

My Trade – A Short History of British Journalism by Andrew Marr.
Macmillan 2004.

Andrew Marr is the kind of person who makes the rest of us mere mortals realise repeatedly how little we have accomplished. His breadth and depth as a journalist are on display daily and his books evince a sensitivity to their subject and an intellectual quality that are admirable.

My Trade, a Short History of British Journalism, is Marr at his best – erudite, stylish, funny, original and informative. For anyone interested in the history of British Journalism this is a wonderful introduction to an area whose product dominates the lives of almost everyone in this country.

From its rather disreputable, over-taxed and censored beginnings to its all conquering power today, Marr details the publications, journalists and proprietors who created newspapers and set the styles and patterns that in some cases are still followed.

He writes engagingly and frankly of his own career, notably of his stint as Editor of The Independent, a role he describes as akin to a pint glass of lukewarm ricin, and of his work on television and radio, of colleagues he has loved or admired, and of the different kinds of journalism, from hacks to foreign correspondents to pundits.

The Epilogue, in which he indulges in some navel-gazing about the current state of his trade, and the almost universally low-esteem in which journalists are held, should be read by everyone who cares about the standards and practices of the organs of communication on which we depend for information; but ultimately one is left with the feeling that as long as Andrew Marr is around there is cause for hope, if not undiluted optimism.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh