

**Popular Reading and the First Information Management Revolution:
The Staff Magazine in Britain before the Second World War**

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Appearing around the turn of the twentieth century and significantly increasing in number between the wars, staff magazines were organs of companies and other organisations that were internally edited primarily for consumption by employees. Most were funded by the organisation itself and directed by approved editors, but a small minority owed their existence to autonomous staff associations. The content of early staff magazines was eclectic. The high degree of ‘internal specialisation’ that characterised the staff magazine makes it the subject of multiple potential historical investigations. However, this paper will draw attention to two contexts in which the staff magazine developed. Firstly, it is important to register the growing popularity of newspaper and magazine reading in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, for it was within this growing culture of popular reading that the staff magazine flourished. The paper’s primary lens of analysis, however, is that of information management. Staff magazines began to appear and multiply at the time they did because their instigators viewed them as a kind ‘information glue’ in organisations that across society and the economy were becoming larger and more fragmented, thereby requiring new ways – ‘informational’ ways – of managing them. Staff magazines were as much valuable handbooks of information as vehicles for entertainment and distraction. The revolution in pre-computer information management beginning in the late-nineteenth century was a major driver of the medium of the staff magazine. Against a backdrop of increasingly hostile international markets, in-house journalism was seen as a new and useful instrument of business leadership in the struggle to bridge gaps in internal communications, combat the effects of increasing intensity of work, reduce alienation and ameliorate specialisation – all of which had been exacerbated by corporate enlargement and the changing structure of industries and services. At a time when production and the workplace were being subjected to streamlining, rationalisation and new scientific methods of management, the staff magazine offered explanations of these changes as well as strategies for coping with them. They helped disseminate messages from management that attempted not only to motivate and rally staff and humanize the organisation, but also inform and educate the workforce in a way that in today’s lexicon would be defined as ‘organisational learning’.