

# Public lecture by Roy Greenslade

Last night we attended a lecture by Roy Greenslade who is Professor of Journalism at City University, and who has been a much respected media commentator for some years.



He has worked with many of the well-known titles, and was editor of The Daily Mirror at one time, appointed by Robert Maxwell himself.

In his talk entitled *Can Journalism Survive the Death of Newspapers?* Greenslade discussed the accountability of news outlets (now called news brands) and the sustainability of news and journalism. And well, reader, the outlook according to Professor Greenslade is not good.

[tweet\_box design="default"]In the Edinburgh University Enlightenment lecture Greenslade aimed to shock the audience with his claim that "Newspapers are in their death throes. The end of newsprint is indisputable."[/tweet\_box]

He explained that although Jon Snow delivered a University of Edinburgh Enlightenment lecture with a fairly similar title some years back, both Facebook and Twitter were then in their infancy. Times have changed, and now these forms of social media have themselves become news sources, and in certain cases news reporters.

Greenslade was damning of the newspaper industry's future. He said : "It is hard to see how the industry can survive in its current form. It will not survive and we should all think about a future without journalists.

"I am not assaulting the digital revolution. I was actually an early adopter.

"And with social media there is now a running commentary on news itself and the quality of it."

But he warned that the advent of social media has not been without some change to the old guard.

He continued : "We were shocked that old form news outlets were no longer the gatekeepers of media. We had of course already experienced the disrupters of TV, but the internet threatens our existence in a very different way."

Greenslade believes that the public no longer hold the industry of journalism and journalists in high esteem, and warned that it is dangerous if they are lost.

He quoted figures showing that sales of newspapers between 2000 and 2017 dropped to 5.8 million which is a decline of 54.5%.

He exclaimed : "The decline in Scotland is so startling that I thought I had made an error. In Scotland there are 276,983 daily papers sold. This has reduced by 72% from sales approaching 1 million daily."



But Greenslade believes that this 'does not mean that all newspapers will die'.

He claims that those which serve the 'affluent and elite' will survive. He quoted the Economist, the FT and The Spectator as examples of that.

He also said that in his view free titles may outlive others as long as they have advertising revenue. (This is good news

indeed for The Edinburgh Reporter which now produces a monthly free print version!)

But in what would also appear to be good news he quoted figures showing that websites have had enormous increases in their online audiences. For example the Metro has 2.4 million online readers each day and the Mail Online, which is by far the biggest online platform, 14.2 million.

So it appears that there is a profound change in news consumption across all age ranges, while most under 25s have it seems rejected newspapers. (A quick show of hands in the audience as to those who had bought a newspaper yesterday was disappointingly low, and the number of those who had paid for online news depressingly few.)

So while print is dying, and readers are moving to online, this is perhaps not really good news as most readers do not pay for their online news.

Greenslade summed up : “That is the dilemma we face. People are reading news for free but it is not free to produce.”

And this is well known to us. We encourage our readers to support us either by making a really small regular donation (see the foot of this page!), or by those with local businesses supporting us with some [advertising.](#)

Our [advertising](#) is from £1 a day. Do think about it – it would help us to continue to report on things like council business – which Greenslade says many of the big news brands cannot afford to do. We are almost always at council meetings and talking to councillors of all hues trying to get some news for you.

***Greenslade : “There is too little***

***journalism of real value to the community. No shoe leather is being worn out."***

Professor Greenslade was damning of those who simply regurgitate press releases. Yes we use press releases. We almost never copy and paste, preferring to take out all the adjectives and reduce the release to something informative. We filter through the 300 odd emails we get daily to find the stories which might interest you most. They add to our content, and we cannot be everywhere! But what we like best is a good campaign. Our coverage of the recent one to [Save the Music School](#) is a good example.

Finally the media commentator summed up by damning the fact that the BBC licence money is being used to fund 150 reporters for local news outlets. (We know there must be some in Scotland, though we have yet to find out where, and we ourselves swerved the application process finding it too labour intensive.)

He suggested that the winners are those running PR companies who are making hay while the sun sets on newspapers and journalists, and that this direction of travel will mean we face a democratic deficit. If the newspapers had not written about MPs' expenses, paedophiles in Rotherham, Lance Armstrong and phone hacking then we might be unaware of these scandals.

In the form of an answer to the problem Greenslade believes we should find a new way to fund newspapers, perhaps by way of some arms length type of government subsidy such as they have in France, philanthropy or perhaps councils could be persuaded to move their statutory advertising to online rather than print newspapers?

While he finished on a negative note, it is clear that there are still some smidgins of hope for sites like ours. We live

in hope that donations might eventually overtake advertising as it has in the case of The Guardian which now enjoys 8 million readers per day.

Or we could become a PR firm.....

Our Changing World is a set of public lectures examining the global challenges facing our society. It also looks at the role of academia in meeting them.

The series has run for several years now and some members of the audience were members of the public as well as students studying for a credit bearing course in what is considered a unique collaboration.