

The pages of history now online for all to see

By Charlotte Galt

news@southwarknews.org

EARLIER THIS month 160 years of the world's first pictorial paper was launched online.

The Illustrated London News (ILN) archive is now available at the touch of a button, covering events from Southwark amongst its pages. In an instantaneous multimedia world, it is difficult to imagine the effort involved in producing that first copy in 1842, or the effect it had on how its readers perceived the world. In an age before radio, television, or popular travel, the visual impact on its readers imagination means that The ILN occupies a distinct place in social history.

Costing sixpence, and produced mainly for the Victorian middle classes, its aim was to encourage social reform, but without affiliation to any political party. The paper's proprietor, Herbert Ingram was originally a printers apprentice from Lincolnshire, and after moving to London, set up the paper's office on Fleet Street, opposite St Clement Danes church.

The pictures would be drawn by artists who'd be given descriptions of events by reporters. In the early days they would then have to use their imagination to draw the events described. Later on and during prolonged events like the Crimean war, artists would be sent out to observe for themselves. The artist would draw their image onto a woodblock, which would then be passed to an engraver, who would, with a magnifying glass attached to one eye, bevel out the fine detail of the picture, ready to be printed. This system was cheaper and quicker than traditional printing methods, and allowed for the level of production needed to take the paper to the masses.

In 1843, the paper offered readers a panoramic print of a photograph of the Colosseum, which was met with ferocious demand, as most had never seen a photograph before, and in the 1855 Christmas issue, it became the first English newspaper to include colour printed pictures. Ingram also initiated concepts such as special editions, supplements and fold out features to capture the

imagination of his readers. Clearly determined to be a revolutionary force in journalism, the paper covered stories such as The Great Exhibition, and was the first to report on Howard Carter opening King Tutankhamen's tomb.

In 1843 also, the high demand of the paper meant that an additional property behind the Fleet Street office had be purchased, and two printing presses were ordered from Middleton of Southwark, so that the paper could be printed on the premises with high tech machinery. The building was a hive of activity, with artists, reporters and printers working all hours of the day, often sleeping at the there to ensure the paper was ready in time.

The Illustrated London News ceased publication in 2003, and was until recently only available as a hard copy from libraries. Now, despite being out of circulation, its enduring quality and pioneering dedication to journalism has ensured its place as a modern day reference. The Illustrated London News is available to students, researchers and historians from www.gale.cengage.co.uk/iln.



G. DODGSON. "A LONDON MARKET ON CHRISTMAS EVE." Illustrated London News (London, England), Saturday, December 24, 1853;



"WHEN CHARING CROSS STOOD ON A VILLAGE GREEN: OLD LONDON." Illustrated London News (London, England), Saturday, October 29, 1921