

# Eddy Shah

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**S**elim E Shah, universally known as Eddy Shah, was born in Cambridge, UK in 1944. His father was Iranian and became a shipping barrister, his mother English from a local boatbuilding family.

The citation for his Honorary degree by Anglia Ruskin University in 2001 neatly summarises the central role Eddy Shah played in the revolution which swept over the British newspaper industry in the 1980s. He “is famous throughout the land and beyond (as the) founder of Today newspaper and hero of the battle against the “closed shop” of employment and the closed minds which resisted new technology in the newspaper industry.”

His schooldays were marked by abrupt departures from one school after another, though he did stay long enough at a Brighton crammers to get 7 GCE O-levels. His first job was in repertory theatre and later in television production. In 1986, he met the actress Jennifer White while working for Granada Television, and they married.

His first newspaper job was in a team producing a new newspaper for the Manchester Evening News. But he was made redundant after only 6 months. This was during the “three day week” when commercial users of electricity were only allowed to use it for three days each week, and only for their normal hours.

Eddy Shah responded by selling his house, and using the money to start his own local newspaper (and vowing never to work for anyone else ever again). He devoted the next 16 years to building up a total of 60 provincial newspapers in the north-west of England. All these newspapers used efficient, modern computer technology rather than the traditional, centuries-old, labour-intensive and tiresome hot-metal technology.

His first confrontation with the unions came in July 1983, when he sacked 6 members of staff on the Warrington Messenger who had been ordered to go on strike by the NGA in protest against the employment of non-union

members. But new laws had been passed by the Thatcher government to make such strikes more difficult, and Mr. Shah refused to reinstate the 6 strikers. The NGA started mass picketing of the firm’s offices, and also began to harass individual members of the staff and of Eddy Shah’s family. Every van leaving the company’s premises had to have the way cleared by police. The NGA ignored several court injunctions and fines. The ‘siege’ went on for several weeks. At the end of November, the courts sequestered the NGA bank accounts until the illegal action stopped. When other newspapers reported on the violence, they were shut down by the NGA too. In January 1985 the NGA agreed to abide by court orders, but some further industrial action continued until May.

Eddy Shah was keen to build on this success, and tried to interest the proprietors of a number of national newspapers to support the launch of a new national newspaper. Many newspaper people could see that computerisation was bound to come, and would radically change the whole of the industry. But he could not get the support of any of the national newspapers, so he decided to launch Today on his own, It would be produced without trade unions, with computer technology and with colour pictures (in contrast to the black-and-white pictures in all other national newspapers). It was a very courageous decision, but it proved to be too difficult to carry out successfully

Today was launched on 4 March 1986 as a middle-market tabloid to compete with the Daily Mail and the Daily Express. It achieved an initial circulation of a million copies a day though this fell back to some 300,000 within weeks. The paper was sold to Lonrho within 4 months, and then sold again to News International in 1987. It finally ceased publication in 1996.

Though the paper was not a commercial success, it forced the conversion of all UK national newspapers to electronic production and colour printing, and thereby led to the exodus of all the national newspapers from Fleet Street, and a massive reduction in the power of the traditional print unions.



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## Additional notes

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Prepared by: Piers Nicholson 2024

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Additional notes: We have not been able to find a royalty-free photograph of Eddy Shah. There are however plenty of stock photos of him available on, for example, [www.alchtron.com](http://www.alchtron.com)