

The Manchester Guardian.

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The Manchester Guardian was founded in 1821 by a cotton merchant, John Taylor, with backing from a group of friends. This was two years after the notorious Peterloo Massacre, in which the yeomanry had charged on a crowded demonstration in Manchester with some deaths and many injuries. It was also after another newspaper, the Manchester Observer had been shut down by the police after it strongly supported the radical views of the speakers at Peterloo.

Taylor had been hostile to the radical reformers. In their prospectus, they said they would zealously enforce the principles of civil and religious liberty, and would warmly advocate the cause of Reform. But other + local newspapers described the Manchester Guardian as the “foul prostitute and dirty parasite of the worst portion of the mill-owners”

It was published weekly on Saturdays until 1836, when a Wednesday edition was added. In 1855 the abolition of Stamp Duty on newspapers finally made it possible to publish the paper daily, at a reduced cover price of 2d.

The paper opposed slavery and supported free trade. It was critical of many aspects of the American Civil War.

CP Scott became editor in 1872, and owner of the paper from 1907 following the death of Taylor’s son. He pledged that the principles laid down in the founder’s will would be upheld by retaining the independence of the paper. These principles were later articulated as “Comment is free,

but facts are sacred”. The voice of opponents no less than that of friends has a right to be heard.

Scott was editor for 57 years, and was responsible for laying down the values of the paper which have lasted to this day. The paper’s moderate editorial line became more radical, and it supported Gladstone when the Liberal party split in 1886. It opposed the second Boer War contrary to public opinion. Scott supported the movement for women’s suffrage, but was critical of their policies of direct action. He thought the Suffragettes courage and devotion was “worthy of a better cause and sane leadership”. It has been suggested that Scott’s criticisms reflected a widespread disdain for those women who “transgressed the gender expectations of Edwardian society.

After retiring from an active role, Scott passed control of the paper to his two sons, who made an agreement that, if either of them died, the survivor would buy out their share. This happened in 1932 leaving JR Scott as sole owner of the paper. He concluded that the only way of maintaining the independence of the Manchester Guardian and of the highly profitable Manchester Evening News was to give away his inheritance, and, in 1936, ownership of the paper passed to the Scott Trust; it has owned the paper ever since.

The Manchester Guardian had a reputation for slight eccentricity in this period, as exemplified by the absence of horse racing information. It was teased mercilessly by Private Eye among others, who took to referring to it as the Grauniad because of the poor quality of its proof-reading

The Trust has the duty of maintaining the radical editorial tradition of the paper, and to devote the whole of profits towards building up the reserves of the Company and expending and improving the newspapers.

In 1959, the paper changed its name to The Guardian.



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Additional notes

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Sources:

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