readership surveys of newspapers 1955-63 GB133GDN283/9, 20.

The paper's provincial origins had become the focus of unwelcome attention from satirical magazine *Private Eye*, the conservative magazine the *Spectator* and from the humorous television programme *That Was The Week That Was* for its allegedly provincial attitudes. The *Spectator's* Clive Irving lampooned the "'woolly" leaders and the inclusion of "front page pictures of sunsets on Lake Windermere", implying that the *Manchester Guardian* did not take national news seriously enough for a national newspaper.²¹ This attitude alluded to a more serious problem for the *Manchester Guardian* – the fact that the British newspaper industry itself did not regard it as a truly national paper.

The first Royal Commission on the Press of 1947-1949 designated the paper as a morning provincial due to its location in Manchester. This meant that the paper was excluded from the Newspaper Proprietors' Association (NPA), an organisation that organised the national distribution of newspapers and conducted negotiations with trade unions.²² They were unable to charge as much for advertising as the national newspapers and, because they were viewed as a provincial newspaper, they did not attract as much of the valued display advertising as rivals such as the *Daily Telegraph*, which further compromised the economic viability of the paper.²³

Scott and Hetherington's solution to this was to announce in August 1959 that the title of the newspaper would change from the *Manchester Guardian* to the *Guardian*. While not involving a physical movement per se, this decision began a debate about the status and role of the *Guardian* and of Manchester that was to last until the 1970s. The paper defended its decision in an editorial: 'The omission of Manchester implies no change in policy and we hope no disrespect to our home' (my

²¹ Taylor, *Changing Faces*, 66.

²² R. Waterhouse, *The Other Fleet Street* (Cheshire, 2004), 186.

²³ A. Hetherington, *The Guardian Years* (London, 1981), 145.

emphasis).²⁴ Two thirds of the paper's circulation was now coming from outside of the northwest area – London and Home Counties readership rose from 30,00 in January 1956 to 38,400 in December 1956 and to 41,300 by July 1959.²⁵ The change of name was supposed to reflect this new readership and ensure a new, more national (and therefore, less provincial) orientation.

Caunce has suggested that the *Manchester Guardian* never achieved 'regional hegemony' due to restricted circulation areas and the fragmented nature of the newspaper industry.²⁶ However, the evidence examined here demonstrates that readers' relationships with their newspaper was more nuanced than circulation figures can reveal and capable of transcending regional, national and even international boundaries. Bilig has argued that newspapers construct and reproduce ideas of the nation through what he termed a 'universal code of particularity'.²⁷ This paper demonstrates that this shared code among readers also operated at a local and a regional level with respect to the *Manchester Guardian*. The volume of correspondence on the subject and the themes that emerge from it indicate a vibrant and engaged readership who can articulate clearly their individual sense of community but also their membership of a wider collective, where the shared meanings of a symbol can exert a powerful influence on their perceptions of place.

Reader Reactions: Manchester as a Place and as an Idea

Reaction from the *Manchester Guardian*'s readership to the change of title was swift and mostly negative. 251 letters were sent to the newspaper, all of which form part of

²⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 August 1959, 4.

²⁵ Taylor, *Changing Faces*, 27.

²⁶ S. A. Caunce, 'Northern English Industrial Towns: Rivals or Partners?' *Urban History*, xxx, (3) (2003), 338-58, 354.

²⁷ M. Bilig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995), 73.

the *Manchester Guardian*'s archive at the John Rylands Library Special Collections in Manchester. These letters provide a rare opportunity to examine in detail the ways in which readers articulate and describe their relationship to a newspaper. Using Cohen's concept of the symbolic construction of community, the letters supply evidence of readers using their membership of this community as both a unifying mechanism and a distinguishing principle – they are united in terms of their understanding of the symbolic connotations of Manchester and 'the north' but there is less consensus about the extent to which they feel part of a community of readers.

This was enabled by what Cohen has termed the versatility of the symbol which renders it 'highly responsive to change'.²⁸ The disappearance of the word 'Manchester' presented a threat to the 'cultural integrity of the community' of readers and one which offered the opportunity for a collective mobilisation of individual readers.²⁹ However, when we examine the range of reader reactions, we see that the symbolism of Manchester and the north was not as versatile as might have been expected. Such symbols may not always function in a polysemic manner but can ascribe in a fairly limited way the tactics deployed by newspaper readers to describe their relationship to the paper. Nord has noted the difficulties for the historian in establishing direct evidence of the relationship between a newspaper and its readers.³⁰ These letters provide a rare opportunity to examine such an evidence base and to determine how readers articulated the way the newspaper fitted into their lives and created what Douglas terms a 'shared community consciousness'.³¹

²⁸ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 91.

²⁹ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 103.

³⁰ D. Nord, *Communities of Journalism: a history of American newspapers and their readers* (Urbana and Springfield, 2001), 269.

³¹ F. Douglas, *Scottish Newspapers, Language and Identity* (Edinburgh, 2009), 51.

From a quantitative perspective, the bulk of the letters came from Manchester and its environs (including nearby Lancashire towns such as Oldham and Bolton) and from London (many from Mancunians who had moved there). The geographical spread of the letters was from Dorset to Glasgow, demonstrating that this was an issue that engaged readers from a wide area. Most came from urban centres although there was reaction from some in rural places such as Windermere and Buckinghamshire. In terms of gender, four times as many men wrote as women (where gender could be determined) and the bulk of the mail came from within the UK. The letters were written over a one-month period from the end of August to the end of September, 1959. Some reactions did come from Britons living abroad, as we shall see later on. The ratio of those against the name change and those in favour was four to one. Some were neutral in that they did not agree with the change entirely but they appreciated the argument that it was necessary for the paper to survive. Most, however, took a firm stance on the issue and the majority were motivated to write to the paper to express their dissent from the decision. The class backgrounds of the correspondents is difficult to judge but it is notable that many wrote on monogrammed notepaper, while others used roughly torn paper. Most were from ordinary readers but some were written by prominent people such as Alderman Abraham Moss, a former Lord Mayor of Manchester, the actor Hugh Dempster and Manchester surgeon Harry Platt.

Two major themes emerge from these letters that directly challenge the idea that a newspaper provokes a shared or consensual response from its readers. While most reader reaction to the name change was negative, the ways in which they framed their responses varied greatly. This suggests that readers do not merely create meaning from their reading of a newspaper as Nord suggests but they seek to recreate

this meaning when an element of that text changes.³² In this way, the readers' imputations of the reasons for the change were completely at odds with the intentions of the editor and manager of the paper. The latter were concerned for its economic future, while the readers sensed a more esoteric motive that related directly to the identity of the newspaper. This shows that there is often a disjunction between how readers and editors and managers perceive the value of a newspaper, as Nord has argued.³³ But it also affirms the lack of consensus among readers about what the paper meant to them, demonstrating that a symbolic community did not always manifest itself from readership of the same newspaper.

On its first day as the *Guardian*, a reader wrote that 'he cared not a fig for what we choose to call the newspaper. For his part, he will go on calling it the *Manchester Guardian* until he dies'.³⁴ The negative feedback from readers continued over the next few days. Many questioned the hypocrisy of the name change, accused the paper of being ashamed of its address, of viewing Manchester as an 'encumbrance' and a 'liability', of snobbery about its uniqueness and of failure to take pride in the idea of being provincial.³⁵

Many readers drew direct parallels between the word 'Manchester' and particular aspects of both the city and the newspaper's character. Edward Horgan of Fallowfield, Manchester pointed out that 'whilst this city is progressively becoming a second capital of England, you have the effrontery to disown the city by cutting it'.³⁶ The conflation of Manchester with ideas of liberalism was used often by readers to draw out the similarities between the disposition of the paper and the city of its birth.

³² Nord, *Communities*, 246.

³³ Nord, *Communities*, 248.

³⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 August 1959, 6.

³⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1959, 6.

³⁶ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/18.

Sidney Salomon of Richmond, London wrote that ‘Manchester is something more than the name of a great city. It is a name of a school of politics, of an aspect of economics and these views had as their organ, the *Manchester Guardian*’.³⁷ Doris Phillips from Gloucestershire equated the newspaper directly with the character of the city: ‘its whole, honest, rigorous personality surely belong to Manchester at its best’.³⁸ GP Webb of Leicester suggested that ‘the Guardian owes its existence and its character to Manchester. A city that can produce such an offspring is not to be despised...It is unbecoming, you seem to think, for a national newspaper to proclaim its association with a provincial city’.³⁹ Elsie Entwistle, a Mancunian based in London emphasised the importance of the *Manchester Guardian* in uniting those who were living away from the city. ‘How are we now to establish kinship in the overcrowded trains of the metropolis? How are we to gain a smile of recognition from the dead-pan faces in the congested Underground?’ she asked.⁴⁰ Michael Powicke listed the traits associated with Manchester: ‘freedom, criticism, eclectic tolerance in the arts etc., in a word, liberalism. The use of the term ‘Manchester’ reminds the world that England is not yet London’.⁴¹

The semiotic significance of the word Manchester to the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* cannot be underestimated. The meaning ascribed to the word went far beyond the name of the city – it connoted the entire area of the north of England, it was ‘not London’ (very important for those living outside of London), it was independent, liberal, radical, separate, different, alternative. At a time when London was on the way to becoming even more nationally powerful and when

³⁷ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/59.

³⁸ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38150.

³⁹ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/162.

⁴⁰ *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959, 6.

⁴¹ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/235.

Manchester was losing its economic and cultural power, the loss of Manchester from the title was felt even more acutely by its readers. Boundaries provide a source of identity and a basis for power.⁴² Manchester's ('the north') status in opposition to London ('the south') symbolised its role as a conduit for a sense of place and identity in opposition to the metropolis. Manchester's role as 'not London' signified ideas about belonging and the role of a newspaper in shaping and defining what Borer has termed a 'community of believers'.⁴³

Some correspondents felt that the paper's management was engaging in a re-branding exercise designed to make it more popular. Rev J. Smallwood from Surrey queried whether the change of title indicated an alteration in the tone of the newspaper and argued that 'an attempt is being made to make the paper more popular'.⁴⁴ J. D. Jones of Cardiganshire accused the editor of 'pandering to that which is popular' (GB133GDN223/38/158). Monica Goldsmith of London sensed an attempt to compete directly with *The Times*, writing that 'to aspire to compete with *the Times* is a very poor reason for concealing the origin, history and identity of your paper'.⁴⁵

There is a tacit acknowledgement here that the *Manchester Guardian* did not sell as well as *The Times* or the *Daily Telegraph* but that what the readers valued was its viewpoint and challenge to a London way of thinking. The apparent lack of popularity also bound its readers together into a sense of community based not on commercial success but on quality of content. The conflation of origin and history of the newspaper with its identity is notable. The readers valued the lack of popularity

⁴² L. Cruz and H. van Truyl, 'Boundaries Real and Imagined', in L. Cruz, M. Carlson and B. Kaplan (eds), *Boundaries and Their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands* (Boston, 2009), 5.

⁴³ M. Borer, 'Important Places and Their Public Faces: Understanding Fenway Park as a Public Symbol', *Journal of Popular Culture*, xxxix, (2) (2006), 205-224, 206.

⁴⁴ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/144.

⁴⁵ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/20.

(equated with sales) as a distinctive part of the brand of the *Manchester Guardian*. Its value, in their eyes, went beyond economics into the realm of identity. The removal of the word Manchester from the title threatened the uniqueness of the *Manchester Guardian* reader identity, resulting in what Cohen has termed the ‘mobilising collectivity’.⁴⁶ This is caused when the boundaries of a community are threatened and its members react as if to a loss.

The idea of the popular in newspaper terms has received some scholarly attention recently. Conboy has noted how the term was initially associated with sensationalism and cheap journalism but progressed to the more nuanced meaning of entertaining and eye-catching⁴⁷. Thus, papers could be seen to be adopting popularity as a particular kind of marketing strategy to increase circulation and present themselves as speaking on behalf of the people. However, the bulk of the *Manchester Guardian* readers who mentioned the issue of popularity defined this quite narrowly as referring to circulation figures and commercial appeal.

But there is also a more nuanced possibility here – peoples’ apparently strong feelings and emotional connection to the *Manchester Guardian* was due to closeness to their locality and their concerns. This is a much older definition of popular as Conboy has remarked, evoking Raymond Williams’ idea of the popular as speaking for the people and not the powerful⁴⁸. The *Manchester Guardian*’s status as provincial imbued it with some distance from London, the centre of national political power and thus allowed it to be perceived by its readers as more aligned to their views and opinions than the national press. Hobbs has shown that the term ‘national’ in the

⁴⁶ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 109.

⁴⁷ M. Conboy, ‘Aligning the Newspaper and the People: Defining the Popular in the British Press’, *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, v, (1) (2020), 7-23, 11.

⁴⁸ Conboy, *Aligning*, 8.

nineteenth century meant owned by the people and speaking on their behalf and reflected the ability of the national press to represent the nation⁴⁹.

This relationship to the local area was clearly important to the readers of the *Manchester Guardian*. Hobbs' work on this aspect of newspaper history has demonstrated that terms such as 'national' and provincial' could be used to describe place of production, circulation area, the content or the editorial aspirations⁵⁰.

Similarly, Dave Russell has argued that, in the interwar years, the middle-class worldview was dominated by loyalty to locality and region equally⁵¹. In the case of the *Manchester Guardian*, this feeling went considerably beyond the middle-classes, as evidenced by the readers' letters. Their tendency to conflate Manchester with the north more generally established a strong association between a city and a region in peoples' minds.

Correspondent Richard Haynes from East Sheen in London wrote that the *Daily Telegraph* had become 'a sort of bank clerks and insurance officials vade mecum (handbook/ guidebook) which, despite its veneer of respectability lacks the serious content and challenge to the mind which we *Guardian* readers value so much'.⁵² This drawing of a clear distinction between the readers of the two newspapers reinforces the idea of the paper as a symbolic community, which results from a need on the part of the readers to 'display the distinctiveness' between themselves and readers of other newspapers.⁵³ It also raises questions about whether the *Manchester Guardian* perceived its main competition coming from the national papers or the Manchester press, or both. Hobbs has argued that local and national

⁴⁹ Hobbs, *When the Provincial*, 19 and 20.

⁵⁰ Hobbs, *When the Provincial*, 38.

⁵¹ D. Russell, 'The *Heaton Review*, 1927-1934: Culture, Class and a Sense of Place in Inter-War Yorkshire', *Twentieth Century British History*, xvii, (3) (2006), 323-349, 338.

⁵² JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/209.

⁵³ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 110.

loyalties can co-exist, but this case demonstrates that local loyalties can actually be quite dominant and can over-ride feelings of national pride⁵⁴.

Various readers pointed out that the newspaper was usually referred to in Manchester as the *Guardian* and was only known by its full title, the *Manchester Guardian* outside of that city. Charles Arning, a Manchester-born businessman residing in St. Paul, Minnesota wrote that the *Manchester Guardian* was known locally as the *Guardian*, but, ‘amongst foreigners, the full title, *Manchester Guardian* undoubtedly had a special significance and appeal with the accent on the Manchester portion’.⁵⁵ G. Gouldsbrough of Burnley argued that ‘the prefix Manchester has always been adhered to more in the south than in your home county where you have always been known and loved as t’*Guardian*’. The writer continued: ‘It would have been much better if the change had been made out of faith in a great newspaper rather than contempt for a great city’.⁵⁶

Other readers perceived the localism of the newspaper’s title and character more broadly in terms of the north and the characteristics of northern-ness than specifically the city of Manchester. Stanley Price from York observed that the *Manchester Guardian* had ‘also that touch of intimacy and ironic humour which is deeply engrained in the northern character’ and equated Manchester’s distinctive flavour to ‘northern qualities’.⁵⁷ Richard Clements from London mused that it should not be forgotten ‘what this country owes to the work, skill and genius of the great cities and towns of the Midlands and the north’, thus drawing the history and heritage of the *Guardian* into the industrial landscape of the country.⁵⁸ Anne Isaac of Bristol

⁵⁴ A. Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900* (Cambridge, 2018), 267.

⁵⁵ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/233.

⁵⁶ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/174.

⁵⁷ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/43.

⁵⁸ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/83.

described the *Manchester Guardian* as a ‘daily whiff of the vigorous and bracing intellectual climate of the north’.⁵⁹ These remarks illustrate the celebration of the isolation of the north from the metropolis – an attempt to reclaim the north as positive and not pejorative.⁶⁰ The fact of the north’s distance from London gave it a unique perspective that was lacking in the capital. Manchester’s status as ‘not London’ was connected to the value of the city as an idea, as a representation of independence and distinctiveness. This was valued by its readers as a key foundation of their relationship with the paper. It applied whether or not they had any connection to Manchester or to the north of England in general.

Other responses originated from beyond Britain itself. Peter Hamer, a Mancunian based in South Africa, commented that the title ‘the *Manchester Guardian* belongs to the whole world’, while a reader from the Gambia made reference to the Shakespearian quotation: ‘a rose by any other name would smell as sweet’, a quote that was mentioned by several readers.⁶¹ Kojo Botsio, the Ghanaian Minister for Economic Affairs reminded the paper that it was not uncommon for papers globally to share a title but to distinguish themselves from each other by adding the name of their town or city of origin. He listed the *New York Times*, the *Ghana Times* and the *London Times* (by which the latter was commonly known outside of Britain) to support his case.⁶² The response to the Minister from the *Guardian*’s editor emphasised that ‘its territorial title sometimes made it look like a local paper to those who did not know it’.⁶³

⁵⁹ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/157.

⁶⁰ Russell, *Looking North*, 3.

⁶¹ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/28 and GB133GDN/223/38/29.

⁶² JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/148.

⁶³ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/149.

In recognition of the reactions of many of their readers, the *Guardian* returned to the question of the name change in another editorial on 31 August 1959.⁶⁴ This time, the tone was more defensive and clearer about the economic reasons for the title change. It outlined the commercial pressures of being outside of London and the benefits of attracting new readers (to increase the paper's national influence and impact on public opinion) there.⁶⁵ The need for new southern readers meant a de-emphasis on local and a re-emphasis of the national. The editorial argued:

we are not being swallowed by London's centralising appetite...London... is not a heart sending life-blood through the nation's veins...our home remains in Manchester...we have no intention of deserting the north (my emphasis).⁶⁶

The repetition of 'our home' and the deliberate equation of 'Manchester' with 'the north' is a clear attempt to dispel the idea that the paper planned a formal move to London and to elide the differences already apparent in the north of England as a place. Manchester is not and never has been 'the north' (in the same way that London is not 'the south' – it is just one part of it). The idea of Manchester as representing the whole of the north of England is as distorting as the presumed homogeneity of the south. Readers' responses were more likely to cohere around the identity of Manchester (real or imagined) and to connect it with a broader sense of the north rather than just equating Manchester simply and directly to the region itself.

Significantly, not all of these letters came from those based in or originating from the north, indicating that the status of Manchester as a place was not important to all readers. One *Manchester Guardian* reader from Guildford in Surrey wrote:

I have always believed that what "London does today, the *Manchester Guardian* will put right tomorrow". Alas, the "M.G." is no more and presumptuously in its place

⁶⁴ *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959, 6.

⁶⁵ *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959, 6

⁶⁶ *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959, 6

stands the *Guardian*. *Guardian* of what? Evidently not honourable traditions and provincial pride and independence.⁶⁷

The loss of the local, Manchester identity of the paper was emphasised in many readers' reactions to the breach with the north and the singular characteristics associated with the idea of Manchester. For one reader, W. Costain, the inclusion of Manchester in the title meant that the paper was not part of the Fleet Street 'horde and did not go with the crowd'.⁶⁸ Alex Townsend suggested that the views of the *Manchester Guardian* were 'uncontaminated by London spokesmen or Fleet Street predilections'⁶⁹ while the Reverend H. Vernon Briggs praised the universality of Manchester as a symbol of opposition to excessive centralisation and a rebuke to facile metropolitanism.⁷⁰

Indeed, many readers wrote of never having been to Manchester but of their pride in its inclusion in the title nonetheless. Peter Butcher of Cwmbran wrote: 'I have never been nor have I any desire to go to Manchester'.⁷¹ Mancunians living in other parts of the country emphasised their pride in continuing to read the paper and to value its direct and explicit connection to the city of their birth. Elsie Davies of Frodsham argued that

It has been one of the small pleasures of my life to ask for a *Manchester Guardian* in an ostentatious way (!!) at a bookstall in the south, and now its identity will be lost in the *Guardian* for no sensible reason that I can see. In a generation, or less, no one will know, or care, whether it comes from Cross Street or Fleet Street. It is as a north countrywoman that I have always felt so gratified that such a splendid newspaper came from our region.⁷²

This evidence emphasises that the inhabitants of the same place can disagree profoundly about the character of that place and of its people and that the idea of a

⁶⁷ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/14.

⁶⁸ *The Guardian*, 25 August 1959, 6.

⁶⁹ *The Guardian*, 25 August 1959, 6.

⁷⁰ *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959, 6.

⁷¹ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/23.

⁷² JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/44.

consensus about what a place and a newspaper mean to its readers can be articulated quite differently⁷³. Two former residents of Manchester (E.W. McLeod and H.R. Boynton) sent a telegram from New York to stress that ‘the words *Manchester Guardian*, heavily laden with drama, tradition and excitement convey better than any others could the spirit of your internationally celebrated journal’.⁷⁴ The association of particular words with both the spirit of the city of Manchester and with the newspaper demonstrates the emotional aspect of a newspaper’s relationship with its readers and that fact that ideas such as local identity and culture can be complex and dynamic when expressed in this manner⁷⁵.

This underlines the importance of Powicke’s concept of Manchester as an idea - the readers’ reactions were not just about the removal of the word from the title but about the loss of an independent, non-London voice in the British newspaper landscape. The symbolism of the word ‘Manchester’ succeeded to some extent in uniting readers around what Manchester represented – a progressive, liberal city that took pride in its autonomy. Cohen has argued that sharing a symbol does not necessarily equate to sharing the meaning of the symbol – such symbols give people ‘the capacity to make meaning’ but this practice can be interpreted differently.⁷⁶ Readers of the Manchester Guardian shared a sense of common ownership not of the newspaper but of what it represented and thus illustrate the idea of the symbolic construction of a community of readers.

Some readers who responded more positively to the change of title took the opportunity to complain about some regular frustrations associated with the *Guardian* during this period – its often-late delivery in some parts of the country, especially

⁷³ Hobbs, *Fleet Street in Every Town*, 268.

⁷⁴ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/251.

⁷⁵ Hobbs, *Fleet Street in Every Town*, 265.

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 16.

those distant from the north-west and the preponderance of spelling and subbing errors for which the publication had developed a certain notoriety. George Henderson of Dorset wrote of the ‘constant and distressing mis-spelling of so many words’.⁷⁷ Mervyn Mills of London echoed this by writing that ‘yours must rank high for being the most carelessly composed national newspaper in the country and one of the most fatiguing to read’.⁷⁸ One reader even managed to generate a positive quality from this tendency, writing that ‘I value the misprints just as a sign of the independence of the south...they are a symbolic guarantee that the paper speaks for another section of England’.⁷⁹ Charles Cartwright of Suffolk complained of continual late receipt of the newspaper⁸⁰ to which Hetherington replied that ‘I wish that our own plan for printing in London were a little nearer fruition’.⁸¹

Some readers’ responses sensed the commercial imperative behind the decision. Duncan Macaulay of Sale in Manchester wrote that ‘you are obviously out to catch more of the Top People – not the attitude that endeared the paper to so many in the past’.⁸² Henry King from London remarked: ‘nor are the Top People who read the other paper likely to be won over by a gimmick’.⁸³ Stanley Rubin of Liverpool acknowledged the commercial advantage in the change: ‘There is nothing wrong with aiming at an increased circulation; the more you can influence public opinion, the better’.⁸⁴ R.B. Fletcher acknowledged that: ‘...a newspaper, to be of any use, must survive’.⁸⁵ A few readers mentioned the economic imperative for the *Guardian* of appealing to its expanding London and southeast readership. Most reacted with anger,

⁷⁷ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/17.

⁷⁸ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/71.

⁷⁹ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/80.

⁸⁰ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/245.

⁸¹ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/246.

⁸² JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/78.

⁸³ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/52.

⁸⁴ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/119.

⁸⁵ JRLUM, *Guardian* Archives, GB133GDN/223/38/153.

accusations of betrayal and with sentiment. These reactions have some useful lessons for how and why readers become attached to a newspaper.

Anderson has argued that newspapers provide a sense of national cohesion, while Mersey's work emphasises the ability of a newspaper to tie individuals into a sense of community.⁸⁶ When this feeling of community is threatened or disrupted by a change of title or a move of city, readers experience a sense of dislocation and react accordingly. Cohen's idea of a symbol as imprecise has some merit but, in this instance, we can see that there can be an element of shared agreement among disparate people about the meaning emanating from a symbol and that this can be a powerful unifying element for newspaper readers whose sense of attachment to this community can often be ephemeral.⁸⁷

However, this study also demonstrates that the idea of newspaper readers as a community cannot be assumed and that the dimensions of that community feeling are not always experienced in quite the same way. Readers' sense of connection to the idea of Manchester and to the north of England as a place of frankness, liberalism and a sense of difference was shared in many of their reactions to the change of title. What differed among them was the inherent value and role of the newspaper in their lives. It seems logical that readers (especially those located in the north or with birth or family ties there) would recoil from an increasing centralisation of political, social and economic power in London and the South-East but their responses to the actions of the newspaper indicates the nuances that emerge when readers try to describe and delineate these relationships. Dalmau's work suggests that national newspapers such

⁸⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983) and R. Mersey, 'Re-evaluating Stamm's Theory of Newspapers and Communities in a New Media Environment: toward a new theory based on identity and interdependence', *Northwestern University Law Review*, civ, (2) (2010), 517-36.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 21.

as *The Times* were influential beyond Britain and uses the concept of ‘cultural transfer’ to examine its impact on *Corriere della Sera* and *La Vanguardia*⁸⁸. The evidence of this paper proposes that this kind of influence was also happening intra-nationally. The Guardian’s move was further evidence, for its readers, of the increasing monopoly of power in London and provided them with an opportunity to articulate this through their letters to the newspaper. While some readers’ reactions could be interpreted as what Russell has termed ‘bellicose anti-metropolitanism’, others are an indication of the strength of feeling aroused when a newspaper proposed what to its management seemed to a minor alteration but which was a serious threat to the readers’ emotional bond with their daily newspaper⁸⁹.

The significance of the inclusion of a city name in the title of a newspaper demonstrates that such publications evoke especially strong associations and identities for their readers. The choice of daily newspaper was more than just an act of consumption but part of one’s social identity as an individual and, equally, as part of a community of like-minded readers. Harold Gilbert of Manchester raised this point in his letter, suggesting that the *Manchester Guardian* ‘has been the means of many informal introductions’ when reading it on trains or in other public places. He felt that the change of title relegated readers ‘to the realm of readers of ordinary morning newspapers without any indication how or from whence we came’.⁹⁰ This strong sense of being part of a community of readers and the public identification with a particular newspaper is imbued with a feeling of newspaper readership as a ‘badge of belonging’.⁹¹ This feeling was integral to the symbolic construction of a readership community by *Manchester Guardian* readers.

⁸⁸ P. Dalmau, ‘Looking at London for Inspiration’, *Media History*, xxvi, (1), (2019), 6-19.

⁸⁹ Russell, Heaton Review, 345.

⁹⁰ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/38/48.

⁹¹ T. Gitlin, ‘The Rise of Identity Politics’, *Dissent*, 40 (1993), 172-77, 172.

Other provincial newspapers also responded to the *Guardian*'s decision. The *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* suggested that 'some local pride will be ruffled by this seeming dissociation from the metropolis of the north with which it has so long been identified'.⁹² The reference to Manchester itself as a metropolis in northern terms is a sly jibe at Manchester's own imperialism that had been pointed out by other towns and cities. In May 1959, a Labour MP for Newcastle, E. W. Short, protested about the leaflet produced by Manchester City Council that presented Manchester as 'the centre of the universe'.⁹³ The brochure was aimed at businesses that were seeking new locations outside of London and its Manchester-centric nature clearly offended representatives from other cities. Similarly, a 1964 editorial in the *Liverpool Daily Post* tried to blame the power of Manchester for causing economic difficulties in Liverpool.⁹⁴ The *Glasgow Herald* welcomed the move as a pragmatic recognition of the power of London as 'much more the hub of England than it used to be', indicating that there was a general awareness in the provincial newspaper industry of the increasing dominance of London.⁹⁵

International newspaper reaction was also varied. The German newspaper, *Die Welt*, was quoted as saying that 'nothing will change in the attitude and style of the paper, whose voice no freedom-loving person in the English-speaking world would like to be without'.⁹⁶ The same article quoted French newspaper *Le Monde*'s more ambivalent reaction:

One may question the suitability of a decision that will deprive the British press of an old-established name to which everyone was accustomed... the provincial flavour of its former name never prevented this newspaper from acquiring the national and

⁹² JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/40/20.

⁹³ *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1959, 20.

⁹⁴ Russell, *Looking North*, 20.

⁹⁵ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/223/40/24.

⁹⁶ *The Guardian*, 25 August 1959, 7.

international reputation it has today. One might even be tempted to think that the old name and the reputation were closely linked'.⁹⁷

Such contrasting responses reflected the varying sentiments of the readers and acknowledged the importance of a sense of place to a community of newspaper readers. More crucial to this, however, was the symbolism of the word 'Manchester' and its connotations of liberalism and northerness. Its readers' identity was, therefore, not necessarily tied to Manchester but to what the city represented. While Cohen has argued that a shared symbol did not always evoke a shared meaning, this evidence demonstrates that this was often the case and offers a nuanced insight into the complex relationship between reader and newspaper.⁹⁸

It is also clear from the letters that not all readers objected to the name change. This suggests that the idea of Manchester was more versatile than might be imagined as its symbolic significance could and did vary among its readers. Symbolic communities may share broad agreements about their meaning but there remains the possibility for very individual interpretations of that symbol. The symbolic community thus operates on two levels – the general agreement about what a place is or could be and what that place means to each individual, depending on their relationship to it. That relationship can be based on personal experience of the place but that is not a *sine qua non*.

The *Guardian*: A Provincial Newspaper in London

Two years after the change of name, in September 1961, the *Guardian* announced that it would begin to print all of its editions in London. This reversed a process that had been common in the British press since the beginning of the 20th century. The *Daily*

⁹⁷ *The Guardian*, 25 August 1959, 7.

⁹⁸ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 15.

Mail had been one of the first British newspapers to be printed simultaneously in London and Manchester in 1900. This process saw Manchester emerge as a serious rival to London's Fleet Street as it eventually published between a quarter and a third of all British newspapers, except for the *Financial Times* and *the Times*.⁹⁹ The *Daily Express* began Manchester printing in 1927. The first northern edition included a message to the new northern readers from the owner, Max Beaverbrook. The northern edition would, Beaverbrook wrote: 'bring to the North a doctrine of individual endeavour which will be congenial to a people who may be said to have inspired it'.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* began Manchester printing in 1940, fearful of the German bombing of London and anxious to have an alternative printing centre.¹⁰¹

The London printing of the *Guardian* was instigated by Laurence Scott, anxious to continue to prove that the newspaper could be truly national rather than provincial.¹⁰² The paper entered into a shared arrangement with *the Times* for offices in Gray's Inn Road. The whole experience of London printing was expensive – the extra costs involved, lack of advertising revenue and continuing poor circulations drove Scott to consider a merger with *the Times* in 1965 and again in 1966.

The paper's struggles as it began its final drift away from its northern home are an indication of the emergence of two Englands – one southern prosperous and growing, the other northern and declining. Commenting on the introduction of London printing, editor Alastair Hetherington wrote somewhat ominously: 'The *Guardian* will continue to be based in Manchester for as long as anyone can see into the future'.¹⁰³ The *Guardian*'s move was one of the final acts in a gradual process of

⁹⁹ Waterhouse, *Other Fleet Street*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ *The Daily Express*, 27 March 1927, 1.

¹⁰¹ Waterhouse, *Other Fleet Street*, 9.

¹⁰² Taylor, *Changing Faces*, 11.

¹⁰³ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, Loose leaf file on the first London printing of the *Guardian*, September 1961, GB133GDN/298.

decline and changing regional influence. Other newspapers also altered their regional arrangements during the 1960s – the *Daily Mail* closed its Scottish office in Edinburgh in 1966 – and there was a general re-siting of the national press and a refocusing of coverage onto London and the south-east from this point onwards.¹⁰⁴

An article in the *Economist* (9 September 1961) examined the prospects for the survival of the provincial press. It noted that such papers tended to concentrate on technical and production innovations rather than journalistic values but emphasised their ‘distinctive, independent and critical commentary’.¹⁰⁵ The association of provincial with independence echoes a continuing concern with the concentration of the press in London and the loss of alternatives and challenges to the metropolitan view that resulted. It is indicative of a country that was becoming increasingly polarised and reliant on well-worn tropes about the north, in particular.

The old stereotypes about the north were resurrected again in two very similar cartoons published on the subject of the move to London printing in the *National Newsagent* (published on September 16 1961) and *Punch* (published on 20 September 1961) respectively.¹⁰⁶ Both allude to the stereotype of rainy Manchester – the *National Newsagent* image has a newsagent looking through the rain at a notice announcing the arrival of the *Guardian* to London, commenting: ‘And it’s brought the flippin’ weather with it by the looks of it’ (Figure 1 here). The *Punch* cartoon has a similarly stereotyped southerner, complete with bowler hat and rolled up umbrella collecting his *Guardian* from a rain-soaked vendor (Figure 2 here).

Shields has alluded to the fact that the south has always tended to produce consistent images of the north, often based on assumptions about its character and

¹⁰⁴ Conboy, *Journalism in Britain*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/298.

¹⁰⁶ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/298.

status as a ‘homogenously uncultured industrial hell’ (1991, 231).¹⁰⁷ The similarity of both of these cartoons emphasises the tendency to reduce not just Manchester but the north in general to the reductive trope of bad weather. This was how London viewed both Manchester and the north. London’s confidence in its own future was attractive to the management of the *Guardian*. The decision was taken in 1964 to move the editorial offices (but not the editor) to London, causing Hetherington to remark that the newspaper hoped to present the case for regenerating the north from its new base.¹⁰⁸ Countering this, Manchester surgeon Harry Platt, wrote that the ‘magnetic pull of the metropolis, with its corridors of power, is irresistible’.¹⁰⁹ London as the seat of political (and therefore, economic) power had finally managed to play its part in diluting the strong local associations of the *Manchester Guardian* with the city of its birth.

It should also be noted that the *Guardian* continued the tradition of innovative responses to market conditions. It moved to a controversial Berliner format in 2005, eschewing both the broadsheet and tabloid format in favour of a compromise. The international market was more clearly addressed with the launch of *Guardian America* in 2007 and *Guardian US* in 2009. These decisions were intended to reposition the *Guardian* in the new global news market and were presaged by the earlier transformations enacted by the paper’s decision to change title and move to London.

Conclusion

¹⁰⁷ Shields, *Places*, 231.

¹⁰⁸ *The Guardian*, 8 February 1964, 3.

¹⁰⁹ *The Guardian*, 6 February 1964, 18.

Most readers viewed the removal of the word ‘Manchester’ from the title of the *Guardian* as a rejection of Manchester both as a place and as an idea and a repudiation of the north in general. Readers interpreted the nuances of this decision in different ways but there was a solid core of agreement in their responses about what Manchester represented to them. It is possible that they were fusing Manchester and the *Manchester Guardian* into one single entity and viewing the newspaper as representing the city and the north as a region. Nonetheless, their sense of ownership of Manchester both as a place and an idea bound them into a symbolic community of readers with more in common than divided them.

The symbolic meaning of the newspaper was more significant to the readers than the literal text and content of the newspaper itself. What it represented was more important than what it said. This symbolism was clearly derived from their reading of the text. While other scholarship on readers has sought to emphasise their activity or passivity, this study demonstrates that the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* placed more value on their symbolic attachment to the ideas that their newspaper represented.¹¹⁰ It is also important to acknowledge the possibility that those readers who were happy to accept the change of title did not write to the newspaper at all and that the 251 letters did include some from readers who either supported the change or could appreciate the economic reasons behind it and accepted it on that basis.

The immediate result of the decision to move the *Guardian* closer to London was an increase in total circulation from 180,000 copies a day to 235,000, thereby justifying the ‘magnetic pull of the metropolis’ at least in economic terms.¹¹¹ Sales remained strong in Manchester and continued to grow in London and the southeast

¹¹⁰ Nord, *Communities*, 267; Douglas, *Scottish Newspapers*, 60, D. Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London and New York, 1992).

¹¹¹ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/298.

markets. This ensured the future viability of the paper. A press release developed to celebrate London printing emphasised that the *Guardian* had deliberately ‘acknowledged its national status’ with the name change.¹¹² Two thirds of the 235,000 readers were now situated outside Lancashire and Cheshire.¹¹³ A national newspaper, therefore, meant one that was centred on and in London, implying that the whole country could only be adequately inspected from the capital.

Manchester-based readers did not desert the newspaper in serious numbers.¹¹⁴ The challenge to the ‘cultural integrity of the community’ was a temporary dislocation for most.¹¹⁵ Their sense of belonging to a symbolic community of *Guardian* readers overcame their feelings about the change of name, proving that such symbols can be strong enough to endure this kind of dislocation. The symbol of what Manchester represented both as a place and as an idea was potent enough to retain readers’ loyalty after the removal of the word from the title. While the symbolic element of Manchester had a nuanced interpretation among the readers, its unifying power transcended this, binding people together and creating a sense of belonging. The idea of Manchester resonated well beyond that city and into the minds of those who had never been there but who, nonetheless, felt a sense of association with the newspapers. Readers identified with the idea of Manchester as well as the city as a place and they superimposed that idea onto the character of the newspaper to create a symbolic community.

It has always been challenging for historians to research the relationships that readers formed with newspapers, primarily due to the fact that ‘the experience of most

¹¹² JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/298.

¹¹³ JRLUM, *Guardian Archives*, GB133GDN/298.

¹¹⁴ Hetherington, *Guardian Years*, 146.

¹¹⁵ Cohen, *Symbolic*, 103.

readers in the past can never be recovered'.¹¹⁶ Published letters only offer a partial view as they have been selected for publication; the cache of letters examined here offers a rare glimpse into the totality of reader response to the decision to change title. The significance of how readers articulated their sense of ownership of the newspaper illustrates not just the politics of readership and the social role of the newspaper but provides a broader insight into the shifting economic and social history of England and the 'magnetic pull' being exerted by London in particular. The attitudes displayed by *Manchester Guardian* readers from all backgrounds and from many locations indicate the importance of newspapers not merely *qua* newspapers but as symbols of personal identity and social value.

Figure captions

Figure 1 – *National Newsagent* cartoon, 16 September 1961.

Figure 2 – *Punch* cartoon, 20 September 1961 © Punch Cartoon Library/ Topfoto.

¹¹⁶ Nord, *Communities*, 269.

