

13. Research Services Limited (Part 2)

DA: What work were you doing at the time ... around that time?

MA: What year was that?

DA: '57.

MA: '57 ... where was I? I was at Research Services ... '57 ...I think, all sorts of sort of interesting surveys I was doing at Research Services about then. One of them was for the *Guardian*, which was then the *Manchester Guardian*. And they're obviously not ever going to increase their circulation up in the Manchester area, as the *Manchester Guardian*. They wanted to know, was it worthwhile moving to London? So, Lawrence Scott came down to see me and said "Could research help on this?"

[So I said] "Okay, we will do a survey in which we will take a sample of your present readers, and then we will find a sample of people who match them, on all their outstanding traits, and interview them and ask them why they are not readers of the *Guardian*? ... Why on this one characteristic, are they deviants from the majority?" And so we did a survey and it was easy enough to list what were the outstanding traits of the *Guardian* readers, the then *Guardian* readers. Then we went to their nearest neighbour, who scored the same on these, I think it was seven traits we listed, and asked them why they weren't reading the *Guardian* ... what were they reading, and why did they prefer that to, say, the *Guardian*, what did they know about the *Guardian*? And at the end I said to Lawrence Scott, "You know there are no more *Guardian* readers left for you really in the Manchester area ... you seemed to have exhausted all the people with those peculiar characteristics. You are going to have to find them now in the south of England. Why don't you take a couple of pilot areas, get copies of the *Guardian* down there by motor bike, overnight, and available on sale before breakfast, and then change the character of the thing? Why the hell do you never have any signed articles? People like signed articles. Why do you not have a woman's page? If you introduce into the sort of family that I think you should go after, a paper without a woman's page, then the woman will kick up a row. She feels she is the equal of her husband. And a paper which ignores the existence of women isn't her idea of a good newspaper. You'd have to overcome that." I said, "Again, you never give any space to horse racing, or to any sport except cricket. You know in the south of England they play football as well, and they indulge in horse racing quite a bit. Give them some." You know, and a few other things like that.

So Lawrence Scott said, "I think you are right." I said, "Another thing is that you've got to drop this word 'Manchester', which is a nasty word in the minds of the people brought up in the south, they think of it as a grimy, old broken down industrial, textile town. And if they do happen to see it on a news stand what they see on the front page full of ads by people who want to sell second-hand cars or want to sell abandoned warehouses. Take the ads off the front page and put your lead news stories there". And he said, "Alright, all we've got to do is persuade Wadsworth", who was then the editor of the *Guardian*, "to shift to London. And make all these editorial changes in the make up of it" ... God! Wadsworth was absolutely furious ... he was a Lancashire man himself, he was a historian really rather than an editor. He was a very good editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, but he finally agreed. And, to begin with, they lost 20,000 circulation.

DA: So they weren't very pleased with you?

MA: The people up in the north thought this was outrageous! [laughs] We can't have our ads about how to acquire a broken down warehouse (or whatever it is) on the front page We have to turn to an inside page for that! They lost 20,000 readers straightaway. But within three years they were 20,000 above the point they had had started at. And from then on they've never looked back, gone ahead all the time. And Lawrence Scott was so pleased with it that at the next meeting of the International Journalist Union, I think it is, yes, or International Press Union, that's right ... which is devoted normally just to professional problems, and so on, of newspapers and journalists, he persuaded them to let me have the floor, to present a talk on how the *Guardian* changed its character, and won. And that brought in a lot of other research on newspapers and magazines. On the *Times* – I said to the *Times*, you know I am doing research for the *Guardian* and you are its main competitor. They said, "We don't care, we want you to do research like the research for the *Guardian*". And some of its provincial competitors like the *Liverpool Post*, the *Western Mail* and so on. They were perfectly happy. And most of them survived.