

Example 1: Reporting the Strike (Master's, Humanities)

Level and discipline: Master's, History (Humanities)

Word count of the sample: approximately 1,000 words

Context: A one-year part-time MA History dissertation proposal, submitted to a UK department and marked by a supervisor and a second reader before the dissertation was cleared to proceed.

Reporting the Strike: Local Newspaper Coverage of the 1984-85

Miners' Strike in Nottinghamshire

Abstract

This study examines how two Nottinghamshire papers, the Nottingham Evening Post and the Mansfield Chad, reported the 1984-85 miners' strike across its twelve months. Nottinghamshire was a divided coalfield, where most miners kept working while a minority struck, so the local press wrote for readers on opposite sides of a bitter dispute. The research asks how each paper framed the strikers, the working miners, and the police, and how that framing moved as the dispute wore on. The method pairs a quantitative content analysis of front pages with close qualitative reading of editorials and letters. Archival material comes mainly through the British Newspaper Archive. The project adds a county-level account of press framing that national-press studies have mostly passed over, and it should interest historians of the strike, media historians, and scholars of regional identity.

Annotation: The gap is pinned to one anomaly, the divided coalfield, which gives a marker a concrete reason the work needs doing. A general complaint that local coverage is understudied would not persuade anyone.

Introduction and background

The 1984-85 strike split Nottinghamshire more sharply than almost any coalfield in Britain. Most miners across the county stayed at work, and the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers grew out of that split in 1985. For a local paper, this produced an unusual editorial problem. Its readership included striking families, working miners, police drafted in from other forces, and shopkeepers watching their towns turn tense. Any report risked alienating a large part of the audience. National coverage of the strike already has a deep literature, with television, the tabloids, and the confrontation at Orgreave all well documented. County-level coverage has had far less attention, and Nottinghamshire fits the dominant solidarity narrative badly, which is the exact reason it rewards a closer look. This study treats the local paper as a historical actor rather than a relay for national events, because its daily choices about which villages and voices to feature built a version of the strike that readers absorbed and later remembered.

Annotation: The section ends on why the topic matters now, which answers the examiner's unspoken question early. The named anomaly does the persuasive work a vague gap statement cannot.

Literature review

Three bodies of work frame the project. Studies of strike media have concentrated on national outlets and argued that broadcasters foregrounded picket-line violence over the miners' economic

case, a reading later historians have refined and contested. Scholarship on the English provincial press shows that local titles built their authority on proximity, knowing the pit villages and councillors by name, while depending on local advertisers whom a strike could unsettle. That double bind, influence plus commercial exposure, is a pressure no national title felt. Memory studies supplies the third strand. Halbwachs treated remembering as a social process that groups perform together (Halbwachs 1992), and Nora extended the idea to the texts through which communities store a usable past (Nora 1989). A run of local papers is one such text, a day-by-day record of how a community described events to itself. One gap runs across all three literatures. National framing is documented, memory scholars have the tools, and no study has yet applied them to the Nottinghamshire local press.

Annotation: Three literatures are arranged so they converge on a single gap, which stops the review reading as a pile of summaries. The theory earns its place because the method later treats newspapers as memory records.

Research questions and objectives

One central question drives the study: how did the Evening Post and the Chad frame the strikers, the working miners, and the policing of the dispute across 1984 and 1985, and how did that framing move over the twelve months? Three objectives support it:

1. Measure the volume and prominence of strike coverage in each paper, month by month.
2. Identify the recurring language used for each group, and track how it shifted as the dispute hardened.

3. Compare the two papers' editorial positions against the social and commercial contexts of their circulation areas.

Annotation: Each objective maps onto one stage of the method, so the plan can clearly deliver what the question asks. Objectives that no method could reach are the fastest route to a reject.

Methodology

The design runs in two stages on a defined sample. A full census of every issue would overrun a Master's timescale, so stage one uses a constructed-week sample: for each month, one Monday is chosen, then one Tuesday, and so on in rotation, which yields about 96 issues per paper without seasonal bias. Each sampled front page is coded for the amount of strike coverage, its position, and the group named in the headline, with the framing classed as sympathetic, hostile, or neutral. A second coder checks a ten per cent subsample so the coding stays reliable. Stage two reads every editorial and letters page across eight weeks aligned with major events, among them the strike's start, the working miners' court actions, the formation of the UDM, and the national return to work. This stage follows established critical discourse analysis and treats the letters page as a space editors managed, not a neutral mirror of opinion. Digitised issues come through the British Newspaper Archive, with any gaps filled at Nottinghamshire Archives, which is within travelling distance. Ethical approval is not required, because the material is published and historical and involves no participants.

Annotation: The constructed-week sample is the strongest move, making a year of two papers workable and defending the choice in method terms. Confirmed archive

access matters more than beginners expect, because a proposal that rests on unreachable sources collapses at the viva.

Timeline

The project runs across a twelve-month part-time schedule.

Phase	Months	Work
1	1-2	Finalise coding frame, pilot on one month of issues
2	3-6	Content analysis of the full constructed-week sample
3	5-8	Discourse analysis of marked-week editorials and letters
4	8-10	Cross-paper comparison and interpretation
5	10-12	Drafting, supervisor review, revision

Annotation: The phases overlap on purpose, which is how research actually runs. A dedicated revision phase signals that the writer expects a first draft to need work.

Expected outcomes and significance

The dissertation will deliver the first county-level account of how the Nottinghamshire press framed the 1984-85 strike. Three outcomes follow. The first is a dataset of coded front pages that later researchers can reuse, covering two papers across a full year. The second is a comparative reading that shows how a divided coalfield produced local coverage of its own kind, with less of the solidarity story that dominates national accounts. The third is a contribution to memory studies, through evidence of how local reporting supplied the raw material for the way the county remembers the strike today. The significance reaches past the single case, since Nottinghamshire tests what the provincial press did when a national conflict divided its own readers. A short article for a regional history journal is a realistic secondary output.

Annotation: Each outcome is concrete enough to picture, and the reusable dataset offers value past the dissertation itself. The scope stays honest, with the secondary article flagged as realistic.

References (illustrative, Chicago author-date)

Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nora, Pierre. 1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26: 7-24.

British Newspaper Archive. n.d. *Nottingham Evening Post and Mansfield Chad*, 1984-1985.
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.