

The Clarion

The *Clarion*, a socialist weekly, was established by [Robert Blatchford](#), a [Manchester](#) journalist, in 1890. The paper first appeared in Manchester on 2nd December, 1891. Blatchford announced that the newspaper would follow a "policy of humanity; a policy not of party, sect or creed; but of justice, of reason and mercy." The first edition sold 40,000 and after a few months settled down to about 30,000 copies a week.

In 1893 the *Clarion* began serializing Blatchford's book *Merrie England*. When it was eventually published as a book it sold 750,000 copies. In 1895 began to use the work of the illustrator [Walter Crane](#).

The *Clarion* newspaper also became involved in a wide-range of different activities including missionary vans, cycling clubs, choirs, handicraft guilds and holiday camps. The newspaper also sponsored Cinderella Clubs that entertain children from the slums. [Robert Blatchford](#) boasted that he would "convert England to Socialism in seven years". However, it soon became clear that Blatchford had overestimated the power of the *Clarion* and when he was asked about this a few years later, he replied that "the British working classes are not fit for Socialism yet".

Blatchford upset a lot of the *Clarion* readers with his enthusiastic support for the [Boer War](#) and opposition to organisations such as the [NUWSS](#) and the [WSPU](#) that were demanding the vote for women.

Sales fell but revived after the [1906 General Election](#), when 29 [Labour Party](#) MPs were elected. Blatchford increased the size of the newspaper and began to employ talented socialist writers such as [George Bernard Shaw](#). By 1907 sales of the *Clarion* had reached 74,000.

After the [First World War](#) Blatchford moved to the right and became a passionate advocate of the British Empire. In the [1924 General Election](#) he supported the [Conservative Party](#) and declared that [Stanley Baldwin](#) was Britain's finest politician. The *Clarion* ceased publication in 1931.

1) [Philip Snowden](#), *An Autobiography* (1934)

In the 1890s Robert Blatchford was attracting recruits to the movement by his vigorous socialist writings. He established *The Clarion*, a weekly socialist and literary journal, and written *Merrie England*, a popular textbook on socialism written in the simple and vigorous English of which he was such a master. This book, which extended to two hundred pages, was published in a penny edition, which had a sale of a million copies. No man did more than he to make socialism understood by the ordinary working man. He based his appeal on the principles of human justice. He preached socialism as a system of industrial co-operation for the common good. His arguments and illustrations

were drawn from facts and experiences within the knowledge of the common people.

(2) [Tom Hopkinson](#), *Of This Our Time* (1982)

In the 1890s, before cars came to dominate roads built for the brief heyday of the stage coach, there had been a short alliance between two oddly assorted partners - socialism and the bicycle. Robert Blatchford, a journalist who had spent some years as a private soldier, founded *The Clarion* in 1891 as a weekly paper on a capital of £400. Its blend of biblical socialism with love of the countryside caught the mood of the time and the magazine prospered. Earnest young tradesmen and craftsmen took to their cycles at weekends to explore the 'merrie England' of which Blatchford wrote in a book that would ultimately sell two million copies, and discussed plans for a socialist Britain in evening classes and at Workers' Educational Societies during the week. *The Clarion* was their bible, and a network of *Clarion* cycling clubs carried its message round the country and pushed its circulation up to 60,000.

By 1934, however, most of the clubs had gone the way of the stage coach, and *The Clarion's* trumpet call had sunk to a feeble quaver. With circulation at 15,000 and next to no advertising, it appeared doomed to rapid extinction. But then Dunbar had an idea. If encyclopedias and sets of Dickens had induced two million homes to buy the *Daily Herald* six times a week, surely similar offers could entice a quarter of that number, the politically conscious, to pay twopence a week for a 'poor man's *New Statesman*'. He managed to convince his colleagues and the project went ahead.

Robert Blatchford, the son of an actor, was born in Maidstone in 1851. Robert father died when he was two and at the age of fourteen he was apprenticed as a brushmaker. He disliked the work and ran away to join the army.

Blatchford reached the rank of sergeant major before leaving the service in 1878. After trying a variety of different jobs he became a freelance journalist. After working for several newspapers he became leader writer for the *Sunday Chronicle* in [Manchester](#). It was his journalistic experience of working-class life that turned Blatchford into a socialist.

In 1890 Blatchford founded the [Manchester Fabian Society](#). The following year, Blatchford and four fellow members launched a socialist newspaper, *The Clarion*. Blatchford, who was editor, announced that the newspaper would follow a "policy of humanity; a policy not of party, sect or creed; but of justice, of reason and mercy." The first edition sold 40,000 and after a few months settled down to about 30,000 copies a week.

It was decided in 1893 to publish some of Blatchford's articles about socialism as a book. *Merrie England*, was an immediate success, with the cheap edition selling over 2,000,000 copies. Influenced by the ideas of [William Morris](#), Blatchford emphasized the importance of the arts and the values of the countryside. Considered to be an excellent example of socialist propaganda, the book was translated into several different languages.

Blatchford upset many of his socialist supporters by his nationalistic views on foreign policy. He supported the government during the **Boer War** and warned against what he saw was the German menace. Blatchford also changed his views on equal rights and strongly opposed the policies of the [NUWSS](#) and the [WSPU](#).

After the [First World War](#) Blatchford moved to the right and became a passionate advocate of the British Empire. In the [1924 General Election](#) supported the [Conservative Party](#) and declared that [Stanley Baldwin](#) was Britain's finest politician. **Robert Blatchford** died on 17th December 1943.

(1) [Philip Snowden](#), *An Autobiography* (1934)

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Friday April 19 1907

A Journal to Stella by Merrythought Wibblesnatch. McGinnis

Friday April 26 1907

A New Journal to Stella Letter II by M. W. McGinnis Esq

Friday May 3 1907

A New Journal to Stella by M. W. McGinnis Esq

Friday May 17 1907

A New Journal to Stella Letter IV by M. W. McGinnis Esq

Friday October 25 1907

For the Children by Winifrid