

THE BARON AND THE BREWER: POLITICAL SUBSIDY AND THE LAST YEARS OF THE MANCHESTER COURIER

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At the end of the nineteenth century, the newspaper industry in Britain was transformed by the rise of the 'new journalism', pioneered by George Newnes, Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) and, in the north west, Edward Hulton.¹ It saw the production of cheap, popular, diverting newspapers whose circulation and profitability rapidly outstripped the existing press. The arrival of these new halfpenny sheets did not of itself cause all of the rest of the press serious problems, but it did exacerbate, sometimes fatally, difficulties which were already being experienced by serious political journals, and by the daily provincial papers in particular. These problems had been evident for some time, and were worsened by the impact of the Boer War. The circulations of many penny papers were falling, and advertising was proving hard to come by. Substantial sections of the heavyweight daily political press needed external support if serious papers were to survive in numbers. Politicians, however, no longer called the tune with proprietors, and were generally less able to subsidise loss-making organs from their own resources. The editors of the significant political papers which aspired to form opinion Buckle, Garvin, Ware and Gwynne, to mention only Unionists, became therefore more dependent than ever before on the support of press barons, political parties, ambitious individuals seeking political influence, or other profitable journalistic properties.²

In Manchester, the situation mirrored the national picture. The two penny papers which aspired to be taken seriously were the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Courier*, both in difficulties in the early years of the century. The former, which its editor C.P. Scott saw as the leading Liberal daily in the country, not merely in the region, lost circulation and advertising as a consequence of its critical stand on the Boer War, but it already had troubles on both these fronts before the war had begun. The death of J.E. Taylor in 1905 created additional problems for Scott, and the financial status of the paper was not secured until 1910. The *Manchester Courier* which aspired to rival the *Guardian* had problems which were even more acute. This article looks at the history of the *Courier* from the 1890s to its termination in 1916. It examines the nature of its commercial problems, the reasons why it needed subsidy if it was to survive, why that subsidy was given for a period of time, and why in spite of subsidy the paper eventually ceased publication.

Manchester Courier

The *Manchester Courier* had been founded in 1825 and began daily publication in 1864. Its owners were the Sowler family and its politics staunchly Tory. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Thomas Sowler, the head of the family, was described as the paymaster of Tory Lancashire, 'the chief man to find money, etc, for the party when Conservatism was a very unpopular creed in Manchester'³. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that he

was knighted in 1889, the honour being secured for him by A.J. Balfour, MP for East Manchester since 1885 and nephew of the Prime Minister of the day, Lord Salisbury. For the Sowers, newspapers were primarily a business, which also conferred political influence and political obligations. The *Courier* was only one of three properties which they controlled. The other two were the *Manchester Evening Mail*, founded as an offshoot of the *Courier* in 1874, and the *Manchester Weekly Times*, at one time the largest penny weekly in the country, and bought in 1891 along with the *Manchester Examiner* 'for a pittance'. The *Examiner*, formerly a Liberal paper, had become Liberal Unionist in 1888. The sum of £90,000 had been invested in it in the two years prior to the Sowler takeover, in an attempt to build up its circulation and influence, to no avail. It was closed in 1894. By this time Sir Thomas Sowler was dead, and his four sons, Thomas, Harry, Frank and Arthur, had turned the family business into a limited company with a capital of £305,000. E.B. Iwan-Muller, former *Courier*, *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Daily Telegraph* journalist and Balfour *confidant*, hinted later that the Sowler properties had been substantially overvalued: 'The late T. Sowler (Junior) sold to the public for £300,000 what to my knowledge was not worth more than £75,000.' Accusations that the Sowers had become more interested in their own prosperity than in party-service were to recur.⁵

T. Sowler and Sons Limited declared a dividend of two and a half per cent in 1894, and the company continued to make good profits for the next couple of years. By 1900, however, the situation had changed dramatically for the worse. It was sufficiently serious for the company's shareholders to commission an external examination of the business from the *Morning Post* in London in February 1900.⁶ The report was completed six months later. It concentrated on the *Courier* and the *Evening Mail*, as the *Weekly Times* was not presenting problems. The report compared the position of the two papers in 1900 with that of 1896, and showed that a profit of £18,289 on the properties in the earlier year had become a loss of £11,547 four years later. Almost all of the

losses were attributable to the *Evening Mail*. Both papers had been increased in size by half, with a consequent increase in costs of production. This expansion was apparently funded by the sale of shares in the *Evening Mail* in 1897. The aim of the *Courier* was to match its local competitor in the amount of reading matter it contained, and in terms of quality. The *Morning*



Thomas Sowler Junior.

Post's report affirmed that this had been successfully achieved, with the *Courier* judged to be 'a much more worthy rival of the *Guardian* than formerly'. The *Evening Mail* was having to compete with the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* which Edward Hulton had set up in 1897, as well as the *Guardian's* evening stablemate, the *Manchester Evening News*. Both Sowler publications did increase circulation, but neither this increase, nor advertising revenue, compensated for the increased costs of production. Larger papers with multiple editions resulted not only in a bigger wages bill and greater material costs, particularly paper and ink, but in more spoiled copies, and, as attempts were made to boom circulation, more returned copies. As the costs of production now exceeded the cover price of each copy, profitability could only be attained by increasing advertising revenue, but that was actually falling, the *Courier* losing £4,131 worth of business between 1896 and 1900. Nevertheless its loss in 1900 was only £393, whereas the *Evening Mail's* was a catastrophic £11,154. Expenditure simply had to be cut. The *Morning Post* consultant suggested various economies, but the main recommendations were that advertising revenue must be increased, the distributions system overhauled, fewer editions must be produced, and the size of both papers reduced from twelve pages to eight. These changes should be overseen by a newly appointed business manager who would have control of all administrative and organisational matters. If this was not done, then the *Evening Mail* must be closed. The *Courier* could still produce an effective paper, even if reduced in size, by exercising tighter editorial control to eliminate stories which were of little national significance and no local relevance, and condensing other material. The paper should only be increased in size on special occasions, or to accommodate more advertising.

The 'Wunderkinds'

Any measures which were taken in relation to the *Evening Mail* did not have the desired effect, for the paper continued to make losses – £8,200 in 1902 – which led to its closure. This was a source of concern to those local Tories who felt that the evening press offered the possibility of reaching the masses more effectively than any other form of propaganda. Consequently, the need for a replacement for the *Evening Mail* was a constant Tory activist theme over the next few years, particularly after the outbreak of civil war in the party over tariff reform after 1903. As far as the *Courier* was concerned, attempts were made to secure further investment. Arthur Balfour was said to have been induced to put money into the paper, but efforts centred on persuading Alfred Harmsworth, the *wunderkind* of the 'new journalism', to take an interest. There were rumours abroad in Manchester early in 1902 that Harmsworth had bought the *Courier* for £80,000, which alarmed J.E. Taylor of the *Guardian*, for that paper was in difficulties. With circulation down by over a quarter, advertising revenue falling, and the *Evening News* losing out to Hulton's *Evening Chronicle*, Taylor and C.P. Scott were worried at the effect a Harmsworth takeover might have, worries which can only have been reinforced by the knowledge that Harmsworth already had a presence in Manchester in the form of the northern edition of the *Daily Mail* which had been published there, enormously successfully, since 1900. In fact, it was not until the autumn of 1904 that Harmsworth agreed to take over the paper. By that time, Balfour had already conferred a knighthood upon him, for he was involved in supporting Conservative local newspapers in both the south east and south west of the country.⁷

Many local Conservatives had been on tenterhooks during this period. The party nationally was beginning to be riven by the tariff reform controversy, whilst electoral unpopularity was manifest in a string of poor by-election performances, nationally and locally. In the north west, the Conservatives lost Bury to the Liberals in the spring of 1902. Contested seats were held at East Toxteth just before Christmas in the same year, and at West Derby, Preston and Chorley in 1903, all with much reduced majorities, whilst Stalybridge was lost to the Liberals in the first week of January, 1905. The *Evening Mail* was no more, and the *Courier* seemed on the brink of following it. Harmsworth therefore appeared to many of them as a saviour. Not all, however, were enthusiastic when rumours of the new arrangements appeared likely to be confirmed. As with almost all Tory affairs at that time, the stance a person took on tariffs determined a whole host of other political reactions. One prominent local Tory, a keen free trader like many others in the region, viewed Harmsworth's new role with dismay. W.J. Galloway, MP for South West Manchester and a large engineering employer, wrote angrily to Balfour's political secretary J.S. Sandars that his offer to raise £60,000 to save the *Courier* had been ignored, that Harmsworth's proprietorship would mean that the *Courier* would become a tariff reform paper, and that 'tariff reform in Manchester will ruin us'.⁸

What prompted Harmsworth to ride to the *Courier's* rescue? Although Jack Sandars attempted to argue that the paper represented a sound commercial investment from Harmsworth's point of view, the new owner made it clear privately that he had put money into the paper for political reasons. 'From the point of view of a business investment, I would not consider it at all', he wrote to the experienced north-west newspaperman A.F. Stephenson in October 1904.⁹ Galloway and several other local Tories believed that the political reasons related to policy, specifically 'constructive policy' as its adherents usually described tariff reform, and the subsequent policy of the paper gives some credence to this. Harmsworth's version of tariff reform, though, was not a whole-hogging one, as he harboured considerable resistance to any suggestion of food taxes.

Harmsworth was undoubtedly a Conservative, and susceptible to calls to aid the party, but he received many of these. His response to the Manchester appeal was positive because of the Prime Minister, Balfour's, association with the city, and because of a desire for further honours and political acceptance. Though often contemptuous of party officials, and of senior political figures, Harmsworth craved social and political respectability, which made him willing to please in certain circumstances. That his peerage followed the subsidy of the *Courier* has led some people, both contemporaries and historians, to assume that the one secured the other, but other stories of the services which ensured his elevation abound, many of limited credibility. Few can doubt that it resulted from political services, and that his willingness to subsidise Conservative newspapers was an important element in them.¹⁰

The *Courier* was valued at £114,500 when Harmsworth assumed control, and had made a loss of £4,600 in 1903–04. Of the 5,000 ordinary shares, he held 3,144. The second largest ordinary shareholder was the man whom Harmsworth had selected as the new editor, James Nicol Dunn. Dunn was a forty-nine year old Scot who had entered journalism after graduating from Aberdeen University, and had worked for the *Scotsman* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* before taking

the chair at the *Morning Post* in 1897. Harmsworth was clearly keen to recruit him, for he offered him a fifth of the ordinary shares, as well as a seven-year contract which guaranteed his salary, and a seat on the Board. Dunn wrote to Oliver Borthwick, son of Lord Glenesk, who owned the *Morning Post*, that he had been offered higher salaries before, which he had always refused, but he could not turn down a stake in what he believed could become a valuable property. Dunn was known to Balfour, and had close links with the tariff reformers in the Conservative party. He had, of course, been in charge at the *Morning Post* when it had reported on the problems of the *Courier* for the Sowers, though it is not clear what role he played in producing the analysis. It is tempting to assume that prior knowledge of the problems of the *Courier* would commend him to Harmsworth as the man to revitalise it. However, others did not see Dunn as an innovator: the *Morning Post* under his stewardship was said to have operated as in the age of Disraeli. It therefore seems likely that he was selected because of his political approach, and his experience in working on exactly the kind of weighty political papers that the *Courier* had always aspired to match.¹¹ This interpretation is supported by Harmsworth's selection of Albert Stephenson as the paper's managing director. Stephenson had experience of a large number of newspapers, from Newcastle, Southport, Merseyside, Halifax and Oldham. He had qualified as a printer's mechanic after a spell in the merchant navy. Most of his experience was managerial, and, at the time of Harmsworth's offer, he had interests in several local Conservative sheets, which he was to retain. His experience and his party loyalty meant that he was continuously in demand by Tory proprietors in the north west. Harmsworth's attempt to revive the paper was at least as much dependent on his expertise in the nuts and bolts side of the business as on Dunn's political direction.¹²

The only other significant shareholder was Harry Sowler, eldest of the surviving Sowler brothers. He had 500 ordinary shares, and continued to own the *Weekly Times*, which was printed on the *Courier*'s presses. A condition of Harmsworth's takeover was that the shareholders must agree to forego any entitlement to dividends until the paper was turning a profit. All accepted this, a decision which Sowler was later to regret.¹³

News of Harmsworth's purchase of a majority holding in the *Courier* was announced in January 1905, when the proprietor travelled to Manchester to inspect his purchase. Local Tories entertained both the new owner and his new editor at a celebratory dinner, after which Harmsworth returned to London. This was his first and last visit to Manchester on *Courier* business. The paper was left in the hands of Dunn and Stephenson. They proceeded to implement changes, the former in the policy field, the latter in day-to-day operations. Dunn, as Galloway had feared, placed increasing emphasis on tariff reform as the policy which the Conservatives needed to revive their fortunes, protect employment, and raise revenue to pay for social reform. This involved handling the 'King of Lancashire', Eddie Stanley, who became the seventeenth Earl of Derby in 1908, with some care, for Stanley was loyal to Balfour rather than to Birmingham, and lukewarm on the fiscal question. Dunn did this in several ways. Editorials were fulsome in praise of Stanley whenever he made speeches which nodded in the direction of tariffs, or which were susceptible to having a tariff reform spin put on them by the *Courier*. Reservations which Stanley might express were given little prominence, politely corrected, or ignored. The disastrous electoral showing of Conservatives in the general

election of January 1906, which swept away Balfour and all the other Manchester Tory members from Westminster, provided the opportunity for greater vigour in the paper in the cause of reform in general, and tariff reform could be wrapped up in the overall demand for change. There was a demand for a shake-up at the centre of the Conservative machine, and Dunn associated the *Courier* with that movement, and also drew conclusions about the necessity for new brooms to be at work locally. A series of articles on the necessity of reform began on 21 February 1906, the theme of which was that reform must incorporate policy as well as organisation. 'We live in democratic days', the editorial on Saint Patrick's Day, 1906, proclaimed, 'The only hope for the party is to be in touch with the great masses of the people. It is not sufficient to instruct them by speeches and literature. They must be admitted by a generous representation to the councils of the party'. This was exactly the line of the Chamberlain faction, which believed that the vast majority of party activists were tariff reformers, and their admission 'by a generous representation' would see whole-hogging triumphant.

Dunn used the paper to publicise the activities of the Unionist Propaganda Club from the spring of 1906 onwards. The Club organised dinners, debates and model lectures across the region, and aimed to revive the numerous local Conservative Clubs as political discussion centres. The Club's leading light was J. Saxon Mills, a barrister turned author and journalist, who was a frequent *Courier* contributor. Indeed, without the *Courier* it is doubtful if the Propaganda Club would have existed, for the paper was its chief support; editorials regularly praised its work and the news pages puffed as well as reported its meetings.

Accompanying this strong sense of political direction was an increase in financial and commercial coverage, designed to ensure that the *Guardian* was matched in these departments. Of course, this involved increased expenditure, but there appeared to be money in plenty in the first year or so of the Dunn regime. Stephenson and S.R. Crapnell, the managing editor, were engaged in modernising the paper's Cannon Street headquarters, putting in electric power and new equipment. They were also seeking greater advertising revenue, and vigorously canvassing in the surrounding towns to improve sales. Both Dunn and Stephenson felt, justifiably, that a much improved paper was being produced, whilst Crapnell insisted that people were giving up the *Guardian* to take the *Courier*.¹⁴

The political value of the revived paper seemed to be proved by the Conservative success in turning out the sitting Liberal member (and turncoat Conservative) Winston Churchill in the North West Manchester by-election in the spring of 1908. The fact that the seat was the most likely of all in the city to be Conservative, because of the business vote, was forgotten in the euphoria of victory over the man who had been the central figure in the north west in the Liberal landslide of 1906. The fact that Churchill frequently mocked the *Courier* in his speeches made the Tory victory all the sweeter in Cannon Street, especially as the paper sold an additional 10,000 copies a week during the campaign.¹⁵

The euphoria did not last long, however. A rise in circulation could be achieved only in the artificial circumstances of a by-election; the efforts to boost it in normal times had not brought permanent results after 1906. Nor was advertising revenue increasing. Indeed, in this department, the paper was in such difficulty that, when one of its more substantial advertisers was slow to pay his bills, it was deemed impolitic

to press him lest the account be lost altogether. The editor, Dunn, had also become disillusioned with local Unionists whom he described as 'a wretched lot' who would not support the paper. By the summer of 1908 he was writing gloomily that the 'blight of the paper seems to kill everything'. Plans to set up a local evening paper using the *Courier* presses had run into the sand. Stephenson was thoroughly fed up and on the brink of resignation. In short, as Northcliffe (as Harmsworth now was) remarked to Balfour, the paper was in one of its 'quinquennial crises' and near to collapse.¹⁶

Northcliffe's own role in the sinking morale was not insignificant. If his purpose in rescuing the *Courier* four years earlier had been to secure a peerage, that had been achieved. The paper showed no signs of turning the commercial corner. After making a small profit in 1905-06, losses had been resumed, and by 1908 the chief shareholder was keen to lay down the burden of support. He had liquidated some of his provincial loss-making interests elsewhere, in the Eastern Press and in Portsmouth, originally undertaken for party reasons, whilst his interest in the *Globe* had waned. His takeover of *The Times* in April 1908 gave him a new interest, of far greater weight and political significance to the Tory party than any other property. He was determined to run it in a manner which would bring him credit, which meant, at a substantial loss. Hence his desire to see someone else take on responsibility for the *Courier* in the summer of 1908. Crisis meetings were held at Carmelite House, Northcliffe's London headquarters, which eventually saw Northcliffe resign as Chairman of the *Courier* and the paper survive under new direction. The saviour this time was a Manchester brewer, Alderman William Thomas Rothwell.

'An Unobtrusive Gentleman'

Rothwell was a Manchester Tory Alderman, originally from the Haydock area of west Lancashire, who had moved to the town in the 1870s and made his fortune by building up the Newton Heath Brewery-Company. Rothwell's Ales were sold in a string of pubs and off-licences throughout Manchester and its surrounding districts, and the company took over the Bardsley Brewery, situated between Oldham and Ashton, in 1902. He was Chairman of the Liquor Trades Confederation between 1901 and 1906, and worked with other brewers to try to avoid a split on the fiscal question. Although he was an undemonstrative man, he was himself firmly in the tariff reform camp. He had taken up tariffs in middle age after years of interest in bimetallism, and was a Vice-President of the Manchester Tariff Reform League. He had become involved in local government and was for several years Chairman of the Baths Committee of Manchester City Council. In that position he was a noted opponent of allowing mixed bathing in the Corporation swimming baths. He was Chairman of the North East Manchester Conservative Association, a constituency which the Tories had held continuously since 1885 until Sir James Fergusson, the sitting member, lost it to Labour in the 1906 landslide. He held 100 of the *Courier*'s ordinary shares, and took a keen interest in the paper's progress. His hope had originally been that a strong Tory paper in Manchester would be a paying proposition, something less easy to believe in 1908 than at the time of the Harmsworth takeover. Why then did he agree to subsidise the *Courier*?¹⁷

Rothwell's motives were complex. He was a quietly committed tariff reformer and saw the paper as the chief means by which the policy could be pressed forward in the north west. He believed that it was essential that the



One of Rothwell's Public Houses.

Manchester Tories had a penny paper which would be a credit to them and which would stand comparison with the *Guardian*. Rothwell was a proud and stubborn man, and it suited his sense of self-esteem to be stepping in to support the *Courier* when other, better established Tory figures in the area were unwilling to 'put their hands down'. The possibility of reward for party service was also an important factor, though with the Tories out of office, as Balfour pointed out when the matter was brought to his attention, nothing could be done in the short term. Perhaps most important of all, Rothwell was unwilling to contemplate, in 1908, the paper going under, and so agreed to save it by a loan of £20,000. He was, Dunn wrote to G.E. Sutton, Northcliffe's managing director at Associated Newspapers, 'willing to pay for his fads'. The loan was conditional upon Northcliffe remaining connected with the enterprise, which was agreed. The political direction of the paper, however, was placed in the hands of Stephenson, who took over as Chairman, Dunn, who remained editor, and Rothwell himself. Northcliffe, in deference to Rothwell's wishes, remained on the Board. He could hardly have refused. As he remarked to Bonar Law: 'An unobtrusive gentleman like Alderman Rothwell, who ladles out money by the hatful on very slight security is a rarity in a democracy'.¹⁸

With the future temporarily secured, changes were made in the paper in the autumn of 1908. The layout was somewhat revised, and more illustrations and photographs were incorporated. Attempts were made to broaden its appeal by the introduction of a new section entitled 'Women's World'. Once again, the paper was 'boomed'. It did not work. The paper lost over £7,000 in the second half of 1908, and collapse again seemed likely. Stephenson saw the future as bleak. If there was a willingness to spend a large amount, the paper might be turned into a halfpenny and become popular. The competition in that area was acute, however, and Northcliffe could have seen little sense in spending money to produce a potential competitor to his own *Daily Mail*. Rothwell was in any case opposed to taking the paper down-market: the *Courier* had to be a credit to the town's Tories. The alternative was economy, cost-cutting, to reduce expenditure. However, that also was problematic. Could a paper produced on the cheap be 'a credit'? Would a smaller paper retain such advertising as it still had? Dunn did not wait for the argument to be resolved. He resigned as editor



Henry Sowler.

in the spring of 1909, with two years of his contract still to run. He was later to refer to his time in Manchester as 'years of hopeless struggle'. The paper survived largely because neither Northcliffe nor Rothwell seemed able to reach a decision to do anything but carry on, though Rothwell was by this time under no illusions that the paper would ever pay.¹⁹

Despite its predicament, and the departure of its editor the *Courier* continued to argue vigorously for tariff-reform policies. It had ample opportunity in 1910, a year in which there were two general elections which saw a substantial recovery in Tory fortunes. Like many others, the paper was momentarily thrown into confusion by Balfour's pledge at the end of November 1910 not to introduce food taxes without submitting them to the public at a second election, but its confidence that this was a minor aberration was strengthened when Balfour resigned as party leader in 1911, to be replaced by Bonar Law, a staunch supporter of constructive policy. He, the paper was sure, would push through necessary reforms in party organisation. On the constitutional struggle with the Lords, its approach was uncompromisingly on the 'ditcher' side.

Northcliffe became increasingly irritated with his commitment to the *Courier* during 1912. It was, he wrote to Geoffrey Dawson, future editor of *The Times*, 'certainly the worst-managed paper in Europe'.²⁰ He offered his shares in it to Rothwell and threatened to get out altogether



Lord Northcliffe

on more than one occasion. Rothwell would not rise to the bait, however. He was willing to continue to support the paper, but only if Northcliffe also remained involved. Stephenson persuaded Northcliffe to continue, despite increasing losses. These were compounded by the launch of an 'Illustrated Supplement' on Joseph Chamberlain's seventy-sixth birthday, 8 July 1912. The readers, publicity material proclaimed, would now be getting two papers for the price of one. The supplement cost an additional £200 a week to produce, and it did lead to an increase in circulation and advertising, but far less than was needed to defray its expense. Losses on the paper rose to £18,000 in 1912, by the end of which year Rothwell's interest-free loans to it amounted to almost £34,000. The supplement was dropped after less than six months, though a 'Picture Page' remained a feature of the paper thereafter. On policy matters, the dropping of the 'referendum pledge' by Bonar Law pleased the *Courier* as it did all tariff reformers, but Derby and local Unionists reacted angrily, and the 'Lancashire Rebellion' at the end of 1912 forced Bonar Law to recant. This caused great confusion at the *Courier* initially, but by 1913 it had moderated its line, and came to denounce its former tariff-reform soulmates at the *Morning Post* and *National Review* for rocking the boat and placing tariff purity before loyalty to Bonar Law's new line.

Decline thereafter was steady. The paper was forced into further cheeseparing. Its Parliamentary Correspondent had lost his place in the Press Gallery, a clear sign of its falling prestige. Northcliffe for a time in 1913-14 put the printing of the northern edition of the *Daily Mirror* into the *Courier* building, but this was not to last. He became less and less content to carry on subsidising the paper's losses, and called for other local men to assist Rothwell if the paper was to carry on. However, local worthies were as reluctant as ever. Seventy were invited to a meeting designed to tap support in the spring of 1914, but only eight turned up and no finance was forthcoming. All staff were put on two weeks notice that summer. The outbreak of war led to the paper being reduced in size and price. Advertising revenue plummeted, and some of the staff were sacked.

The *Manchester Weekly Times*, which Harry Sowler controlled (though he had tried to sell a half interest in it to Northcliffe in 1911) suspended publication at the end of 1914, owing the *Courier*, on whose presses it was printed, £800. Rothwell put up another interest-free loan of £5,000 to enable the paper to continue, and revived the *Evening Mail* in a quite crazy attempt, given previous history and the difficulties all papers were facing because of the war, to make profits to help the *Courier*. He had to meet all its losses himself. Northcliffe reluctantly shelled out £90 per week to assist the *Courier*, Rothwell covering the rest of its loss, but he would have nothing to do with the *Evening Mail*. He resigned as a Director in the spring of 1915, angry that the last editor of the *Courier*, Edward Foster, had been 'poached' by Conservative Central Office. He had, he said, been very patient about the *Courier* and claimed to have acted against his better judgement throughout the whole sorry business. Shaken by a family bereavement, Stephenson also gave up the ghost in the Autumn, so that even Rothwell had to acknowledge at the end of the year that the game was up. One last despairing effort was made to raise money from local Tories. Inevitably, it failed, and the *Courier* ceased publication in January 1916. Northcliffe put the Cannon Street building on the market, selling it in 1917 for £25,000. The paper's remaining overdraft of £34,711 was paid off by Northcliffe at the end of the year. He, like Rothwell, had lost a packet.²¹

'Recipe for Disaster'

By the time the *Courier* became a part of the *Daily Mail* empire in 1904, it already had the aura of a paper from a bygone age. The aspirations of those who supported it were clear enough; they wanted a high-quality political paper, with ample industrial and commercial coverage, which would exercise influence amongst the 'better sort of people' in the Manchester region. Successful penny papers had to contain a considerable variety of news – international as well as national, sporting as well as political, industrial and commercial. They had to build up a loyal readership among people willing to spend twice as much each day on a newspaper as was necessary, that is, among clerks, shopkeepers, and small traders as well as the politically committed. This the *Courier* was never capable of doing. It was not a bad paper under Dunn and Stephenson, and it did cover much the same areas as the *Guardian*, but it lacked consistent flair and sparkle. What is more, whilst its main political campaigns undoubtedly were attractive to a certain kind of Tory activist, one convinced of the merits of tariff reform, they involved evangelising in an area where the opposite creed of free trade was the conventional wisdom and, as such, deeply attractive to traditional Conservatives. If, as has often been argued, people buy newspapers to have their prejudices confirmed rather than challenged, it is perhaps not surprising that many potential local readers were unwilling daily to 'put their hands down' for a penny, as well as for larger sums the paper needed to keep afloat. Thus the management of the *Courier* found itself selling for a penny that which it cost more than a penny to produce, a recipe for disaster.

The *Guardian* might have been in difficulties, but even at its lowest ebb it sold almost twice as many copies as the *Courier* at its peak. This circulation enabled it to attract more advertising than the *Courier* ever could, to offset the costs of a high-quality all-round news service even without the benefit of horse racing. The profitable *Manchester Evening News*, with the same ownership as the *Guardian*, was also there as a potential back-stop should things become desperate, whilst the *Courier* stood alone. The latter had to depend upon political subsidy, and perhaps the surprising feature of its later history is how long Northcliffe and Rothwell were willing to keep it afloat, a fact intimately related to their interdependence. Northcliffe did not wish to be seen to be deserting the paper whilst local backing could be produced, and Rothwell's support was dependent on Northcliffe's continuing commitment. Thus they remained yoked together, and to the hopeless enterprise, until the circumstances created by the war provided the opportunity for release.

Rothwell continued in the brewing trade until his death, the Newton Heath Brewery Company being reorganised as L.T. Rothwell Limited in 1917. It survived as an independent brewery until 1961, when it was taken over by Marstons. Nicol Dunn left England for South Africa in 1911, to edit the *Johannesburg Star*, returning to Scotland in 1914 to the chair of the *Glasgow News*. He died in 1919. Northcliffe became wealthier, and increasingly unstable. The cumulative effects of syphilis brought about his end in 1922. Stephenson returned to his other local Lancashire newspaper interests and outlived the others, dying in Southport in 1934.

NOTES

- Footnotes have been restricted to giving the source of direct quotations, or indicating the bases upon which particular paragraphs rely. The main sources used were the *Manchester Courier* itself, the originals of which are in the care of Manchester Central Reference Library; the Northcliffe and A.J. Balfour papers, both collections being Additional Manuscripts in the British Library. Citations from these collections are referred to using abbreviations, thus: N.P. (for Northcliffe Papers), or B.P. (for Balfour Papers) followed by the British Library Additional Manuscripts catalogue number, and folio number, where appropriate. Not all of the Northcliffe Papers had been foliated at the time they were consulted.
- See A.J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press, 1855-1914* (1976), esp. pp.39,90; S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (2 Volumes, 1981,1984) (hereafter Koss, Vol. 1 or Koss, Vol. 2), Vol. 2, pp.24, 30; D.G. Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the reappraisal of a concept' in D.G. Boyce, J. Curran and P. Wingate (eds.), *Newspaper History* (1978), esp. pp.283-5.
- Iwan-Muller to Balfour, 16 May 1888, B.P., 49796, ff.56.
- Koss, Vol. 1, pp.290-91; J. Nicholson, 'Popular Imperialism and the Provincial Press', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 13 (1980), esp. pp.85-8.
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- A copy of the report (unsigned) is in the Bathurst Glenesk Papers (hereafter B.G.P.) in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, 1990/1/757. The rest of the paragraph is dependent on material in that report. The Bathurst family were the owners of the *Morning Post*.
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- This relies on information in the biography of Stephenson cited in note (9).
- Stephenson to Northcliffe, 6 April 1908, N.P., 62275.
- Duguid to Sutton, 19 April 1906 and Crapnell to Sutton, 12 April 1907, both in N.P., 62184A.
- Stephenson to Sutton, undated, but April 1908, N.P., 62275.
- Stephenson to Northcliffe, 12 February 1907, Dunn to Sutton, 22 June 1907, 28 April and 15 July 1908, all in N.P., 62272; Northcliffe to Balfour (copy), 29 July 1908, N.P., 62153.
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- Dunn to Sutton, 1 June 1908, N.P., 62272; Northcliffe to Bonar Law (copy) 15 February 1912, N.P., 62158.
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