

THE INDEPENDENT

VOL. 3 - No. 8

THE HERITAGE of FLEET STREET

LONDON 2023

The Independent almost wasn't The Independent. When the founders of the paper were taking the brave, even foolhardy, decision to start a new newspaper in 1986 – the first quality national paper to launch for more than a century – a variety of names were considered: Arena, The Examiner, The Nation, The Chronicle and 24 Hours. All promising, but all fell short of truly capturing the essence. “The Independent” did so. And it inspired one of the most famous and successful marketing campaigns in media history, with the slogan: “It is. Are you?”

The first edition appeared on Tuesday 7 October 1986. It was an upstart paper, capitalising on the new technologies, financial revolutions and trade union reforms of the time, all of which made a new broadsheet feasible. There was a gap in the market. The competition were tired and partisan, and its founders found little difficulty in attracting funding and talent from across Fleet Street. The Independent stood for social and economic liberalism, and a fresh style. The informal, internal motto is “classic with a twist”. With the generous support of its proprietors over the decades, notably Tony O'Reilly and Evgeny Lebedev, the adventure continued, and it now thrives as a global digital brand.

In an essay about its history, the founding editor, Andreas Whittam Smith, once commented: “To say that somebody is independent-minded indicates no particular profile. It simply defines an attitude. You immediately recognise the independent-minded when you meet them.” As a reader, you can be who you want to be, stand for whatever you want to stand for. The Independent stands independent of political party allegiance, and makes its own mind up on the issues of the day.

The Independent titles have stuck to that, and been vindicated, guided by inspired editors, including Andrew Marr, Rosie Boycott, Ian Jack, Janet Street-Porter and Simon Kelner. It campaigned against the American- and British-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. As world opinion moves slowly towards a more liberal, enlightened and medically driven attitude towards a “war on drugs” that is unwinnable, The Independent can reflect that it and its sibling, The Independent on Sunday (launched in 1990) led the debate on this too.

The Independent has always been brave. We felt compelled, for example, to use the shocking image of a drowned three-year-old Syrian refugee, Alan Kurdi, to confront the human cost of the migrant crisis in 2015. Since then we have continued to campaign hard for the humane treatment of those



seeking refuge. It's a lonely stance. The Independent has always been in favour of a reformed monarchy, one that reflects the nation over which it reigns and which is accountable to the people for its activities. We have also avoided the treatment of royals as celebrities in our coverage – famously, the birth of Princess Beatrice in 1988 was marked only with a nib on page two.

On the UK's great issue of the past decade, Brexit, The Independent campaigned with unprecedented force for a “Final Say”, clear in our belief that the British people should decide the ultimate relationship with Europe. That remains unfinished business.

The Independent also made up its mind, before most, that climate change was an existential threat to life on Earth, based on a growing body of scientific evidence.

When, in 2007, Tony Blair described The Independent as a “feral beast”, and “avowedly a viewspaper not a newspaper”, he misunderstood our values: Yet in doing so he inadvertently paid a great compliment. Some rivals might have chosen simply to ignore a prime ministerial attack; The Independent was happy to publish it.

Some fine writers provided world-class scoops. Robert Fisk's interviews with an obscure mujahideen leader named Osama bin Laden were a very early warning of what was to come. Patrick Cockburn tried to alert the world to the rise of so-called Islamic State long before any other journalist, or even anyone in the defence and intelligence communities, had noticed the threat they posed. And, incidentally, the Indy gave Helen Fielding's creation Bridget Jones to the world.

The Independent has always been “condemned to innovate”. It has many “firsts” to its credit, apart its own disruptive appearance on the scene. It was the first British newspaper to add a Saturday magazine; the first broadsheet to go tabloid; the first to give stunning photography the same prestige as news or features; the first to challenge the Westminster lobby system of closed briefings (“a self-satisfied cabal”); the first to launch a concise quality compact paper, *i*, in 2010; the first to launch an edition for children; and the first to go fully digital, in March 2016. We felt then that our resources would best be concentrated on this growing medium, and progress since has justified that.

In recent times we have added public events and reader-oriented debates to our mix, as well as Independent TV. The Independent's reputation went before it, even in countries where a print copy was rarely glimpsed. Today, the boundaries of The Independent's influence are growing wider and wider.

In ways that only digital technology can deliver, The Independent is more receptive to its readers than ever before. It still is “independent”, and so are they.



The Independent Additional notes

Prepared by: ES&I marketing department 2023

Copyright: All material on this website is subject to our copyright. You may use any of our material under the terms of our Creative Commons – Attribution – Share Alike licence. This permits you to distribute, adapt, or build upon our work, for any purpose including commercially, as long as you (1) credit www.fleetstreetheritage.com (2) includes link where possible and (3) licence your new creation under identical terms to this.

Source: Original research