ARTICLE

# "The Vital Link": British Print Media Export to Australia, 1853–1980

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This paper uses the case study of Gordon & Gotch, media import/exporters, to explore how the transnational sale of British media contributed to a common cultural identity within the British World. Gordon & Gotch, founded as a media import firm in Australia in 1853, opened a London branch in 1866 which became independently owned and operated in 1890. This paper argues that the London and Australasian firms of Gordon & Gotch played an important and understudied role in tying Australia to Britain through lines of business that benefitted men in Melbourne and London, creating an "imagined community" of British readers that spanned oceans. The paper also explores how the divergent strategies of the London and Australasian Gordon & Gotches in the wake of the Second World War help us to understand the timeline of Australia's cultural disentanglement with Britain. As new political economies developed in Britain and Australia, the London firm was forced to pivot to a European or more generally "global" strategy, while the Australian firm refocused its energies to domestic and American media. The consequence for Australian consumers was a reduced presence of British media and a greater preponderance of American, Australian, and locally printed multinational media in Australia. The long history of the British and Antipodean Gordon & Gotches reveals the contingency of British media saturation in Australia and the value of business historical approaches to studying change in cultural markets.

In one photograph, a balding employee in a sweater vest, shirtsleeves rolled up, organizes stacks of books and magazines in front of rough wooden racks emblazoned with the words "Launceston," "Brisbane," and "Adelaide."[1] In another, a cheery young man operates a forklift holding a copper-strapped package full of magazines. He is in a cavernous warehouse full of bound papers: magazines arranged into packets, tied in kraft paper, wrapped in cardboard, and strapped to pallets. A third picture shows these pallets stacked four or five high in a

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1. LMA.4767.PR.03.01.005, London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA).

covered outdoor warehouse, representing literally millions of pages of British print media. These are company photographs from the 1950s for the London news import-export firm Gordon & Gotch held at the London Metropolitan Archives. The print media in these photographs was soon to be sent to the Australasian firm of Gordon & Gotch, in addition to agents in Argentina, Brazil, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, India, and the United States.

When these photos were taken, London's Gordon & Gotch was the largest exporter of magazines in the world, sending ten thousand tons of publications each year from London, Liverpool, and Southampton to customers across the globe.[2] The Australasian Gordon & Gotch supplied over 10,000 retail locations in Australia, selling 946 different magazines for retail and home delivery. Of these, 562 were printed either in Britain or Europe.[3] Gordon & Gotch had a long and rich history. Founded in Australia in 1853 as a newspaper and magazine import and distribution firm, the company grew to include many Australian branches in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth and a London branch, which became independent in the 1890s. From that period onward, the Australasian and London-based firms operated as separate companies, bound closely by mutual interest. By the early twentieth century, Gordon & Gotch (London) came to dominate the export of foreign news to Australia, in part because Gordon & Gotch (Australasia) held a near-monopoly on news distribution within Australia. Australian readers read the same material as British readers did, often offset by only a few short weeks. During World War II, British government propagandists, envious of Gordon & Gotch's global impact and influence, sought to reproduce its thorough and effective system.[4] Few other firms could claim such responsibility for exposing international readers to British news.

There is surprisingly little scholarship on the business of exporting British print media. Valuable studies in recent years have explored the business of domestic British print media, as well as the business behind transnational cable news companies, but almost no research has been done on the commercial export of print newspapers and magazines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[5] In part, this lacuna can be explained by the challenges that daunt the historian: there are few extant corporate records, the companies involved are infrequently mentioned in newspaper articles, and relevant archival materials are scattered in international archives.[6] Yet the study of print media export has great value for scholars of British imperialism, as it offers a way to understand the persistence and deterioration of common British cultural life in the empire.

Since the publication of Benedict Anderson's 1983 *Imagined Communities*, scholars have argued that print media can play a substantial role in the development of national identity. Anderson posited that the production and circulation of commercial print media, a system he

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2. Bell, *Gordon & Gotch*, 2.
3. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
4. FO 924.235, National Archives at Kew (hereafter NA).
5. Cox and Mowatt, *Revolutions;* Brennan, "International News" in *Making News*; Potter, *News and the British World*; Potter, *Newspapers and Empire*; Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*; Tworek, "Political and Economic News".
6. This article has relied on a small archive deposited at the London Metropolitan Archives, Australian and British newspaper records, two official company histories, a single file of corporate documents from 1919 at the State Library Victoria (hereafter SLV), and secondary scholarship on the Australian Gordon & Gotch by Denis Cryle and Roger Osborne.

calls "print-capitalism," can create a "specific imagined world of vernacular readers" who, through reading, participate in a "steady, solid simultaneity through time."[7] These readers not only share common language but also read and understand the world through the same medium. This process, according to Anderson, encourages the development of a national cultural identity. In particular, Anderson argued for the importance of this phenomenon in the colonial states of the Western hemisphere in the late eighteenth century. Before industrialization, the combined presence of a common language, local administration, and, critically, print-capitalism yielded a nationalism that challenged imperialism.

I posit that Anderson's argument for the importance of print-capitalism in cultivating national feeling in the eighteenth century can also help us explain the inverse phenomenon in the nineteenth century. If national print-capitalism in a preindustrial world could foster national identity, I argue that imperial print-capitalism in an industrial world could foster and perpetuate imperial identity. Critical in this dynamic were the firms of imperial print-capitalism—firms like Gordon & Gotch, exporters and sellers whose business allowed readers in Melbourne to consume the same papers as readers in Liverpool within the space of six weeks. This article draws on their case to answer how the business of print media fostered and perpetuated British culture abroad, specifically in nineteenth and twentieth century Australia. Moving beyond Anderson's formulation, it also asks whether the disappearance of imperial media could result in the dissolution of the bonds of common British cultural life.

By arguing for the cultural impact of print-capitalism, this study links two strains of literature on British imperialism that have largely remained separate: scholarship on the effects of British trade on imperial connection on the one hand and scholarship on British culture in the empire on the other. Scholars of British World trade, including James Belich, Gary Magee, and Andrew Thompson, have explored how migration, commodity export, and ideology held regions of British settlement, termed the British World, together. In this framework, British media suffused the British World as a byproduct of other kinds of trade.[8] British World research reveals the longstanding and valuable links of business, which tied Britain to its areas of settlement, and demonstrates the motivations that both those in the regions and British imperialists had to foster these connections. Other scholars of British World business have enriched this research by tracing the role of British multinational enterprises (MNEs) in Australia, particularly in extractive and financial industries.[9] Australian business historians have further explored the role of MNEs and large companies in Australian history.[10] This literature deftly articulates how the movement of people and goods shaped the British World and Australian economies but has relatively little to say about the impact of globalized trade on consumer preferences and identities or on the development of imperial culture.[11]

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7. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 63.
8. Belich, *Replenishing*; Bridge and Fedorowich, *The British World*; Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalization;* Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain.*
9. Cain and Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism II"; Jones and de Silva Lopes, "International Business History"; Wilkins, "The History of Multinationals"; Jones, *The Multinational Traders.*
10. Ville and Merrett, "Australia: settler capitalism *sans doctrines*"; Ville and Merrett, *International Business in Australia*; Fleming, Merrett, and Ville, *The Big End of Town.*
11. Jones, "Globalization."

In contrast, scholars of British imperial culture have attended closely to the consumption, reception, and impact of British goods within the British World. Much of this scholarship has focused on either the symbols of imperialism in colonized regions or state-driven initiatives to spread British media, the latter thesis often short-handed as "cultural imperialism."[12] Scholars studying various state initiatives of cultural export have revealed the ways in which imperial elites tried to create a singular imperial culture through exporting British performances, art, and texts during the imperial era and well into the postcolonial era and how local people responded to these initiatives.[13] This scholarship, in its attentiveness to state-sponsored imperialism, has often paid little attention to commercial sources of imperial culture, either in Britain or in the British World.

Gordon & Gotch provides a prime, though by no means unique, example of how we can synthesize these fields: by exploring how print-capitalism shaped imperial cultural life. The two firms of Gordon & Gotch leveraged their firm-specific advantages to achieve a near-monopolistic position as news importers and distributors in the Australian market, and their businesses fostered and maintained Anglo-Australian cultural ties. After World War II, a new international political economy caused both firms to shift strategies, resulting in a changing print media landscape in Australia and contributing to Australia's cultural disentanglement from Britain.

Uniting economic and cultural histories of the British World requires that we expand our vision beyond a simple study of a product, such as wool, or a group of consumers, such as theatergoers, to consider how intermediaries, working with producers, make products so influential for consumers. This article thus responds to Francesca Carnevali's call to examine industries holistically by exploring how Gordon & Gotch distributed British media in Australia as well as the firm's impact on Australian consumers.[14] There are, naturally, limits to what a study of a firm or a single pair of firms can tell us about larger patterns of cultural influence, but this article argues that the two Gordon & Gotches served as one part of a broader phenomenon of the business of cultural exchange that has largely been overlooked by scholars.

Examining the long history of the Australian and British-based Gordon & Gotches also provides one answer to a question James Curran and Stuart Ward posed in *The Unknown Nation*: Why did Australian independent cultural development happen slowly and unevenly in the twentieth century?[15] The history of the Australian decolonial moment is often narrated from the perspective of geopolitical wrangling and large-scale economic shifts.[16] These explanations have little space to unpack the nature and force behind cultural change in Australia. Imperial history, for its part, often narrates the end of common Commonwealth cultural life as the "unstoppable" result of modern media technologies and political nationalism.[17] This latter explanation does not account for how and why the cultural connections of empire

12. Burton, *Burdens of History*; Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*; Hall, *Civilising Subjects.*

13. Ritter, *Imperial Encore*; MacKenzie, *A Cultural History*; Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation*; Joshi, *In Another Country*; Rudy, *Imagined Homelands*; Balme, *Pacific Performances*; Yamomo, *Theatre and Music.*

14. Di Martino et al., *People, Places*, 21.

15. Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation.*

16. Bridge, "Australia, Britain, and the British Commonwealth."

17. MacKenzie, 325.

weakened when they did. This article suggests that by focusing on cultural development from the perspective of the businesses involved in selling and distributing cultural products, we can provide some explanations for the endurance of British media dominance in Australia as well as the timeline for Australia's disentanglement from British media.

## The Rise: 1853–1870

Gordon & Gotch was founded as a newspaper import and distribution business in Melbourne, Australia, in 1853. Alexander Gordon, a Scot, was at the time living in Melbourne and working as a journalist for the *Argus.* John Gotch emigrated from England to Australia with the hope of making his fortune in the gold fields: his prior professional experience had been as a dentist.[18] Before Gotch arrived in Australia, he had already been abroad for some time, first working briefly in the United States then on the island of Mauritius as a dentist.[19] Gotch lacked any news experience when he met Gordon, but he was resilient and a hard worker. The two entered business together in 1853 to distribute news, importing British newspapers such as *The Illustrated London News* and *Lloyd's.*[20] Although both founders were British by birth, the company was established and run out of Australia, proving a noteworthy contrast to the plurality of British-based free-standing companies in Australia at this time.[21]

Gordon & Gotch began at a moment when the potential market for British newspapers in Australia was growing substantially. The discovery of gold in Australia in July 1851 led to a takeoff in population growth.[22] Between 1851 and 1861, the population of Australia's colonies swelled from 405,000 to 1,145,000.[23] Gordon & Gotch also entered business at the precise moment when British newspapers were becoming significantly less expensive due to the repeal of the advertisement duty in 1853. In the coming years, the stamp duty (1855) and paper duty would also be repealed (1861), making newspapers more accessible to a wider segment of the Australian population.[24] The adoption of steam shipping in the 1860s and 1870s would further reduce the price and increase the speed at which newspapers could be imported.

British newspapers were not being imported into a market without news. Newspapers and circulars had been printed in Australia since the very beginning of the nineteenth century, although early newspapers were more organs of government than transmitters of popular information.[25] Independent newspapers began to take off in the various Australian colonies in the 1820s, and by the 1850s, each major city had between three and a dozen.[26] Australian

18. Kirsop, "Gotch, John Speechly (1829–1901)."
19. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
20. The early stage of Gordon & Gotch roughly matches Wallace Kirsop's second of four phases described in *Books for Colonial Readers.*
21. Ville, "Business Development," 32.
22. Belich, 311.
23. McCalman and Kippen, "Population and health," 297.
24. Temple, *The British Press,* 17.
25. Young, *Paper Emperors*, Introduction.
26. Ford and Roberts, "Expansion, 1820–1850," 141.

newspapers, like British newspapers, would flourish after the 1850s with repeal of the advertisement and stamp duties.[27] Australian newspapers and British newspapers served slightly different purposes in these early years: Australian papers shared local news and information, as well as some imperial news, while British newspapers connected Australians to the world of news beyond the colony. As the functions of the papers were different, the presence of Australian newspapers did not diminish the demand for British ones.

Financial success for Gordon & Gotch in those early days depended on the firm's ability to acquire and distribute the news faster than its competition. Gordon & Gotch thus invested in hansom cabs, which it would use to drive out to the mail steamers and acquire its news as soon as it arrived in port.[28] The most lucrative of the imported papers were *The Illustrated London News*, *The Home News*, *Lloyd's*, *Reynold's Magazine*, and the Dublin *Weekly Freeman* as well as the monthly *European Mail*.[29] While the import and distribution of news was at the heart of Gordon & Gotch's early business, like many businesses of its time, its activities were also relatively heterogenous. From the early days, the firm was an importer and distributor of news as well as printing machinery, stationery, ink, and general merchandise. It engaged in some limited local publishing as well. As of 1862, it also operated a domestic telegraphic agency, although the firm never sought to compete with telegraphic news agencies such as Reuters.[30] Telegraphy was a supplement to its primary business of print media import and distribution.

The firm expanded in the 1860s. In 1859, Alexander Gordon sold out his partnership for an annuity and returned to Scotland. Gordon was replaced by John Gotch's brother William Gotch and his brother-in-law, Alfred Jones. John Gotch expanded the firm from a single location in Melbourne to a second, branch location in Sydney in 1861. John Gotch soon sought to expand the business further and sent Jones to establish an office in London in 1866. In 1874, this London office was restructured as a partnership between Gotch and Jones.[31] The branch was responsible for soliciting the sole distributorships of London's most popular papers and book publishers. London newspaper and magazine publishers were happy to work with Gordon & Gotch as their overseas agent due to the firm's diligence in packing print media so as not to crush it or let it become damp. From the perspective of midsize publishers, such as Cassell and Co. or Ward, Lock, and Taylor, Gordon & Gotch offered them an opportunity to maximize revenue from excess stock.[32]

The London office also generated a new revenue stream for Gordon & Gotch in 1870, when Alfred Jones first published the *Australasian Handbook.* The *Handbook* was designed as an informational guide for a prospective emigrant to Australia, containing a calendar of all the major Australian mail ships, information on Australia and New Zealand, some general information for emigrants, and a digest of tariffs. The *Handbook* also gave Gordon & Gotch a space to sell its services as an advertising agent for papers in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, British Columbia, Panama, and the Cape as well as in all major London, weekly,

27. Macintyre and Scalmer, "Colonial States and Civil Society, 1860–90," 212.
28. A likely apocryphal story claims that Gordon & Gotch used blind men with seeing eye dogs as distributors in these early days. Bell, 1953, 22.
29. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
30. Bell, 1953, 20.
31. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
32. *Leader* (Melbourne), June 1, 1867, 3.

Scottish, Irish, and provincial papers.[33] As an advertising agent, the London office was leveraging its connections with London media firms to place advertisements where they could be seen throughout the British World. The *Handbook* was republished each year with new and updated information and swelled from an original 150 pages to 600 in 1876.[34] The *Handbook* was a consistently popular and well-selling volume, which Gordon & Gotch continued to print until the publication was replaced by a Commonwealth Government handbook in 1906.

The first two decades of Gordon & Gotch's development illuminate how private businesses in both Britain and Australia came to link the two regions. Australia and Britain had long been connected culturally due to common heritage, emigration, and the political links of empire, but, in Australia's first half-century, slow and uncertain shipping had deprived the colonies of consistent, dependable access to British print media. By the 1850s, conditions had changed. Gordon & Gotch grew from one business importing and distributing news in Melbourne in 1853 to a triad of businesses exporting, importing, distributing, telegraphing, and printing in the 1870s. Gordon & Gotch's early development illustrates the important bidirectionality of Australian cultural connection to Britain: that entrepreneurs in Australia sought British print media and were able to cooperate with sellers in Britain.[35] Seeing a business opportunity, Gordon & Gotch took advantage of structures the British empire put into place, such as state-supported shipping routes and common English literacy.[36] The result was the consistent presence of British media—news, periodicals, and books—in the two largest cities of Australia. As early as the 1860s, Gordon & Gotch was forging a community of readers steeped in British news that transcended the real constraints of distance and time zones.

### The Consolidation: 1870 to World War II

The seventy-year period from 1870 to 1940 was one of expansion and consolidation for Gordon & Gotch. The London branch moved in 1872 to a new, custom-built facility in St. Bride Street in London, where a hand-operated baling press was also installed. The London office could now compress bales of magazines down to three-quarters of their volume—a savings in space and freight costs.[37] While the London office increased its exports of books, magazines, and periodicals, it also continued to export other merchandise abroad, including home goods, such as shoes and toothpaste, and commercial goods, such as printing machinery and paper.[38] In Australia, Gordon & Gotch was looking to expand its distribution network. In 1875, it acquired the bookselling business of George Slater & Co. in Brisbane.[39] The acquisition removed a competitor in the book and news distribution business while also expanding Gordon & Gotch's activities, as George Slater had the contract to print the bank notes for the Bank of Queensland. As Gordon & Gotch developed this local distribution hub, it

33. *The Australian Handbook*, 1870, vi.
34. *The Australian Handbook*, 1876, 3.
35. Price, "One Big Thing," 624.
36. Magee and Thompson, 131.
37. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
38. Bell, 1953, 28.
39. Ibid, 27.

increased both the number of imported and domestic publications it sold, garnering the distributorship of *The Brisbane Courier.*

As the Australian population expanded more than three-fold in the late nineteenth century, Gordon & Gotch's offices in Sydney and Melbourne grew with it. Australia's population had spiked in the gold rush decade of the 1850s, but it continued to grow dramatically between 1861 and 1901, increasing from 1,145,000 to 3,773,000.[40] Waves of migration from Britain to Australia contributed to the population increase, and Gordon & Gotch benefitted from the arrival of more talented men involved in the business of selling print media.[41] The population increase was ultimately sustained by rising domestic birth rates and decreasing mortality toward the end of the century, creating a robust population of Australian-born colonials.[42] By 1901, 77 percent of white Australians had been born in the newly federated colony.[43] The new century would be an important one for Gordon & Gotch's cultural legacy. For that 77 percent of the 1901 population, their only exposure to British newspapers and magazines was through the efforts of exporters such as Gordon & Gotch.

The increasing scale and divergent activities of the London and Australian offices led, in 1890, to the sale of the London office to its managers, William Berrill (brother of founder John Gotch) and John Baddely Poole.[44] Although telegraph communication between Britain and Australia was readily possible by the 1890s, telegraph messages were expensive, resulting in infrequent and short messages. Letters, in which complex business matters could be discussed, were delivered four weeks after they were posted. In a business reliant upon quick decisions and complex negotiations, such delays were perilous.

One can readily see the difficulties of operating a media business between Britain and Australia in the 1890s correspondence of J.C. Williamson, a powerful Australian theatrical impresario, and his London-based partner George Musgrove. As in the case of Gordon & Gotch, the Australian and London partners had slightly different business activities; Musgrove was leasing his own London theater, while Williamson was managing an Australian theater that relied on a steady stream of London productions licensed for Australia. In their case, Anglo-Australian media business was riddled with difficulties that were often exacerbated by the limitations of technology. Cables were too brief to represent the nuances of a media landscape and frequently sounded accusatory.[45] Acrimonious letters and cables from Williamson were followed by silence from Musgrove, which led to further frustration for Williamson. Often, misunderstandings were exaggerated when letters and their responses were sent and received out of order. The communication problems between the two men ultimately led to a dissolution of their partnership. Well into the twentieth century, the only successful Anglo-Australian operations for J.C. Williamson  Ltd. would be when the London office was as small as possible and strategic choices were made from Australia. Similar

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40.  McCalman and Kippen, 297 and 301.
41.  Finkelstein, "Nineteenth-Century Print on the Move."
42.  McCalman and Kippen, 310.
43.  Ibid, 301.
44.  Bell, 1953, 31.
45.  MS 5783, Box 614. Letter from Musgrave to Williamson, March 27, 1896, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA).

miscommunications and challenges bedeviled the Anglo-Australian bookselling businesses of George Robertson & Co. and Edward Petherick's Colonial Booksellers' Agency.[46]

Although no internal records survive from this period for Gordon & Gotch, it seems likely that recognition of these challenges of communication was a contributing factor leading to the sale of the London firm to its local managers. Going forward, Gordon & Gotch in London would be an entirely separate firm from Gordon & Gotch in Australia, although one closely tied to the activities of the Australian firm. Unlike the case of J.C. Williamson, the London and Australasian offices of Gordon & Gotch had interconnected business interests, which facilitated their cooperation as independent firms. In the decades after the sale, the two Gordon & Gotches continued to follow similar patterns in management. Close partnerships, often among family members, continued to dominate. The London firm was first owned by William Berrill and Poole, and next between William Berrill and his son, W.J. Berrill.[47] After William died in 1897, W.J. invited his brother Arthur Berrill to join him in the business.

Despite the economic depression that befell Australia in the 1890s, both the London and Australian firms expanded at the turn of the century.[48] Gordon & Gotch in Melbourne opened a branch in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1894. This office was followed in the next decade by branches in Christchurch, Auckland, and Dunedin. The supply of British newspapers and magazines for these branches was orchestrated through London's Gordon & Gotch. For its part, the London firm of Gordon & Gotch had opened its first international branch in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1891, and opened a second in Durban in 1902, following these with a Toronto office in 1911.[49] The Canadian office was never as large or profitable as the antipodean or South African offices, as the geographic convenience of the United States meant that American newspapers were often significantly cheaper than imported British ones. In South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, British newspapers were far more competitive against other international alternatives. The London firm's international business in South Africa and Canada was facilitated by the discounts it received for the scale of its Australian business. By 1911, the London and Australasian Gordon & Gotches were working together to export British print media to every corner of Australia and New Zealand, and the London firm was exporting to many parts of the broader British World.

Just how thorough British newspapers' saturation in Australia was during this period cannot be overstated. An advertisement for the London Gordon & Gotch's press list in 1876 includes a dozen daily London newspapers, more than 180 weekly British papers, hundreds of magazines and periodicals, and 18 quarterlies.[50] By the early twentieth century, Gordon & Gotch was the exclusive distributor for the biggest press conglomerates, including the Associated Press (AP).[51] When Lord Northcliffe's assistant Evelyn Wrench visited Australia on behalf of the Associated Press in 1912, he wrote back that the AP publications got "an

46. Rukavina, *International Book Trade.*
47. Bell, 1953, 32.
48. Bellanta, "Rethinking the 1890s"; Merrett, "The Australian Bank Crashes."
49. LMA.4767.PR.04. *Gordon & Gotch Mercury* v. 5, May 1948, 3, LMA.
50. *The Australian Handbook*, 1876, 72.
51. Northcliffe Papers. Letter from Evelyn Wrench to Lord Northcliffe, June 27, 1912, British Library (hereafter BL).

extremely good show" in Australia and New Zealand and that "local competition is practically nil."[52] As Stuart Macintyre and Sean Scalmer have argued, newspapers were essential to Australian public life: "the newspaper was the dominant medium of civil society, recording, interpreting and disseminating public opinion."[53] As the British and Australian firms of Gordon & Gotch worked together to bring British papers to interested Australians, they were forging the links of a common cultural life shared between Britain and Australia.

Gordon & Gotch's preeminence in Commonwealth media export did not go unchallenged in the early years of the twentieth century. The first threat to the Gordon & Gotches came from the London-based trading company Robert A. Thompson and Co., whose branches extended throughout Australia and South Africa. In 1904, Thompson and the London firm went toe-to-toe in South Africa, where both firms were vying for the sole agency of South Africa's largest news retailer, the Central News Agency (CNA). Arthur Berrill was ultimately able to out-negotiate Thompson, exchanging the South African offices of Gordon & Gotch for sole London agency for the CNA in 1904.[54] This deal was an unqualified win for Gordon & Gotch (London), which had always been more qualified as an export agent than as a retailer. Now it could simply reap the benefits of a large export business to South African retailers. Melbourne's Gordon & Gotch neutralized the threat of Thompson & Co. in 1907 in the antipodes by acquiring the firm's Australian offices. In both cases, the Gordon & Gotches were able to use the advantage of the firms' sizes and associated economies of scale to retain their primary position in their markets.

The American-backed Australasian News Company (ANC) posed a much greater challenge to Australia's Gordon & Gotch. A branch location of the American News Company based in New York, ANC imported American and British newspapers into Australasia at surprisingly low costs.[55] ANC was not, at least in Gordon & Gotch's estimation, making money, but it seemed willing to lose money for many years to drive Gordon & Gotch out of business.[56] In response, the separate Australasian offices of Gordon & Gotch—based out of Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane—consolidated into one limited liability company, Gordon & Gotch (Australasia).[57] Gordon & Gotch (Australasia) managed to acquire ANC in December 1919, and made an agreement with the American News Company to purchase American periodicals from the firm in San Francisco.[58] By 1920, Gordon & Gotch (Australasia) controlled almost the entire import market for news and magazines to Australia. It also held a dominant position as distributors, capturing nearly two-thirds of the total market.[59] By 1930, the firm was the 76th largest enterprise and the 16th largest wholesaler of any product in Australia, with total assets in excess of AUS£1,100,000.[60] Its status as the preeminent importer of print media was thoroughly established.

52. Northcliffe Papers. Letter from Evelyn Wrench to Lord Northcliffe, November 26, 1912, BL.
53. Macintyre and Scalmer, 213.
54. Bell, 1953, 37.
55. Cryle, "Gordon and Gotch from the 1940s to the Present," 19.
56. MS 9350. F.J. Cox, "Amalgamation," SLV.
57. LMA.4767.PR.04. *Gordon & Gotch Mercury*, v. 4, April 1948, 11, LMA.
58. "TRADE AND FINANCE," *The Age*, December 12, 1919, 9; MS 9350. F.J. Cox, "Amalgamation," SLV.
59. Cryle, *Culture and Commerce.*
60. Ville and Merrett, "The Development of Large-Scale Enterprise in Australia," 37.

The expansion of newspapers and magazines in the interwar period, both in Britain and in Australia, led to a boom in the Gordon & Gotches' business. The "new journalism" of Hearst, Pulitzer, Northcliffe, and Newnes had taken off at the turn of the twentieth century, but the interwar years would bring an explosion of circulation in both Britain and Australia, spurred by a growth in advertising.[61] In Australia, the expansion of newspapers and magazines would be driven by Keith Murdoch, Hugh Denison, the Fairfax family, and Frank Packer. By the interwar period, London's Gordon & Gotch had developed into a sprawling operation that employed 250 people distributed between several warehouses, a printing and books department, an advertising office, and administrative offices necessary to communicate with the Toronto branch and the Central News Agency in South Africa.[62] The Australian firm had similarly grown to distribute between 400 and 500 overseas periodicals in its wholesale department and over 1,000 in its subscription department, representing the best of print media from Britain, Australia, and the United States.[63] Australian magazines required a large circulation to survive, but the distribution network of Gordon & Gotch could support imported British magazines that had only a small circulation in the country.[64] Gordon & Gotch's business thus supported readership of relatively niche British publications throughout Australia. The parallel success of imported and domestic news at this moment indicates how successful Gordon & Gotch (Australasia) were in developing readers' loyalties for British periodicals. It also suggests that Australian newspaper readers continued to perceive differences in British and Australian periodicals. A readership had been crafted for British product, which, for the moment, could withstand domestic competition.

The London firm continued to maintain its preeminence as a British news exporter in the interwar years, because there was no interest among British press barons in turning their newspaper firms into multinationals or even licensing British newspapers for publication in Australia. In Britain and the United States, early multinational news companies were being founded during the interwar period, as in the case of Condé Nast's *Vogue*, but no British magazines were printing local editions in Australia at this time.[65] The distance between Australia and Britain was still too great, and there was no way to ensure the newspapers would be sufficiently customized for local audiences. Keith Murdoch's insistence that Melbourne's *The Herald* reflect "Melbourne's character" is just one of many examples from this era in which print media was designed to reflect and engage with local readers and their particular interests.[66] In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the difficulties of overcoming national and local differences, compounded by the distance between London and Australia, made multinational development unappealing. The Gordon & Gotches provided a perfect alternative. They could offer British news firms effective and efficient export of their papers abroad, distribution on their arrival, and a thorough knowledge of local markets and conditions in both countries.[67]

61. Temple, 33.
62. Bell, 1953, 40.
63. Osborne, 75.3.
64. Osborne, 75.4.
65. Cox and Mowatt, "*Vogue* in Britain," 73.
66. MS 2823, Box 7, Memo by Keith Murdoch, No 48, May 8, 1924, NLA.
67. Gordon & Gotch thus provide a slightly delayed timeline for "deglobalization," as their business of exporting media globally continued to thrive until World War II. Jones, "Globalization," 144.

By the 1950s, the Australian firm of Gordon & Gotch was circulating over eighteen million copies of magazines through its sales locations *each month*—over 220 million magazines per year. More than half of the titles the firm sold were from the United Kingdom or Europe.[68] Although there are no data on what percentage of total sales came from British titles, it is clear that British newspapers and magazines circulated in great numbers and were read by a wide swath of the Australian population. By creating a community of news consumers, Gordon & Gotch made possible an international version of the "imagined national community" of newspaper readers Anderson theorized.[69] Reading the news of the day or examining magazines describing the fashions and visuals of Britain made Australians well aware of British cultural trends.[70] These periodicals, magazines, and books created a body of common knowledge that linked the two regions. This was, of course, not the only link connecting Britain and Australia. In the 1950s, the vast majority of Australia's population was of British origin, as the "white Australia" migration policy had continued to encourage British migrants, discourage European migrants, and exclude Asian migrants.[71] Yet when we combine the effect of the two Gordon & Gotches in Australia—consistent British media saturation—with an understanding of their business, we see how they helped forge the links of common cultural life between Britain and Australia from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

## The Disentanglement: World War II to 1980

At the start of World War II, the mutually beneficial business strategies of the two Gordon & Gotches were about to shift, with substantial consequences for the kinds of print media Australians could access. While the firms appeared to weather the war, their alignment was thrown off-kilter. The London firm's physical resources were damaged in the Blitz, but shipments of magazines out of the country continued, as Parliament viewed the distribution of British news abroad vital for international support for the war effort. Employees retired to basement bomb shelters to continue fulfilling orders during air raids—photos show female typists at work surrounded by walls of sandbags.[72] The London firm would briefly go into debt in these years but quickly returned to solvency after the war.[73] In Australia, despite severe limitations on paper imports, the newspaper and magazine market thrived, stoked by the intense competition between the Consolidated Press, Associated Newspapers, and the Fairfax and Herald and Weekly Times groups.[74] Paper importation limits prioritized newsprint for Australian papers over imported foreign magazines or newspapers. Under these conditions,

68. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.

69. Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

70. The success of individual periodicals is much harder to track, as Osborne notes. This is a promising area for future research. Osborne, 75.12.

71. Macintyre and Bashford, "Introduction," 8.

72. Bell, 1953, 49.

73. The firm reported £33,318.7.2 worth of debt on their tax returns in 1945 but were debt free by 1949. BT 31.39257.119387, NA.

74. Griffin-Foley, *The House of Packer*, 83.

the Australian Gordon & Gotch pivoted to distributing more domestic print media than before.[75]

In 1953, both Gordon & Gotches celebrated their centenaries by producing separate firm biographies. The Australian version of this book, *100 Years to Remember: The Story of Gordon & Gotch*, tells the history of the Australasian company and celebrates the firm's wide range of contemporary activities. As of the 1950s, the Australian company was not only distributing imported and domestic magazines and newspapers but also retailing books, printing equipment, paper, and stationery and engaging in advertising sales. The firm's public performance in the 1950s was good; the firm hit a record of nearly £400,000 profit in 1956, with consistent public dividends of 11 shillings per share per year, or roughly 25 percent on prebonus capital.[76] This success derived not only from imports, in which the firm's activities were limited but where licensing restrictions had also limited its competition, but also from the efflorescence of Australian periodicals.[77] As of 1953, the Australian firm was distributing 352 Australian periodicals, in contrast to 103 in 1938.[78] Australian consumers thus had increasing choice in the Australian periodicals available to them, although they continued to have access to a wide selection of British and American periodicals.

The London firm's version of the hagiography, *Gordon & Gotch: The Story of the G&G Century, 1852-1953*, also celebrated the firm's history and varied modern activities. Where the Australian firm engaged in many activities as a single firm, London's Gordon & Gotch expanded while dividing into subsidiary companies, presumably because its activities had grown so heterogenous that managing them under one enterprise had become difficult. In 1949, the Advertising Department was registered as Gordon & Gotch Advertising Ltd; in 1950, the Printing Department became Gordon & Gotch Printing Ltd; and in 1952, a textile import business that was run for two decades through Gordon & Gotch was independently registered as Tomlinson's Textile Agencies Ltd.[79] These services had long been under the Gordon & Gotch umbrella but were somewhat separate from the core activities of magazine, book, and periodical exports. London's Gordon & Gotch was also still involved in general merchandise export, stationery and printing export, and domestic sales. The London-based firm went further than the Australian firm in diversification by becoming the exclusive sales agents for a nonprint media product: the self-adhesive tape Sellotape.[80] The firm additionally became the sales agents for a new packaging material, Bubblepak. These expansions seemed to be the result of a wartime desire to invest further in domestic sales opportunities, which would be unaffected by the vicissitudes of international shipping. By midcentury, the London firm was no mere exporter but engaged in export in addition to a variety of domestic services and sales.

The British firm's biography presented the history of Gordon & Gotch as a tale of daring British entrepreneurship, tenacity, and soft imperial power. As in the case of the Australian firm's biography, the British firm's biography celebrated the continuities in the firm's

75. Souter, *Company of Heralds*, 269.
76. "Gotch div. up 2½%," *The Argus*, May 17, 1955, 14; "G. Gotch satisfies," *The Argus,* November 5, 1955, 16; "GORDON & GOTCH £400,000 RECORD," *The Argus*, June 8, 1956, 8.
77. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
78. *100 Years*, Gordon & Gotch Australasia.
79. Bell, 1953, 56.
80. Ibid, 55.

leadership. There had been Berrills leading the London firm since the 1860s, and Berrills still led the firm in the 1950s. However, where the Australian document downplayed Gordon & Gotch's connection to Britain and emphasized Australian ingenuity, the British biography presented a vision of a postwar firm linked firmly to the empire. One story in the history tells of a caricatured young black reader in central Africa requesting prayer books from Gordon & Gotch. Later, an illustration shows Adrian Berrill presenting an efficiency award to an unnamed Black employee. The rhetoric throughout the book emphasizes both how Gordon & Gotch performed a modernizing, positive service for the "backwards" Black empire and how Gordon & Gotch's business of print media export contributed to the unity of the anglophone world. Magazines exported to celebrate the queen's coronation were described in the book as "ambassadors for Britain."[81] By its own declaration, the firm was forging a common British identity in regions that even extended beyond the British empire, encompassing South Africa, Egypt, Jamaica, Newfoundland, Brazil, the Persian Gulf, Siam, and the United States, among other regions. Although this common British readership was not nearly as politically unified as Gordon & Gotch's rhetoric suggested, the London Gordon & Gotch had indeed created a common readership of British media that spanned continents and hemispheres.

The London firm's confidence in its transnational network emerges in the firm's internal newsletters from the 1950s. The transcontinental comings and goings of various international departmental heads from Canada or South Africa were constantly reported.[82] London executives would frequently travel to visit with their agents in the empire and their clients at the Australian firm. The company magazine also included references to less prominent employees from the London, Australian, New Zealand, South African, and Canadian offices in short biographical articles. Despite the increasingly global agency of Gordon & Gotch, the firm in the 1950s still reinforced the Commonwealth–national nature of its founding business model.

Although both centenary publications for London and Australia celebrated the two Gordon & Gotches' success, 1953 would mark a high-water point for the London firm. Over the next six years, the London Gordon & Gotch's profits would start to decline. The London firm was forced to confront its own internal inefficiencies, which had long existed but had become problematic by the end of the decade due to the rise of shipping costs and an increase in global competition. In 1959, Gordon & Gotch hired a consulting firm to look into ways of making the company more profitable.[83]

They did not have to look very hard. In the 1950s, the London firm was still shipping packages to its various offices using dramatically different methods. Newspapers and magazines destined for Australia or New Zealand would arrive at Gordon & Gotch fresh each morning (collected by Gordon & Gotch vans), where they would then be sorted into carrels, packaged with kraft paper, and tied with flat copper wire–tying machines.[84] Slightly larger packages would be sealed with hard straps.[85] The magazines and newspapers would be

81. Ibid, 70.
82. LMA.4767.04, *Gordon & Gotch Echo*, February 1957, no. 23, 2, LMA.
83. LMA.4767.04, *Gordon and Gotch Echo*, March–April 1959, 6, LMA.
84. LMA.4767.PR.03.01.024, LMA.
85. LMA.4767.PR.03.01.029, LMA.

received at Sydney or Melbourne by the Australasian firm, where they would then be sorted and distributed as the firm found appropriate. This process, although space and time intensive, was generally efficient. By contrast, the process for South Africa and Rhodesia was an inefficient process that had become standard through the routine of decades. For these destinations, periodicals and magazines were packed for each individual retail location—every train station bookstore, every magazine stall, every single location of retail. A team of thirty men worked within the London office of Gordon & Gotch to receive, sort, parcel, and ship newspapers, magazines, and periodicals from London to South Africa on a weekly basis. Unsurprisingly, one of the first points the consultants suggested was standardizing shipping to run on the same, bulk system in all regions of the British empire.

The larger problem for London's Gordon & Gotch was one it could not solve: the dissolution of the British Empire over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, which seemed to challenge the firm's core business. The London firm's centenary biography had proudly listed agencies in Burma, Ceylon, Egypt, India, Kenya, Malaya, Nigeria, Nyasaland, Pakistan, Sudan, Tanganyika, and Trinidad. None of these regions was still part of the formal empire by 1965.[86] Decreased demand for British publications in these newly independent territories reduced the London Gordon & Gotch's business and forced the firm to look for new revenue streams.[87] The first avenue was to look to Europe as a new market for print media export.[88] Given that Gordon & Gotch had limited prior experience in European markets, this expansion was going to take time. Another avenue Gordon & Gotch pursued was horizontal expansion into a new service: a commercial Computer Centre, which other firms could rent for commercial calculations.[89] The Computer Centre was, like Sellotape, a fairly large step beyond Gordon & Gotch's core activities. Seen with modern eyes, this diversification appears to be a desperate attempt to find short-term profits to counterbalance the diminishing returns of the export business and the forecasted delay in profits from entering the European market.

From the perspective of the company down under, things did not seem so grim. For many firms in Australia, economic development away from ties with British firms increased dramatically after Britain attempted to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1962.[90] The Australian firm of Gordon & Gotch expanded in the 1960s toward still more retailing of Australian authors and periodicals, a process that was encouraged by a contemporary uptick in Australian nationalism.[91] The turn from Britain was further eased by more economic and media opportunities coming from the United States.[92] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Gordon & Gotch increased its sale of American newspapers and magazines. This shift toward American and Australian product was less "geopolitical jockeying," in which multinationals

86. Darwin, *Decolonisation.*
87. Ritter, *Imperial Encore*, 135. Ward, *Untied Kingdom.*
88. Magee, "The Importance of Being British?" 354.
89. LMA.4767.PR.05.03.004, LMA.
90. Curran and Ward, 38.
91. Carter, "Publishing, patronage," 371.
92. In 1960, American books were imported freely for the first time in twenty years, a sign of a turn towards the American media market. Johanson, *Colonial Editions*, 200.

in decolonizing states shift allegiances for political reasons, and more a move of economic necessity.[93] Gordon & Gotch had always been an Australian company, so there was no contradiction in redoubling the firm's national strategy.

Australia's Gordon & Gotch was successful in these years because of the strength of its distribution system. The company maintained a rate of a 20 percent ordinary dividend from 1962 to 1971, no small feat.[94] Profits were slightly lower than they had been in the heady rush of the 1950s, but the business model remained fundamentally strong.[95] Although the 1950s and 1960s were decades of rising Australian engagement with television and decreasing consumption of newspapers, the demand for magazines held firm during this era.[96] British magazines continued to occupy some of that market share, due to the legacy of the connection between the Gordon & Gotches and the robust publishing activity of British print media firms, but Australian and American magazines predominated. The import and sale of British books continued to be a profitable area of activity for the Australian Gordon & Gotch.[97]

In London, business did not look as rosy as the 1960s tipped into the 1970s. The firm began to report its finances in its internal magazine in 1969, and they were dire. In the financial year ending 1968, the firm grossed £8,140,991 but reported a profit of only £50,111. The company's Computer Centre had been expensive, and sales agencies in Sellotape and the packing material Bubblepak had not recouped their investment. Fundamentally, London's Gordon & Gotch was suffering from a shift in the business model of international print media. The London firm had thrived in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the costs of news export had been so high as to encourage the development of a near-monopolistic trading firm like Gordon & Gotch, which could take advantage of economies of scale. The London firm had served as print media export agent for most of Fleet Street, a dynamic that suited both Gordon & Gotch and London's publishers.

By the 1970s, conditions had changed. Media multinationals, previously constrained by problems of distance and communication, were now enabled by telephones and new digital communications.[98] In the 1960s, large print media conglomerates formed and expanded internationally. In 1962, a majority of Britain's most successful magazines were consolidated into one group, International Publishing Corporation (IPC).[99] As of 1971, IPC was operating a branch in Australia under the name of the P. Hamlyn group and reporting profits before tax of $952,000.[100] W.H. Smith could see the writing on the wall—in 1970 it closed its book and periodical export business and transferred control to the British Gordon & Gotch.[101]

Gordon & Gotch was far from the only British media firm feeling the pinch of competition from multinationals in the 1970s. A similar constriction was taking place at the BBC's commercial wing, BBC Enterprises. Where previously sales of programs had been the highest in

93.  Wong, "Flexible Corporate Nationality," 450; Lubinski and Wadhwani, "Geopolitical Jockeying."
94.  "GORDON & GOTCH CHAIRMAN QUIZZED," *The Canberra Times*, June 26, 1971, 19.
95.  "G. & Gotch criticism," *The Canberra Times,* June 24, 1967, 16; "Gordon & Gotch sales up," *The Canberra Times,* November 18, 1967, 15.
96.  Cox and Mowatt, 109.
97.  Cryle, "1940s to the Present," 20.
98.  Jones and de Silva Lopes, 42.
99.  Cox and Mowatt, 90.
100.  "P. Hamlyn Group increases profit," *The Canberra Times*, June 29, 1971, 15.
101.  LMA.4767.PR.04, *New Mercury*, September 1970, no. 17, LMA.

Australia of any region of the world, Australian business occupied only a small fraction of Enterprises' total sales by the 1970s.[102] Where Gordon & Gotch (London) struggled with shipping costs and competition, the BBC wrestled with production costs and competition. For both companies, the entry of more actors into the market had vastly decreased their competitiveness in former colonial regions. In Australia, commercial television stations increasingly purchased their programs from American television producers or made their programs domestically. The case of comedy programs was the one exception in which British programs, and BBC programs, still had a market niche.[103] Yet BBC Enterprises was only one small wing of a company still explicitly domestic in its focus. That company's decline in the Australian market was a concern but not an existential problem. Gordon & Gotch (London), in contrast, was fundamentally an export firm whose business model relied on shipping British news at scale. If Gordon & Gotch's export business slipped, that was the end.

Facing a crisis, the London firm did its best to modernize its workings and expand into the European media distribution business. The firm transitioned to export via airplane instead of traditional sea export and made sea export more efficient using shipping containers.[104] It also introduced shrink-wrap technology, brought into general use in 1970.[105] In practical matters, the firm invested more and more in news export in Europe, forming partnerships with Austrian (Morawa and Co) and French (Hachette) companies to distribute British print media within the Continent.[106] Language related to its international business was updated for the postimperial era—one flyer explicitly advertised the new magazine *West Indian World* claiming, "At long last…a weekly worthy of the West Indian."[107] This was a change in tone from the racially infantilizing text of the 1950s and early 1960s—a sign the firm felt what Harold Macmillan had termed the "winds of change." In shifting its tone from condescension to inclusion of black and brown readers, Gordon & Gotch (London) followed a common pattern taking place across the British print industry in the 1950s and 1960s.[108]

More broadly, the London firm changed its marketing language in the 1970s from one that focused on the British World to text that suggested an integrated global market. The new media campaign branded the European joint venture Hachette Gotch as "the vital link" uniting publisher and distributor "throughout the world."[109] Images showed newspapers shaped into interconnected paper links with taglines such as "Hachette Gotch have the positive approach," or a spiral-bound folder opened to show an image of the globe on one side and an image of overlaid magazines on the other.[110] This was a subtle but real distinction—the London firm was no longer claiming to build Britains all over the world but to function simply as an global trading company. In this transition from national to global language, the London Gordon & Gotch emulated a trend common among British firms after the United Kingdom's

102. *BBC Handbook*, 1962, 5; *BBC Handbook,* 1974, 89.
103. *TV Week*, October 31, 1970; SP1847/1, 27/2/4, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA).
104. LMA.4767.PR.05.03.004, LMA.
105. LMA.4767.PR.04.02.001; LMA.4767.PR.05.03.004, LMA.
106. LMA.4767.PR.04.02.003, LMA.
107. LMA.4767.PR.05.02.014, LMA.
108. Davis, *Postcolonial Literature*; Ritter, *Imperial Encore.*
109. LMA 4767.PR.05.03.014, LMA.
110. LMA.4767.PR.05.03.014; LMA.4767.PR.05.03.011, LMA.

entry to the EEC in 1973.[111] London's Gordon & Gotch, like so many other British firms, was seeking to package itself as modern and competitive with its European counterparts based on its global know-how.

But the London firm was up against stiff competition in the European market, where multinationals and conglomerates had long been well established. The desperate trouble of the London firm is apparent in the constant corporate restructuring and demergers of this era, a trend that seemed to reveal equal interest in hedging risk and in making financial losses less obvious to shareholders.[112] In the early 1970s, shipping came under the umbrella of a new subsidiary, Dawson Brothers Shipping.[113] The business of selling periodicals had been separated out into Hachette Gotch, while the business of air export had been registered as Mercury Airfreight International Limited in 1970. The firm's wing of business in the United States combined with American firm Havas Ltd to become Haventa Ltd in 1973. The shifting of names and corporate structures could not conceal the firm's growing financial problems.

The London firm's expansion into European business and continued investment in a Computer Centre were not financially successful pivots. Profits for 1970 came in at £156,326 and for 1971 at £180,151 on a turnover of £13.3 and £15.8 million, respectively. The post-tax profits for 1971 were closer to £103,000, with corporate tax at 40 percent.[114] A limited breakdown of these numbers reveals that shipping, especially air cargo, was proving expensive for the firm, given the reduced scale of exports, while the publishing component of the firm's activities was the stronghold of profits. The firm's Computer Center finally turned a profit in 1971, although it was nowhere close to recouping the cost of investment. Gordon & Gotch (London) ultimately suffered from being an early adopter of computer technology. Moore's law was against the firm; high capital investment in the earliest computers proved difficult to recoup, and the computers soon needed to be replaced with newer, more powerful ones.[115]

The state of the company was dire so far as employees were concerned. Gordon & Gotch's employee magazine the *New Mercury* wrote that net profits were far too small for the amount of capital employed and that "if jobs are to be secure, our aim must be minimum profit of £450,000 within three years."[116] The solution would be to handle an additional 10 percent of turnover without additional cost, a difficult proposition to say the least. In 1972, with slightly increased Computer Center profits, the firm achieved a profit of £212,220—still a meager shareholder return and less than half of the previously suggested minimum.[117] The subsequent years were not kind to the firm, as the cartelization of oil in the Middle East raised export prices still higher and squeezed profits even further.[118]

The shift in the economics of print media export did not affect Australia's Gordon & Gotch in the same way as the London firm. Gordon & Gotch (Australasia) thrived without the

111. Edgerton, 474.
112. Hannah, *Corporate Economy*, 155.
113. LMA.4767.PR.05.03.005, LMA.
114. LMA.4767.PR.04.01.003. *New Mercury*, September/October 1971, no. 25, LMA.
115. Moore, "Cramming More Components."
116. LMA.4767.PR.04.01.003. *New Mercury*, September/October 1971, no. 25, LMA.
117. LMA.4767.PR.04.01.003. *New Mercury*, 1973, no. 31, LMA.
118. Edgerton, 406.

business of the London firm.[119] This was in great part because Gordon & Gotch's power in Australia had always been in the thoroughness of its distribution system coupled with its knowledge of local taste. These were attributes that the firm could exercise on behalf of domestic magazines, American magazines, and the newly printed multinational magazines in Australia.[120] The importance of Gordon & Gotch's distribution and retailing was made clear in 1979, when the firm bought and integrated the retail bookselling locations of Australian firm Angus & Robertson.[121] The firm may have no longer been setting records for profit as it had done in the 1950s, but it were still Australia's largest print media importer and distributor.[122] The Australian firm of Gordon & Gotch would eventually be acquired by the Herald and Weekly Times (HWT) group in 1986, and then acquired by Rupert Murdoch's New Corporation in its purchase of HWT.[123]

With the upswell of new media sources came the concomitant decline of old sources: British media printed in Britain was no longer omnipresent in Australia. The two firms of Gordon & Gotch had previously, through their mutually beneficial business models, enabled a common community of readers that transcended oceans, an imagined community linked by newspapers, magazines, and books. As global political economies began to change, both Gordon & Gotches were forced to develop new business strategies: one domestic and one European. The impact on consumers of this shift of business models was to disaggregate what had been a single reading community into two separate reading communities. Now, increasingly, Australians could access print media designed for them. This included not only a greater proportion of Australian-owned print media but also the outputs of the new print media MNEs and licensed brands from Britain and the United States operating in Australia. In the 1970s, for the first time since its colonization, Australian print media culture was beginning to fray the ties of connection to Britain.[124]

In the realm of magazines and news, cultural separation from Britain took place in Australia over the 1960s and 1970s. As a phenomenon, this cultural shift was caused by political forces that pushed for a "new nationalism" in Australia, but it was also caused by global changes in the political economy that included domestic import licensing, the expansion of domestic competition, the rise of print media multinationals, and the rising cost of global shipping for London's Gordon & Gotch. Studying the divergent trajectories of the two Gordon & Gotches helps explain the timing of the British media's decline within Australian mainstream culture.

## Conclusion

The history of the two Gordon & Gotches demonstrates the role that print-capitalism played within the British World in connecting Britain to its areas of settlement through common

119. "HIGHER COSTS Gordon & G. lift profit to $1.3m," *The Canberra Times*, June 10, 1970, 25.

120. "Advertising," *The Australian Women's Weekly,* August 11, 1971, 56.

121. "COMPANY NEWS," *The Canberra Times,* November 28, 1978, 17.

122. "Value of exports rose by $830.6m," *The Canberra Times*, May 24, 1973, 19; Cryle, "Gordon & Gotch," 225.

123. "HWT not to extend bid for G&G," *The Canberra Times*, September 6, 1986, 10.

124. Carter and Griffin-Foley, "Culture and Media," 243.

newspaper and magazine reading habits. This was a cultural connection fostered by private sector businesses with specific advantages of scale, communication, and independence that helped them achieve near-monopolistic status in their markets. The Gordon & Gotches also force an expansion in our common narratives of British World cultural history. Current scholarship argues that the presence of British media in Australia was either the result of state nationalism or the inevitable product of impersonal market forces. The case of the Gordon & Gotches reveals a third option, in which British media was imported to Australia as a commercial business venture. Newspapers were physical objects that needed to be sent via ship or plane abroad. British media presence in the empire, particularly in Australia, could result from the contingent choices of entrepreneurs who were responding to political and economic factors as well as demand from consumers. The influence of Gordon & Gotch confirms what Valeska Huber and Jürgen Osterhammel have recently argued—that the movement of media and the development of public sentiment were processes shaped in part by international big business.[125]

If the history of the two Gordon & Gotches helps explain how cultural ties are reinforced, it can also help explain how those ties withered in the twentieth century. Both the British and Australian Gordon & Gotches made decisions in the wake of World War II to change their strategies, driven by a changing political economy for media. The London firm, losing markets in the decolonizing world and unable to increase exports to Australia due to import licensing conditions, attempted to build new domestic businesses. Later, as markets in the empire became more competitive, the firm attempted to pivot to European markets but lost out to the new print media multinationals and conglomerates. The Australian branch of Gordon & Gotch, for its part, developed away from the London branch first out of necessity, as import licensing restrictions forced the firm to develop its domestic distribution business. Later, the firm continued to invest in its domestic and American distributions. The company did not intentionally dissociate from the London firm but reoriented toward more profitable opportunities, which resulted in a smaller distribution of British product. Political decisions certainly shaped this shift—in particular, restrictions on import licensing and Britain's attempt to join the EEC in 1962—but the increasingly small market share of British periodicals in Australia was the result of many more factors than the doings of Whitehall, including the state of the domestic newspaper industry, the growth of American media empires, and the rise of print multinationals.

The business history of Gordon & Gotch thus begins to respond to questions that have long frustrated historians of Australia: Why did independent cultural development take place so late and why did it manifest in fits and starts? This article has argued that the rise of a uniquely Australian magazine and newspaper culture was hampered by the presence of a near-monopolistic firm in the market, which pursued a business strategy that gave preference to British magazines over domestic or international alternatives. As long as this strategy was profitable for both the firm in Australia and the firm in London, it was maintained. The London firm began to shift away from this strategy as its volume of international exports declined due to a loss of markets in the decolonizing world and an increase in competition in the

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125.  Huber and Osterhammel, *Global Publics*, 24.

Commonwealth. By the 1970s, when the London firm began in earnest to focus on Europe instead of the Commonwealth, it was too late. The Australian firm, for its part, began to move to a more domestically oriented business model under the constraints imposed by World War II. The firm did not fully shift its strategy for some time, however, and continued to import British media into Australia. British print media dominance in Australia only eroded after a series of economic developments in the 1960s made it clear that there was more profit to be found in domestic and American media than in collaborating with the firm in London. The case of the Gordon & Gotches thus illustrates the role firms could play in the dissemination of imperial culture through print-capitalism, but also the impact their strategies could have on the attenuation of imperial connections.

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