

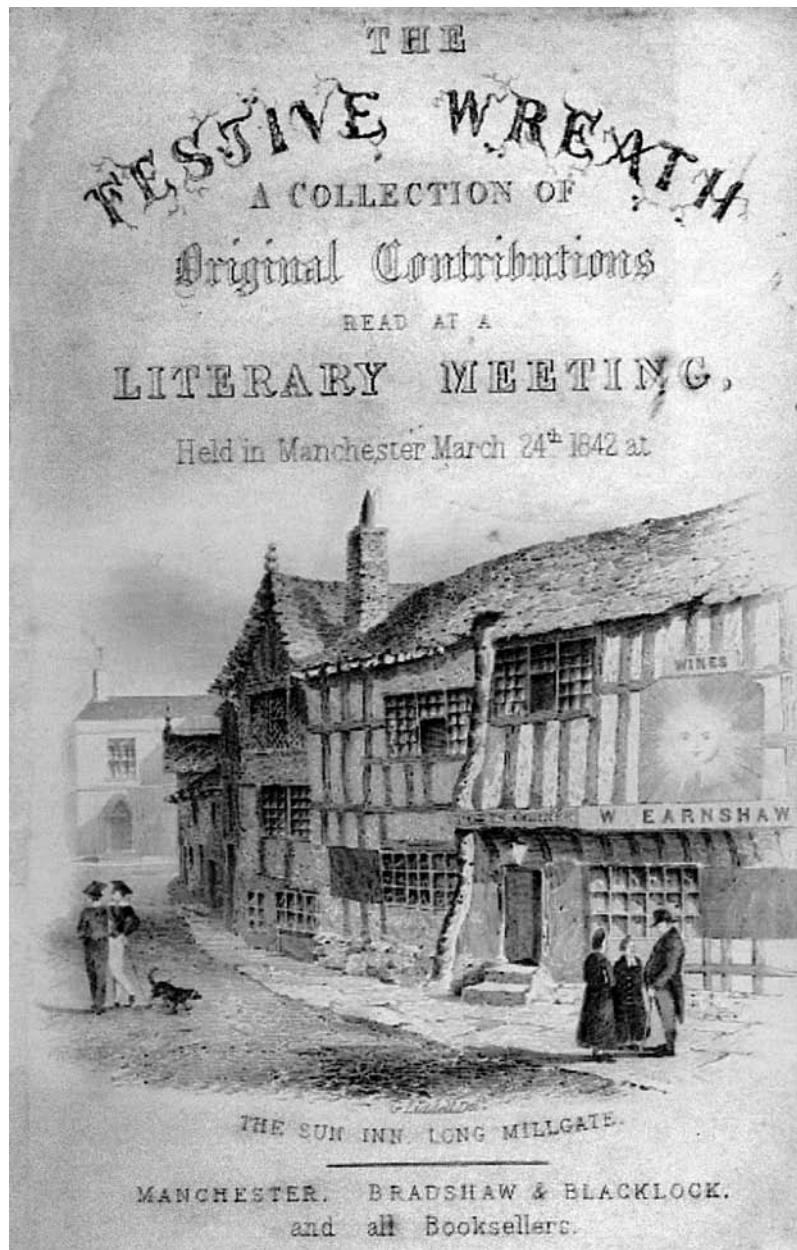
George Bradshaw and *Bradshaw's Manchester Journal*: 1841–1843

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George Bradshaw and Bradshaw & Blacklock

Few Lancashire names were so widely recognised in Victorian England, and indeed throughout Europe, as that of George Bradshaw (1801–1853). 'Bradshaw' rapidly became an universally understood synonym for a railway timetable, and the publication in its yellow wrappers was familiar to travellers the world over. It is the volume, conveniently to hand on the shelf above the fireplace, for which Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson first reach when 'the game's afoot'. In *The Valley of Fear* (1914) Holmes, seeking 'a standardized book which anyone may be supposed to possess' lights on a copy of Bradshaw, which, he notes, has a vocabulary 'nervous and tense, but limited'. In Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, too, Bradshaw's *Continental Railway Guide* is the first port of call. The first of many editions of this universally-known timetable appeared in 1839, published by the Manchester firm of Bradshaw & Blacklock, letterpress printers and engravers. The printing house, first established in Cope's Court, St. Mary's Gate, and later at Brown-Street, soon attained an international reputation for its maps, guides, topographical engravings, illustrated books, and above all, railway timetables. Its lists always included regional material – Bradshaw's first publication, in 1827, was an engraved map of Lancashire, and in 1830 the first Canal Maps covering Lancashire and Yorkshire appeared. The firm also developed more literary and artistic interests – the collection of poetry by the Sun Inn group of local writers, edited by J. B. Rogerson as *The Festive Wreath* (1842) was one notable example. This important and now scarce volume includes an account of the second meeting of the group at the Sun Inn, where a toast to periodical literature was drunk, and *Bradshaw's Manchester Journal* in particular was saluted for its commitment to encouraging the 'rise and progress' of the people of Lancashire.¹

George Bradshaw, joint founder of the firm, was born in Pendleton, near Manchester, to a family said to be of slender means. He was apprenticed to an engraver, and became himself a skilled craftsman.



Engraved title page of *The Festive Wreath*, a collection of local poetry edited by J. B. Rogerson, and published by Bradshaw & Blacklock, 1842

After spending some time in Belfast, he returned to Manchester, joined the Society of Friends, and with his partner W. T. Blacklock set up the firm which later became world renowned. George Bradshaw was involved with many philanthropic movements in Manchester, and in particular with attempts to encourage the progress of the working class through education. He supported the Peace Movement and was present at the first International Peace Congresses in 1848 and 1849.

Another cause in which he was active, with Elihu Burritt, the American 'learned blacksmith' who was said to speak 50 languages, was the standardisation of international postage rates to encourage trade. Bradshaw died of cholera in 1853 in Oslo, where he is buried.

*Bradshaw's Manchester Journal, 1841–1843*²

Title page of
an issue of
*Bradshaw's
Manchester
Journal*, 1841

In early 1841 the firm of Bradshaw & Blacklock took a decision to launch a weekly magazine at a price to be 'within the reach of all classes.' The editor was to be George Falkner (1817–1882), himself an engraver, and well known in Manchester for his literary attainments and support of local writers.³ Falkner remained as editor of the *Journal* throughout its life and his patronage was important to many aspiring local writers. He later established his own letterpress and lithographic printing house in Brown-Street. He was active in the promotion of art and fine printing in Manchester, and was a driving force behind the campaign to establish a City Art Gallery, and the School of Art at All Saints. He supported a number of charities, including Henshaw's

Blind Asylum, of which he was secretary for many years.

The *Address to Our Readers* which prefaces the first number of *Bradshaw's Manchester Journal* gives a clear account of the editorial policy. It was to be a 16-page miscellany of art, science and literature, to sell at the cheap price of a penny-halfpenny a week. A main purpose was to combat 'the extensive circulation in the Provinces of worthless publications, weekly issuing from the most degraded portions of the Metropolitan Press, which address themselves to the grossest passions of our nature, and are fitted only to deprave and ruin.' The editor intended to fill a gap in the market left by the 'absence of any publication combining ... the popular characteristics of our standard periodicals, with notices of subjects of local interest'. The

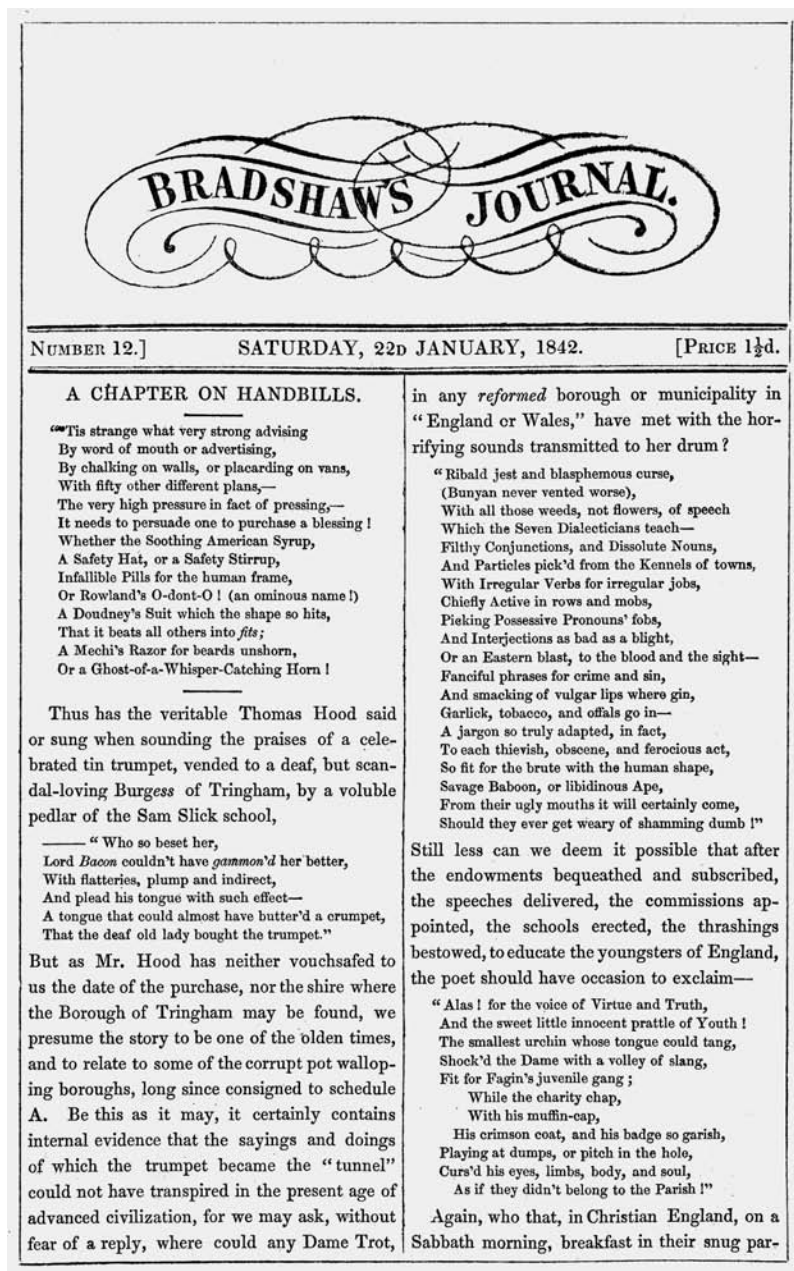


'highest importance' was to be attached to educational institutions and also 'home training – physical, intellectual and moral'. Thus from the first the *Journal* was intended as an affordable but high quality, improving, reformist weekly periodical, to counteract the mass of sensational literature which was beginning to flood in to the industrial cities from the purveyors of 'trash' in London, and to promote the regional Lancashire identity, its history, institutions, productivity, and culture. Equally, its political commitment to a doctrine of gradual social progress through education, rather than revolutionary change, was intended as an alternative to the siren voices of the radical press. In order to increase its appeal in this crowded and volatile marketplace, the *Journal* was finely illustrated with many engraved plates of buildings and scenes in the Manchester region. Also, coloured pull-out county maps were given away *gratis* to regular subscribers with every 12th number of the *Journal*.

After the first six months, the *Journal* was renamed *Bradshaw's Journal: A Miscellany of Literature, Science and Art*, and the place of publication moved to London, where the title was taken on by William Strange, an entrepreneurial Paternoster Row printer. This was the first indication of commercial problems with *Bradshaw's Journal*: the removal of 'Manchester' from the masthead was clearly part of an attempt to re-brand the title, and to tap a wider, national readership among the working classes. The focus on Lancashire life and culture continued, however. After a further six months the imprint was changed again to William Strange, Paternoster Row, & W.J. Adams, Fleet Street. In the last six months of its life a final re-positioning in the market took place; the publication date was changed from weekly to monthly, and the layout from double to single column. The price was increased to 6d for a monthly issue. The content for the first time included some romantic historical fiction, and an increased quota of material reprinted from other sources. Even these perhaps desperate measures did not produce the required rise in sales, and the final monthly issue appeared in May 1843, with a valedictory Address by the editor. He noted that the production of a provincial periodical magazine was 'at all times attended with discouraging difficulties', the 'monopoly maintained by the Metropoles being so powerful and prescriptive as to exclude legitimate competition'. He also remarked that the original aim – to supply 'suitable mental aliment' to meet 'the increasing requirements which the spread of intelligence has excited among all classes' – had been to some extent accomplished. There is no direct evidence available which can sustain this claim, and it is not now easy to be sure how many readers *Bradshaw's Journal* had at any point in its history, or their social make-up. The 'implied readership' constructed in the text by editorial

comment and reference is easier to establish. The intention was to produce a periodical which was directed towards both the skilled, respectable working classes, and the reformist, socially concerned elements in the middle classes. This notion of a common readership, bridging class divisions, and underpinned by a shared pride in the achievements of Lancashire culture and history, was constructed in

Title page of
Bradshaw's
Journal, 1842





many editorials and in commissioned articles. Indeed, the Lancashire heritage – with its values of productivity, energy, and practical ingenuity very often contrasting with the debased cultural life of London – is represented as a unifying influence capable of bringing together classes, and promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. In many ways, Lancashire stands as a model for the rest of the country. It is far from clear, however, how far this vision of a culturally progressive union of classes was reproduced in the formation of readership: an examination of sales figures provided by Abel Heywood and others a few years later suggested that the battle for the minds of the newly literate working classes was in fact largely lost by the mid-1840s. None of the ‘improving’ magazines could compete effectively for sales with the mass of penny bloods and sensational magazines which poured into the city from London, using the new train lines for distribution. Even the London-published ‘improving’ Journals, such as Howitt’s, with easier access to a wider, national readership, struggled to survive in this competitive marketplace.⁴

Steel engraving of the Manchester Union Industrial Training School, Swinton, issued with an early number of *Bradshaw’s Manchester Journal*

Content and Contributors

The original prospectus for the *Journal* laid out the intentions clearly. It was to be a weekly miscellany magazine, carrying articles on art, history and cultural life, illustrated and produced to high standards at a price which put it within the reach of the aspirant working class. There was to be a particular, but not exclusive, focus on the Manchester region, and on education. The purpose of the publication

was clearly defined in the Address to the Readers: to 'communicate to those who move in other spheres correct information as to the actual condition, wants and feelings of the Operative', and to 'induce habits of foresight and reflection which may tend to elevate the character'. The contents pages of the four volumes illustrated clearly the extent to which the commitment to an ideology based on social progress through education, and a regional focusing, was sustained. There are detailed factual articles on 'The History of Writing' (James Hemming Webb); on Henshaw's Blind Asylum and Deaf and Dumb School, Manchester; a comprehensive account of local 'institutions of popular education', including a full description, illustrated with a steel engraving, of the Industrial Training School for Pauper Children at Swinton outside Manchester; a three-part 'History of the Irwell and Mersey Navigation'; a regular 'Column for the Young' offering elevating advice about moral conduct; and an illustrated historical series on 'Manchester As It Was'. Articles and tales by authors who had a national reputation in this literary mode were reprinted, or occasionally commissioned. There are contributions by William and Mary Howitt, Mrs Riddell, and others, as well as comprehensive reviews of important new books bearing on the north west, or on the problems of the industrial city. There is, for example, a four-page review of *The Young Folks of the Factory: or Friendly Hints on Their Duties and Dangers*, published by the Religious Tract Society.

One of the most impressive aspects of the *Journal* was the encouragement it offered to local writers. Isabella Varley (later Mrs Linnaeus Banks), J. B. Rogerson, Samuel Bamford, Benjamin Stott and especially the working-class poet John Critchley Prince were all given early opportunities. A number of Prince's poems appeared for the first time in this *Journal*, as did a series of nine letters entitled *Rambles of a Rhymester*, describing the poet's travels in North Wales and elsewhere. There is also a substantial and important review of Prince's *Hours With the Muses*. Rogerson's series of letters entitled *Manchester Rambles*, a guided tour of buildings and sights in the city, is also notable. The Lancashire focus was not without its problems, however. In an article headed *Rejected Rhymes* the editor complained of the mass of uncommissioned writing filling his desk: 'We have now reached the twelfth week of our existence: yet during this brief period nearly a hundred articles in prose and verse have been submitted for approval . . . we are anxious to discourage this poetic mania.' The editor did not share the view that publishing poetry by working men was a good thing in itself, but insisted that questions of literary quality were important.

Bradshaw's Journal also had a policy of encouraging young socially-concerned writers from outside the region. George Elott Sargent, who published four substantial titles in the *Journal*, writing as 'G.E.S', was

later in his career a prolific and successful author of novels about the lives of the poor, mainly issued by the Religious Tract Society. Others who later attained some literary reputation include Hepworth Dixon, Mrs Riddell, Esther Copley, Mary Howitt and E. L. Blanchard.

As is well known, the three-year period during which *Bradshaw's Journal* was produced was marked by serious industrial unrest in the cotton districts, the rise of a vocal Chartist opposition, political violence in the city, and starvation for sections of the working class. Despite the manifesto claim that the aim of the *Journal* was to provide 'correct information as to the condition, wants and feelings of the Operative', especially in the cotton districts, little direct and realistic reporting of working-class living conditions, or of political conflict, filtered through into the pages of the *Journal*. The Chartist disturbances of August 1842, and the violent Plug Plot Strikes which swept through the cotton districts, were remarkably absent, as is any discussion of matters related to gender and the different roles of men and women. Those contributions which do offer some account of working-class life are directed towards domestic and leisure pursuits, rather than the workplace. The strike, the Chartist and the cellar dwelling, those triple emblems of social crisis, are never directly confronted or explored. Thus, on first reading, most pages of the *Journal* can seem to present a seamless, unified and uncomplicated discourse organized around theories of self-improvement and gradual social progress through individual moral and intellectual development. Although this is certainly at some level a response to the 'condition of England' question, the debate is abstracted and distanced. Little sense of a social system in crisis emerges.

However, it is a mistake to read too much into the apparent coherence of this meliorist ideology. Although editorial attitudes and policies concerning the selection of material are contained within the reformist agenda, there are some significant fissures in the smooth surface. These are most apparent in the literary contributions where, in a few poems and tales, a more interesting construction of contradiction and fracture emerges. William Gaspey's *The Right Honourable Lady Day* is a savage satirical attack on landlords and their hangers-on, 'brokers and bums', organized around the different meanings attached to this feast day by the poor, for whom it was a traditional date for rent collection, and the rich, for whom it was a Christian festival symbolic of renewal and rebirth.

'No work, and every farthing spent
The pangs of hunger to allay,
The poor man fears the compliment
Of visit dire from Lady Day'⁵

One of the most prolific literary contributors to the *Journal* was G. E. Sargent, who wrote under the byline 'G.E.S'.⁶ In his short story *The Incendiary*, a poor man, Jacob, is responsible for the support of an invalid mother and father. He is unable, despite every effort, to obtain work. In despair, when his dying father requests a 'bit of meat' he becomes a poacher. Eventually he is caught by a gamekeeper, tried and sentenced to two months in prison. When he returns he discovers that his father has died, and his mother has lost her reason and is in a workhouse. In a fit of rage he leaves the house and fires the squire's rickstacks. He is sentenced to death but on the intervention of friends is transported to Australia. The incendiarism, although subject to the conventional narrative condemnation, is at another level seen as a natural and human response to intolerable suffering and privation. In both these literary contributions there is some awareness of the inadequacy of the 'self-help' philosophy when faced with a level of poverty which made social progress impossible, and of the uselessness of educational provision when food for the next meal was a priority.

As is well known, the image of the cotton districts and the industrial cities constructed in many 'social problem' novels of the period is that of a uniform, dehumanizing and unnatural, even perverse, growth on the national culture. *Bradshaw's Manchester Journal*, however, challenges this stereotype on many levels. The city is represented as productive, varied, active, dynamic, aware and proud of its history. Many articles celebrate such achievements as the new railways, the inventive industrialists, and the range of educational provision. One of the main purposes of the *Journal* was the marketing of this less threatening image of the city to a national readership. However, in retrospect, this worthy enterprise can be seen to have failed to resolve many inherent contradictions: was its attempt to build a unified readership across classes anything more than rhetoric? Was it mainly a Lancashire journal celebrating local achievements for local readers, or did it promote a particular version of the region for the benefit of a wider, national readership?

Notes

1. Many of the local contributors to *Bradshaw's Journal* also appeared in *The Festive Wreath*.
2. This *Journal* is available in bound form in all the major Manchester Libraries. A full set consists of four volumes, each covering a six-month period:

Volume 1: May 1841 to November 1841, as *Bradshaw's Manchester Journal*, 27 weekly 16-page issues, with steel engravings and coloured county maps given gratis to subscribers with every 12th number. Double column. Published by Bradshaw and Blacklock, Manchester.

Volume 2: December 1841 to May 1842, as *Bradshaw's Journal: A Miscellany of Literature, Science and Art*, 27 weekly issues, embellished with engravings on steel. Double column. Published by William Strange, Paternoster-Row. London.

Volume 3: June 1842 to November 1842, as *Bradshaw's Journal: A Miscellany of Literature, Science and Art*, 27 weekly issues, double column. With steel engravings in every other issue. Published by William Strange, Paternoster-Row and W.J. Adams, Fleet Street, London.

Volume 4: December 1842 to April 1843, as *Bradshaw's Journal*, six monthly numbers, each of 64 pages. Single column. With steel engravings. Published by William Strange, Paternoster-Row & W.J. Adams, Fleet Street, London.

3. The fine seventeenth-century printing press now housed in Chetham's Library was donated by Falkner.
4. The established London-based 'improving' magazines were in decline at this time. The appeal of the radical periodical press on one hand, and the new market for sensational weekly magazines developed by Edward Lloyd and others created great anxiety amongst the middle classes about the nature of working class reading. *Bradshaw's Journal* was one of the earliest of a number of attempts to produce a cheap weekly miscellany magazine dedicated to gradual social progress through education. *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* (1847–1849) and *The People's Journal* (1846–1849) were very similar in format and content – and in the commercial difficulties they encountered – to Bradshaw's.
5. William Gaspey was an interesting writer whose work warrants more study. He was involved with the Sun Inn group, and was editor of *The Manchester Keepsake* in 1844. He worked in Manchester, and later owned a stationery shop in Keswick. He published several volumes of verse, including *Poor Law Melodies* (1842).
6. George Etell Sargent (1808–1833) published 14 novels between 1849 and 1865, most under the auspices of the SPCK. His earliest publications were the four tales serialised in *Bradshaw's Journal*.