

The presentation of British history in popular 19th century educational texts

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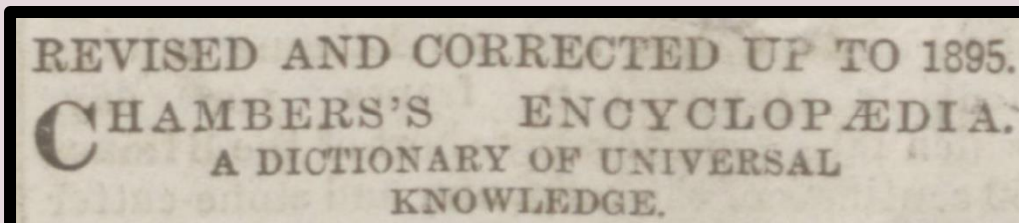
Research Aims and Background

Against a backdrop of inadequate state schooling, 19th century popular publications provided an accessible way for working people in Britain to become educated. Historical education in these schools was especially poor, as the subject received little attention from central and municipal governments. ¹ By studying how history is presented in popular texts, we can understand how British people perceived themselves and their neighbours in this period of rapid societal change.

This study utilized the following three publications. We first compared the five editions of the *Information for the People* to see how historical content changed across the 19th century, then studied the two encyclopaedias to see how format differences affected historical content. This study builds on work done by Sondra Miley Cooney, Michael Hancher and my wonderful supervisor Aileen Fyfe on the William and Robert Chambers's and Blackie & Son publishing houses. ^{2 3 4}

CHAMBERS'S INFORMATION FOR THE PEOPLE.

Published as a part work in five editions in
1835, 1842, 1848-9, 1857-8 and 1874-5.



Published in ten volumes between 1888
and 1892.

BLACKIE'S MODERN CYCLOPEDIA OF UNIVERSAL INFORMATION.

Edited by CHARLES ANNANDALE, M.A., LL.D.
With Pictorial Illustrations and a Series of Maps.

Published in eight volumes between 1889
and 1890.

Methodology

We examined digitized copies of our primary texts on platforms like HathiTrust. Background information was found in the British Newspaper Archives and the collections of 19th century periodicals digitized by the University of St Andrews.

Conclusions

- Popular educational texts were serious, reliable sources of information, enjoyed by a diverse set of consumers.
- Historical education became more varied during the 19th century, though information about oppressed communities remained inaccessible. This prevented readers from learning the scale of colonial violence committed by their state.
- Regional history entries gave readers inadequate and conflicting information on key events in British history.

Temporal Changes

Publishers of educational texts were forced to innovate to remain competitive in a rapidly expanding print industry. Significant revisions during the 19th century meant the *Information for the People*:

Began prioritising accuracy over entertainment

1835	"The great warrior Arthur of whom everybody has heard." ⁵	1842	States as fact that Edward IV drowned his brother in "a butt of malmsey wine" ⁷
1874	"The British prince Arthur, now celebrated more in romance and poetry than in history." ⁶	1874	The fifth edition casts doubt on this legend, describing it as a "popular story" rather than a historical fact. ⁸

Became more varied

In 1842, the *Information for the People* expanded to discuss cultural, scientific and literary history alongside regal and military history.

The histories of women and those exploited by European powers continued to be ignored, preventing people from learning the dark parts of British history.

Format Differences

The *Information for the People* discusses English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh history together. The *Modern Cyclopaedia* and *Chambers's Encyclopaedia* examines regional histories in isolation, meaning they described events and figures very differently.

Modern Cyclopaedia:

	• Edward I was "unfortunate" ⁹ • The Act of Union created "a single and more powerful whole" ¹⁰
	• Edward I was "weak" ¹¹ • The Act of Union was necessary because "ill-feeling between the two countries grew so strong" ¹²

Chambers's Encyclopaedia:

	• Edward I was a "great king" ¹³ • Makes no reference to the Act of the Union.
	• Edward I "sacrificed humanity, honour, and justice" ¹⁴ • "The Union continued to be unpopular in Scotland for many years" ¹⁵

19th century consumers were given fundamentally different information and reading experiences based on which regional history they chose to read first.

References and Acknowledgements

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