Timeline

1974 – The Glasgow University Media Project is formed. Researchers are interviewed in the Summer and the project begins in the Autumn. The project is financed by the Social Science Research Council with a two year grant of between £35,000 and £40,000. Funding is secured by John Eldridge and Paul Walton from Glasgow University. Brian Winston, a former BBC and Granada TV producer and Senior Tutor at the National Film School in Bradford is hired as Research Director.

1975 – Video recording of news bulletins on BBC1, BBC2 and ITV begins on New Year’s Day. The intention is to record for one year and to focus on industrial and economic news. A major revision in the project leads recording to cease on 3rd June, giving the group a sample lasting five months, the largest sample of TV news taken to that point.

In June, the Media Project submits an admittedly rushed 38 page report to the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting. The evidence leads the Committee’s chairman, Lord Annan, to call the group ‘a shadowy guerrilla force on the fringe of broadcasting.’ In December, Gerard Slessenger, Chief Assistant to Editor Television writes the very critical ‘BBC Analysis of the Glasgow University Media Project Report.’

A contract is agreed with Routledge to publish the study in two volumes, in 1976 and 1978, with the title Bad News.
1976 – The group drafts a reply to the Slessenger paper in February.

*Bad News* is published on 9 September under the agreed name Glasgow University Media Group. The names of all eight researchers appear in alphabetical order as authors. An edited version of chapter one of *Bad News* also appears in the September issue of the journal *Theory & Society*.

In September, ITN issues the publisher (Routledge) and the printer (Unwin Brothers) with a writ for libel over passages from chapter three: ‘Inside the Television Newsroom.’ The allegedly defamatory passages had been deleted from the published version of the book, without the consent of the authors. Further threats were made in November and January because the material could still be found in 200 review copies of *Bad News*.

1977 – *Trade Unions & the Media* is published in the last week of June.

1978 – In January, passages from meetings of various Editor News and Current Affairs meetings at the BBC from 1976 are leaked and published in the *Leveller* Magazine. Much of the material concerns the various strategies the BBC discussed for combating the effect of *Bad News*. Sir Charles Curran, Director General of the BBC is quoted saying ‘there would be no sense in attacking *Bad News* in detail… He thought however that the ideology of sociologists was a subject which would repay a little study.’

In the Autumn, the *Index on Censorship* publishes a hysterical joint review of *Bad News* and *Trade Unions & the Media* by the Welsh actor and historian Kenneth Griffith who writes: ‘The greater threat to our way of life comes, generally, from the collective authors of these two books rather than from the object of their massed attack. I suspect that if they had their way I would not be free to write these reviews and *Index* would be in desperate trouble.’

1979 – In April, the *New Statesman* publishes material from the forthcoming *More Bad News* under the title ‘Distorting the News.’ Two weeks later, Richard Francis, Director of News and Current Affairs at the BBC responds, calling it a ‘selective little exercise.’


In May, Alastair Burnet, presenter of ITN’s *News at Ten*, uses his Royal Television Society lecture to denounce *More Bad News*.

Where most reviews of volume one were disparaging, practitioners are split over volume two. Former *Guardian* editor Alastair Hetherington attacks the book in the *Glasgow Herald*, while Stan Taylor in the *Scotsman* and Stuart Hood in the *Guardian* are more measured.

In a review of *More Bad News* for the *Listener* magazine Phillip Whitehead says that the Glasgow dustmen case study from *Bad News* is ‘already mythic.’

In July, Raymond Williams reviews *More Bad News* for the *London Review of Books*. 
That summer, *Screen* publishes Gillian Skirrow’s ‘*More Bad News – A Review of the Reviews*’ the first serious attempt to engage with the controversy caused by the GUMG.

1981 – In January, the *New Statesman* publishes ‘Goodies & Baddies: The bias in the television image’ in which the GUMG questions the adequacy of ITN’s reporting from the Labour Party conference of October 1980. This results in a lengthy exchange in the letters page of the *NS*, with the group on one side and Peter Sissons and Paul McKee on the other. The exchanges go on until May.

In the spring, a piece by Tim Robinson in the *Media Reporter* speaks of the impact the group is having on broadcasting: ‘Their impact on media men has been total; what is worse, it has left a sufficiently bad taste in enough mouths to result in further research within broadcasting organisations becoming almost impossible.’ The very next, summer, issue publishes the GUMG’s response: ‘We have been very critical of broadcasting, but it has not had the effect that Tim Robinson claims. Since the publication of *Bad News* and *More Bad News*, we have been contacted by a large number of programme researchers and broadcasters from the BBC as well as Granada, LWT, STV and Thames. Their concern was to do something about the state of broadcasting and to attempt to democratise the structures within which it is at present constituted.’

In March, a paperback edition of *Bad News* is published. The *Sunday Times* calls it a ‘slightly stodgy, graph-ridden but fascinating study.’

In April, the GUMG and over 100 MPs, trade unionists and scholars send a letter to the heads of the BBC and the IBA accusing the BBC and ITV of bias and distortion in their coverage of British Industry. The letter alleges that there is an ‘enormous gap between the obligations of the broadcasters to give a balanced account and what they actually do.’ BBC Chairman George Howard responds personally and tells the group that the BBC accepts ‘neither your premise, nor your arguments.’ Both the IBA and BBC formally deny the charge and in June they reject the letter’s calls for an inquiry into bias.

Also in April, additional BBC minutes, which contradict George Howard, are leaked and published in the *Evening Times*. They show John Wilson saying that ‘it was necessary to be honest and admit that there was something in what the GUMG was saying.’

In June, the *New Statesman* quotes from further leaked BBC minutes which show David Holmes, then Assistant to the BBC’s Director-General, reporting that the Glasgow allegations were ‘permeating deeply into the consciousness of the general public, even down to influencing the way some of its news trainees based their appreciation of its news coverage.’

In October, a *THES* feature talks about the forthcoming *Really Bad News*. Stuart Hall is quoted saying, ‘whether they liked it or not, everyone read *Bad News*.’
1982 – The group begins a study of news coverage of peace and disarmament, sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. During the recording phase, in March, Argentine troops invade the Falkland Islands and a war begins that will last until June. The group decides, without much funding, to extend its study to include coverage of the conflict. Further funding is secured from UNESCO.

*Really Bad News* is published in May. The same month, leaked BBC minutes are quoted in the *Sunday Times*. They show that Assistant Director-General Alan Protheroe called the group ‘trots’ and that he did so ‘with such vehemence that he stuttered over the initial “T” and had great difficulty getting the word out at all.’

Writing in the *Sunday Standard*, Alastair Hetherington writes a second hostile review of the GUMG’s work as do Paul McKee in *Television Today* and Gus Macdonald in the *Guardian*. The *Times* reports that the BBC has ordered an internal inquiry in response to *Really Bad News*, which will be lead by Alistair Osborne, News and Current Affairs Editor at Radio 4.

*Really Bad News* reaches number five in the *Glasgow Evening Times*’ best sellers list for May 1982 (behind Martin Cruz Smith’s *Gorky Park* and ahead of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and the James Bond thriller *Licence Renewed*). The *Herald* says that the group ‘has become the scourge of broadcasting.’

In June, *Really Bad News* is reviewed in the *Labour Herald* by MP Ken Livingston, the future mayor of London.

Also in June, Chris Dunkley of the *Financial Times* reviews *Really Bad News*. He says the GUMG ‘simply excludes any evidence which tends to disprove their thesis […] The only surprise is that the group can go on fooling enough of the people enough of the time to get support for them to trot out the same set of wide-eyed observations […] on television every couple of years.’

In July, the *Evening Sentinel* calls the GUMG ‘the bête noire of television mandarins. Simply to mention their name in the corridors of power at the BBC or ITN is to risk either a tirade of self-justification or the cold shoulder of total disregard.’

Also in July, a reviewer for the *Times Education Supplement* says ‘the Group should be applauded for their achievement: a small group in a matter of years has had its message widely understood; even their critics now accept media partiality.’

Still in July, Greg Philo presents the Group’s research alongside Labour MP Michael Meacher on the *Man Alive Debate* on BBC2. He is given six minutes to present the Glasgow case. A subsequent exchange of letters is published in the *Guardian* between Philo, viewers of the programme and those who took part in it.

In August, the *Tribune* newspaper says that though media researchers based at Leeds and Leicester were at work well before the Glasgow group ‘it’s only since the debate was joined by the GUMG in 1976 […] that people – particularly those working in television itself – have begun to sit up and take notice.’ Similarly, the *Listener* says that the group ‘may well assist in stimulating more flexible responses to our
increasingly turbulent, multiracial and unemployment-plagued society.’ The Literary Review calls the Glasgow work clear, cogent, powerful, impressive and convincing.

In the autumn, the Media Reporter, whose previous reviews of GUMG were mostly unfavourable, recognises that the group ‘to their credit [has] caused a great deal of heart searching among news-gatherers and news-presenters in Britain.’

1984 – In the March issue of Screen, Carl Gardner & Julie Sheppard remark that for many media scholars the Glasgow research provides ‘a substantial model and example of what to look for and how to go about such work.’

The Miners’ Strike begins in March and lasts until the following March. The strike will provide the subject for the group’s first study of audience reception. Hansard records that, in June, Labour MP Tam Dalyell cites evidence from the forthcoming War & Peace News during a debate in the House of Commons.

In October, Martin Harrison delivers a lecture at the London School of Economics entitled ‘Whose Bias? Strikes, TV News & Media Studies.’ Later published as Keele Research Paper no. 19, it claims to rebut the findings from volumes one and two of Bad News.

1985 – War & Peace News is published in September. The book is based on a study of the 1982 Falklands conflict and is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Trust and is later supplemented by funding from UNESCO. Teaser passages are published in the Guardian. Geoff Mungham of Cardiff University calls it Glasgow’s ‘best book yet.’ The work is attacked by David Nicholas, Editor of ITN, in both the Guardian and in Televisual magazine. Lawrence Freedman from Kings College, London says the group’s case is made ‘forcefully and systematically.’

In October, a television programme based on the book’s findings is broadcast on BBC2’s Open Space series. While, in principle, the group has editorial control, the programme is heavily censored by the BBC, which prohibits the group from showing leaked BBC minutes on the screen. The programme and the BBC’s imposed cuts are widely reported. An estimated 500 people write to Director-General Alasdair Milne to protest the cuts. The Group and Assistant Director-General Alan Protheroe exchange letters in the Sunday Times. The Radio Times says that programme shows that ‘the GUMG has certainly strayed out of the dusty byways of academia and into mainstream debate about the purpose and style of TV’s influential news departments.’ Milne and Greg Philo, the scriptwriter for Open Space, engage in an official, but unpublished correspondence.

‘Academic hitmen stalking television’s newscasters’ is how the group is described in the Observer. The Tribune says that the group is ‘now quite famous.’

The Autumn issue of the Media Education Journal notes the group’s ‘capacity to irritate broadcasters,’ but also notes that the group’s work comes ‘in a form to which professionals feel obliged to respond.’

In November, Martin Harrison publishes TV News: Whose Bias? A casebook analysis of strikes, television & media studies. The book is hailed by the IBA as the definitive
rebuttal of the *Bad News* studies. The book’s arrival is reported in the *Times*, *THES* and the *New Statesman* and is reviewed widely. The group outlines its initial rebuttal, which is published in the *THES*, the *NATFE Journal* and *Airwaves*.

1986 – ‘From Buerk to Band Aid,’ the group’s study of the 1984 Ethiopian famine for the Television Trust is published in October. Passages appear in the *Guardian*.

That autumn, Richard Collins reflects on the Martin Harrison intervention in a piece for the *Journal of Communication*: ‘Bad News & Bad Faith: The Story of a Political Controversy.’

Near the end of the year, Norman Tebbit uses a bowdlerised version of the Glasgow method to accuse the BBC of bias in its coverage of the USA’s bombing raid on Libya.

1987 – The October issue of *Media, Culture & Society* publishes the GUMG’s official rebuttal of Harrison’s *TV News: Whose Bias?* It shows that the data on which Harrison built his conclusion were incomplete.


*Speak no Evil: The British Broadcasting Ban, the Media & the Conflict in Ireland* is published. The authors are Leslie Henderson, David Miller & Jaqueline Reilly.


1994 – David Miller’s *Don’t Mention the War: Northern Ireland, Propaganda & the Media* is published in October. The book is based on his PhD thesis written with the GUMG.


1996 – *The Media & Mental Distress* is published in October.


1998 – *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation & Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis* is published in January. The study is funded by the ESRC.

In February, the GUMG discussion paper *Cultural Compliance: Dead ends of Media/Cultural Studies & Social Science* is circulated widely. A copy reaches John Hartley.

1999 – *Message Received* is published in March. John Hartley responds to the GUMG in the
Winter issue of *Textual Practice* calling *Cultural Compliance* ‘a miserablist lament for a lost politics of revolutionary rupture.’

2000 – The November issue of *Media, Culture & Society* publishes a truncated version of ‘Cultural compliance & critical media studies.’

Also in November, the BBC’s David Shukman writes in the *Independent* about his involvement in the Glasgow Media Group’s DFID sponsored focus group, examining levels of audience interest in his reports from Angola.

2001 – The September issue of *Media, Culture & Society* publishes Alan Finlayson’s ‘Philo & Miller’s metaphysical media studies,’ a response to ‘Cultural Compliance.’

The book *Market Killing* is published in October and features the final version of ‘Cultural Compliance.’

2002 – The April issue of *Journalism Studies* includes Greg Philo’s ‘Television News & Audience Understanding of War, Conflict & Disaster’ a summary of the group’s work on Rwanda, Zaire and the DFID sponsored study that piloted the new method for reception analysis at the centre of the Israel/Palestine study.

2004 – *Bad News from Israel* is published in June. The book is welcomed in the Arab press and is received with ambivalence by the Jewish press. Publication of the book is reported on by Radio 4 and Channel Five News and is reviewed in the *Guardian, Scotsman, Economist* and elsewhere.

Jenny Kitzinger’s *Framing Abuse: Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children* is published in August.