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NOTES & QUERIES

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40. **On the Nature of the Weather, in Bright’s Intelligencer, Ilfracombe’s Newspaper for 1860–1**

The nature of the weather regularly captures ‘front-page’ attention. The forecasting of its likely ‘behaviour’ may have advanced, but extreme meteorological events regularly reveal the limitations of ‘human’ measures taken to tame its fiercer capabilities. Its social, political and economic significance, and critical coverage of its ‘management’ in the media, makes the weather a particularly topical subject for exploration by historians as well as contemporary commentators. The seaside towns are among those places most sensitive to the vicissitudes of the weather. This research-in-progress article discusses the coverage of the weather during one season in a Devon seaside resort, just over 150 years ago. The study is based on a reading of the contents of Ilfracombe’s early, if short-lived, newspaper, *Bright’s Intelligencer*.

The publication of *Bright’s Intelligencer and Arrival List for Ilfracombe, Lynton, and Lynmouth* in the years 1860–1 is especially fortuitous for the historian of Ilfracombe today, and perhaps for historians of the seaside resorts of Devon and more generally. The date of the newspaper coincides with an important phase of transition for many of these towns, as they left their spa-like, ‘select’ identity behind, and steadily became the railway-served, ‘mass’-tourism and leisure centres of the modern period.1 *Bright’s Intelligencer* is not Ilfracombe’s earliest newspaper, but it appears to be the oldest surviving, with the only copies being held within a bound volume in Ilfracombe Museum. The *Intelligencer* appeared in June 1860, but by May 1861 it was ‘folding’, and would give way to the longer lasting *Ilfracombe Chronicle*. Discussion of what is known of the history of the paper has been recounted previously in *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries* and elsewhere.2

The current research being carried out on the *Intelligencer* focuses on the content meriting front-page attention — the ‘headline news’. The format of the cover page adopted a consistent format through 1860–1. Two wide, right and left-hand-side columns are separated by a thinner centre column. Occupying much, and occasionally all, of the two broader columns is a leading article by the editor, followed, if space allowed, by a section with brief accounts and notices of ‘Local News’. The centre column comprises the *Arrival List* of ‘Residents and Visitors’, which runs alphabetically, street by street, through subsequent pages of the newspaper. A recent indexing of the lead editorials drew attention to the prominence of references to the weather. Indeed much of one front page is taken over by its consideration (see Figure 1). Discussion of the weather is often found elsewhere on the front page, where it warranted passing inclusion in the content of the ‘Local News’ section. Quantitative investigation of the occurrences of mentions of the weather, and a more qualitative discernment of their substance and meaning, indicated three prominent themes: patterns and trends, physical impact, and psychological significance.

Discussion of the weather in the *Intelligencer* regularly intertwines commentary on the first two of the three themes: reflection on the changing nature of the weather, and observations of its affects on the life of the town and its sur-
# Bright's Intelligencer and Arrival List

For

**Ilfracombe, Lynton, & Lynmouth.**

**Printed and Published by J. V. Bright, Ilfracombe.**

**Vol. 2 No. 16.**

**Friday, September 14, 1860.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ILFRACOMBE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cottages.</strong> Cottages which have been vacated and let.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Residents and Visitors at Ilfracombe.**

**Adelaide Terrace.**

- **Mr. & Mrs. Rowland.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Fiddes.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Stent.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Balfour.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Fox.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. White.**

**Bath Cottages.**

- **Mr. & Mrs. Matthews.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Pope.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Price.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Goodchild.**

**Belvedere Terrace.**

- **Mr. & Mrs. Hillyard.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Steers.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Turner.**

**Broad Street.**

- **Mr. & Mrs. Buller.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Steers.**
- **Mr. & Mrs. Turner.**

**Church Street.**

- **Mr. & Mrs. Hillyard.**

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**The Weather.**

The present state of the Ocean Greaves Society, which took place on Wednesday last, was not attended by sufficient interest to secure a large attendance. The weather was rather cold and dull, with a few showers, but the evening was considerably colder, which happily passed in pleasant conversation.

The evening was early terminated, and the party, although moderately crowded, appears to have been more agreeable in high lights and in sylvan walks, as well as in smoke than in rooms crowded with people, and a quantity of wine and tea took the place of ale and beer which had been drunk in the inn, and was never drunk in the inn until last night.

Yet despite these indications of prosperity, the fact of a calm and easy yield for the tea, in gaining a term of time which has been the cause of much vexation and the means to make the security of the society the object of the chief amongst those who have taken an interest in its management, according to its arrangement to the adoration of the committee, which should not be the last to go swimming. And not the last to go swimming, that is yesterday deep.

There is every reason why a visit to Ilfracombe should be a success, for there is no place more secluded than this town from the Inland Sea, which is in a state of great activity, and it has been the subject of many inquiries and suggestions.

The health of the whole population is greatly improved, and by and by the present state of health and strength, which have been the subject of many inquiries and suggestions, will be the last to go swimming, and will always be the last to go swimming, as it always has been.

The truth is, the health of the whole population, of family and servants, and for about the state of health and strength, which have been the subject of many inquiries and suggestions, will be the last to go swimming, and will always be the last to go swimming, as it always has been.

It is certain that in temporary "bad" weather and storms, we are always standing by waiting and watching, and in a few words, which are not only successful in our attempts, and are consequently more prosperous than we are generally supposed to be.

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**Figure 1: Bright's Intelligencer, front page, 14 September 1860 (reproduced with kind permission of Ilfracombe Museum)**
rounding area. The following passage is typical, but particularly noteworthy for its interesting reference to local-climate terminology:

The 'ASHEN GALE.' — Owing to the boisterous weather of Monday the 'Prince of Wales' steamer was unable to effect her projected excursion trip from Swansea.

We fear that this heavy gale from the north-west has not improved the very promising prospects of the apple crop. The gale appears to be a regular visitant at this period of the year, and derives its local name from the circumstance of its usually arriving at the twisting of the ash-buds, which process it is supposed to accelerate.3

A second passage, from later in the same year, places the extremes and results of the weather in the context of local collective memory:

WINTER AND ROUGH WEATHER
The calm close weather which has prevailed during the past week presents a striking contrast to the heavy gales and tremendous seas with which we were visited in the corresponding season of last year. We shall long remember the great October gale of 1859 in which the Royal Charter was stranded on a lee shore, and she and hers so terribly destroyed; nor shall we of this place soon forget the fatal cyclone of the 1st of November which desolated so many of our homes, and in which at the height of its fury we beheld the fearful spectacle of a strong man perishing, together with his vessel which he had only navigated too well, at the very mouth of our harbour and within sight of the whole of our seafaring population.4

In a further passage the weather is discussed in relationship to the third theme, and its part in the local and perhaps national (and very 'English') psyche:

But, in truth, it is always so: if a few consecutive months are at all abnormal in their character if it is close and thundery in a late autumn, or wet and windy in an early summer, straightway doleful lamentations, prayers, or murmurings (according to the temperament of the complainant) arise throughout the land.

'Everything is going wrong', cries one man, adding in a not pious corollary, that 'it generally does'.

'Bread is dear enough without a wet summer to make it dearer', grumbles another.

'We ought decidedly to pray for an alteration of this disagreeable state of things', suggests a third, whose devotion is evidently in advance of his faith or his reason.

Meanwhile in-gathering time draws onward, and by and bye the prospect brightens and murmurs cease, prayers are changed into thanksgivings, and everything is seen to be as right, and good, and wisely-ordered, as it always was.5

Consideration of the weather in Bright's Intelligencer invites further research, as do other topics that receive extensive coverage. Such topics are typical of the concerns of a developing seaside resort, as well as what also con-
tinued to function as a rural market town, in the second half of the nineteenth century, notably: agriculture, leisure, ‘improvement’ and social class.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first author is very grateful for the help of the second-year history students of Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln, who undertook an indexing of the newspaper as a classroom primary-source exercise; and in particular for the contribution of Arran Hart, Tracey Jones and Rachel Maxey, who carried out detailed quantitative and qualitative follow-up analysis of the raw indexing data, and assisted in the compilation and proof-reading of this article. Thanks are also expressed for the assistance of Sara Hodson at Ilfracombe Museum, for permission to reproduce Figure 1 and for the museum’s ongoing interest in this research.

REFERENCES


5. BII (1860), ‘The weather’, 14 September, 1.

Andrew J.H. Jackson, Arran Hart, Tracy Jones and Rachel Maxey

41. A Sixteenth-Century Fives Ball?

In 2009 a familiar yet unusual object was handed in to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. It had been found in old thatch in a cottage at Morchard Bishop, Devon, and appeared to be a ball suitable for games-playing. The task of researching the find was handed to Lauren Palmer, a student of Conservation at Cardiff University (and formerly a pupil at Wellington School) on a placement at RAMM.

The usual methods of analysis showed that the ball was of leather, stitched and stuffed with sheep’s fleece, and a date of the sixteenth century was sug-