

Unreliable Sources – How the 20th century was reported - by John Simpson.
Macmillan 2010.

John Simpson is the doyen of BBC foreign correspondents and a man who has brought more exciting stories to BBC news viewers than almost anyone else in the final three decades of the 20th and the first of the 21st centuries. He is an insightful and courageous reporter, sometimes even becoming the story as when he entered Kabul after the fall of the Taliban. But Simpson has also demonstrated, in a number of books, that he is also a fine and mesmerising writer, not least in *A Mad World*, *My Masters* and *The Wars Against Saddam*.

In *Unreliable Sources*, John Simpson turns his forensic eye on his fellow correspondents and the ways in which they have reported, and deliberately misreported the news stories that they had been sent to cover.

Divided into 19 chapters with an introduction and conclusion, the book starts in the period of the Boer War and ends some 500 pages later with the conflicts of the latter decades of the 20th century and the start of the 21st. Sandwiched in between are stories of reporters and events that include the Easter Rising, the coming to power of Hitler and the Suez Crisis.

Simpson considers individual journalists, the good the bad and the ugly, as well as newspaper proprietors and the way the 'line' taken by the owner affected the editorial and reporting sections of the newspaper. His material on this area demonstrates that some of the more egregious actions of today's papers follow a long tradition in the UK press, and should therefore come as no surprise to any readers.

The Conclusion is dominated by Iraq, the British decision to go to war, the role played by the press in presenting the decision, and particularly the 'Gilligan affair' which led to the suicide of Dr David Kelly, the Hutton 'enquiry' and the resignation of senior figures at the BBC. In spite of the fact that Gilligan lost his job subsequent events have vindicated his original words on the *Today* programme in May 2003 and as Simpson points out, one of the annoying things about journalists is that they always contrive to have the last word as they strive to tell people what their world is really like.

Having read this masterful survey I can only hope that John Simpson continues to fulfil his role as an exemplar of the best of his profession.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh