

theJournalist

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HARD NEWS

Three years of reporting in Ukraine

Contents



NThree years ago, Russia invaded Ukraine and sent shockwaves through a previously peaceful Europe. The enormity of a war close to home made Jeff Farrell want to try his hand at war reporting and he made his first trip to Ukraine by taking holiday from his desk job and learning what to do on the ground amid Russian attacks. It was the first of several trips over three years that were to change his career. He recounts his experience in our cover feature.

Another issue much in the news and of huge importance to journalism is disinformation. Jenny Sims looks at what the regulator Ofcom is trying to achieve in the battle for truth.

What is the future for local news? The Government recently responded to the House of Lords communications and digital committee report on this question and was guarded in its offer of support, warning about the need to consider the fiscal climate. We have two features about the state of local news.

From the House of Lords to the Commons and a look at MPs who have gone to parliament after being journalists. Conrad Landin considers how the two professions are compatible and what do you do if you hear a good story.

I hope you enjoy this edition of The Journalist.

Christie

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Job cuts at the BBC World Service

THE BBC World Service is to cut 130 jobs, including in the UK, in a move to save £6 million a year.

The corporation, which was boosted by more than £32 million in extra funding for its World Service from the Foreign Office, blamed the latest cuts on the impact of previous licence-fee freezes, inflation and the necessity to maintain and update technological and digital infrastructure.

It also said that it is competing against international news organisations with much bigger budgets meaning that there is “increased competition for staff, platforms and frequencies, and audiences”.

The job cuts, which the BBC says it is trying to implement on a voluntary basis where possible, will involve closing posts in the



UK and internationally and in BBC Monitoring, which reports and analyses news from around the world.

The cuts come as the chairs of three House of Commons committees called on the Foreign Office and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to push the Treasury to rebalance the

contributions from the licence fee and the Foreign Office so that the BBC World Service is able to be less dependent on the licence fee.

The signatories of the letter from the committee chairs to the departments are Dame Emily Thornberry MP, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee; Dame

Caroline Dinenage, MP Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Sarah Champion MP Chair of the International Development Committee.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said the cuts “serve as yet another blow to journalists at the BBC. Proposals will see the

loss of talented and experienced journalists committed to the unrivalled journalism produced by the World Service and relied upon by countries globally. The freezing of the licence fee has had a profound impact still felt acutely today; we need a commitment from government to provide long-term sustainable funding that allows the provision by teams, including over 40 language services, to thrive.

“It is wrong journalists are once more bearing the brunt of changes at a time when the BBC’s journalism and soft power is needed more than ever.”

The NUJ BBC World Service branch passed a motion opposing the job cuts. The motion said: “NUJ members at the BBC World Service object to the BBC’s decision to cut the World Service budget by £6 million a year. This decision is bad for the BBC, bad for Britain, and bad for the world.”

Further action on SLAPPS is ruled out

THE GOVERNMENT has said that it “does not intend to legislate further in the current parliamentary session” against SLAPPs (strategic litigation against public participation) – lawsuits used

by wealthy individuals to silence journalists or other critics.

It made the statement in a response to the report on the future of news by the House of Lords communications and

digital committee which was published in November.

The government was also cautious in its approach to supporting local journalism. It said it is considering ways of strengthening local media

including financial help in the form of innovation funding and tax relief. However, it stressed that it must be “mindful of the current fiscal climate”.

The Lords committee report

had warned of the development of a two-tier media environment. That would mean that the best journalism was happening behind paywalls for those able to pay for it and everyone else would be served by low quality free information.

UK and US media job losses neared 4,000 last year

JOB CUTS in UK and US journalism totalled nearly 4,000 last year although this was half the previous year’s toll, according to analysis by the Press Gazette.

The online media magazine said that at least 3,875 redundancies and layoffs across newspaper, news broadcaster and digital media businesses were announced or reported in 2024.

This compares to the at least 8,000 journalism job cuts made in the UK and North America in 2023.

At least three-quarters of the job losses were carried out in the US last year.

The biggest single round of job losses was at The Messenger, the digital news start-up that folded affecting around 300 jobs, followed by the Associated Press decision to cut eight per cent of staff, mostly in the US.

In the UK, the biggest round was at the Evening Standard which made about 150 cuts when it decided to close its daily paper and print only on Thursdays.



NUJ

Commitments given as Observer sold

THE NUJ has secured concessions for Guardian and Observer journalists as the Observer moves to being owned by Tortoise Media.

The union said it had been engaged in negotiations with the Guardian Media Group and made significant progress over necessary mitigations for journalists, following members' collective opposition to the sale of The Observer to Tortoise Media, the loss-making start-up founded by former Times editor James Harding.

The NUJ Guardian and Observer chapel said: "We are pleased that hard-fought negotiations, which followed our historic industrial action, secured concessions for our Observer and Guardian colleagues, as our members voted to accept the mitigations offered.

"We are willing to work constructively with management in the next stage of transfer but expect conversations around the Guardian's weekend operation and governance to begin at the earliest opportunity."

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said: "I welcome the progress that has been made to date on the back of the chapel's powerful collective stand. We now want to see meaningful engagement through the TUPE process and outstanding issues such as workloads and governance addressed.

"While Guardian Media Group will be aware that the NUJ's ongoing trade dispute and current strike mandate remains live, we hope further industrial action can be avoided, and that good-faith negotiations will continue as we work to resolve the collective dispute."

MARK THOMAS



Concessions secured by the NUJ include the application window for voluntary redundancy option being extended by two weeks to 5 February and current redundancy terms for Observer staff to be protected for the next 18 months. Existing Guardian staff are to be given assurances on weekend working, as well as information on Saturday working at The Guardian.

Currently contracted Observer freelancers and regular casuals are to be treated as internal applicants for Guardian roles for the next 12 months. TUPE measures are to be issued before the voluntary redundancy deadline expires.

The Scott Trust and GMG board have also committed to discuss changes to governance structures at the Guardian.



We now want to see engagement through TUPE and issues such as workloads and governance addressed

Laura Davison
NUJ general secretary

Journalists' death toll hits 122

LAST year, 122 journalists and media workers were killed, according to the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ). Some 58 per cent of these deaths were a result of the war in Gaza.

The figure is just seven below the 129 killings of media professionals in 2023, which was among the worst

for journalists since the IFJ started its annual Killed List in 1990.

In addition, the IFJ revealed that, as of December 31 2024, 516 journalists were in prison – a sharp increase compared with 427 in 2023 and 375 in 2022. China (including Hong Kong) is the worst offender, with 135 journalists behind bars,

ahead of Israel (59 Palestinian journalists) and Myanmar (44).

The IFJ published its annual Killed List on December 10 on International Human Rights Day. It then updated it to give the total for 2024 and to take into account the result of additional deaths in the Middle East and the Arab world

after nine more journalists were killed in Palestine and two in Syria in late December.

They included the killing of five journalists in central Gaza just after Christmas, who were hit by an Israeli air strike while working for satellite channel Al-Quds Today. They died sleeping in a clearly marked broadcasting van near Al-Awda Hospital, based in the Nuseirat refugee camp.

Johnnie Walker remembered by NUJ colleagues

THE LATE radio DJ Johnnie Walker has been remembered by former NUJ colleagues who recalled his 'principled' outlook and 'commitment to the union'.

Walker, who began his career as a pirate DJ in the 1960s at Swinging Radio England, died on December 31 at his home in Dorset at the age of 79, having been diagnosed with the debilitating lung condition idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

He was informed by doctors that the condition was terminal and broadcast his last Radio 2 show in October.

Among those who paid tribute to Walker are members of the former Wiltshire NUJ branch, who say he often attended its meetings.

Former BBC Points West correspondent Steve Brodie, who worked with Walker during the 1980s, said: "Johnnie Walker was a truly great guy and broadcaster. We launched GWR together when he moved to Swindon from Radio West in Bristol around 1983.

"He was an excellent NUJ member. Of course, he didn't have to be but he was very principled and never wavered in his commitment to the union."



JACK SULLIVAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Police spied on N Ireland journalists

THE POLICE service in Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Metropolitan Police have been found to have acted illegally by spying on two journalists to identify their sources.

The landmark ruling was made by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) in December in a case brought by Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney.

It found that the actions of police when mounting an undercover surveillance operation were disproportionate and undermined the domestic and international protections available for the media.

The PSNI was ordered to pay £4,000 to each journalist. The amount is similar to previous financial damages granted by the European Court of Human Rights to journalists Dirk Ernst and Natalia Sedletska after Belgian and Ukrainian authorities were found to have breached their Article 10 rights to protect journalistic sources.

A covert sting operation in 2018 targeted a civilian employee of the Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman.

They were suspected of passing secret documents to the journalists which appeared in a documentary called No Stone Unturned about the Loughinisland killings in 1994.

The film claimed that the police had colluded in protecting loyalist gunmen who murdered six Catholic men as they watched a World Cup football match.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary said the IPT decision had profound implications for media freedom.

She said: "By taking the case to the IPT Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney have been responsible for shedding light on a very

VUK VALCIC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



dark episode in the murky history of surveillance against journalists. Our union has always been concerned at the secretive nature of the IPT and the lack of transparency in how evidence may be heard. The public sessions and the tenacious quest for answers by the various legal teams provided an insight into the operation of the IPT, as well as insights into the way in which decisions were taken by those responsible for policing in Northern Ireland.

"Many questions remain unanswered. The IPT hearing cannot be the end of this matter since it has raised so many fundamental questions."

In January Angus McCullough KC issued a progress report on the review he is conducting into the conduct of the PSNI arising from concerns about surveillance of journalists, lawyers and other groups.



The Police Service of Northern Ireland was ordered to pay £4000 to each journalist

Sun reporter hit with arrest warrant

RUSSIA has issued an arrest warrant for Sun defence editor Jerome Starkey and he has been placed on an international wanted list after reporting on the Ukraine war.

Russia's Federal Security Service secured the arrest warrant against Starkey because of his exclusive

reporting in August last year when he travelled with Ukrainian forces and a photographer to Kursk inside Russia to cover the incursion by Ukraine. The move by Ukraine was described as the biggest foreign attack on Russian territory since World War II. Starkey's reports meant

that he was the first UK journalist to report from an occupied part of Russia since the Crimean war in 1856.

Starkey has said he will carry on reporting the Ukraine war although he was taking the warrant seriously and The Sun – together with Sir Keir Starmer – has pledged

support for him.'

The defence editor has made a dozen lengthy visits to Ukraine since the war began three years ago.

Last year Evan Gershkovich, the Wall Street Journal reporter, was finally released after being imprisoned in Russia for more than a year.



Spirit amid the horror, Page 16

Family courts made more open

MAJOR changes to reporting family courts rolled out in January mean that accredited journalists can report on what they see and hear whilst attending the hearings, if a transparency order is granted.

Family courts usually cover issues such as who children

will live with or whether they should be taken into care, so are sensitive and are held in private. New changes mean those reporting on proceedings can ask for documents and speak to families involved, if they keep them anonymous.

Since 2009, journalists

have been able to attend cases but not report on them. However, following campaigns highlighting the importance of public interest journalism, including by journalist Louise Tickle, a pilot scheme was rolled out in January 2023 in Leeds, Carlisle and Cardiff.

In the following year it was to 16 further court areas.

In 2024, the Family Procedure Rule Committee approved the extension to cover all family courts, making required changes to the Family Procedure Rules and issuing new practice directions.



CRIMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

AI plans could undermine copyright control

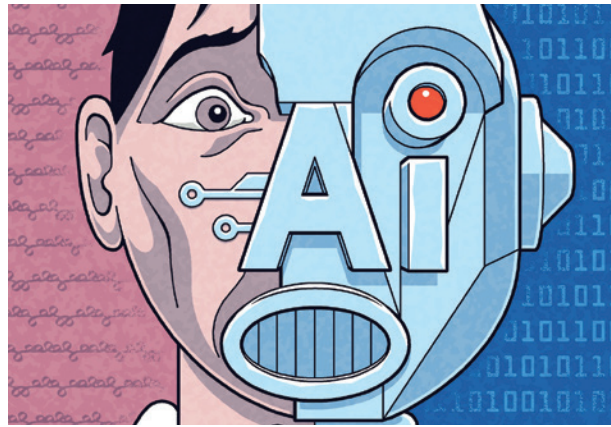
THE UNION has warned that the government’s plans to develop the use of artificial intelligence (AI) across industry and public services must not come at the expense of members who could find their work taken and copyright ignored.

The UK government is promoting its AI Opportunities Action Plan as a flagship initiative to “capture the opportunities of AI to enhance growth and productivity”.

The plan, devised by Matt Clifford, an entrepreneur who is also the prime minister’s adviser on AI, makes several recommendations, including that the government should “reform the UK text and data mining regime so that it is at least as competitive as the EU”.

The NUJ has called for greater enforcement of UK copyright law, opposing an exception that would permit AI developers access to the copyright-protected works of rights-holders through opt-out mechanisms. However, it says in its copyright and AI consultation regarding the EU approach, “there is some uncertainty about how it works in practice and some aspects are still being developed”.

The union says that NUJ members, including freelancers working in different sectors, should not have their works used to train or develop AI technologies without consent being sought and obtained. The union will respond to the



MATT KENYON

Choice over how works are used must remain with journalists, whose work plays a critical role in democracy

Laura Davison
NUJ general secretary

consultation and include key issues called for in its AI campaign.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said that ministers must show they remain open to the voices of journalists and creators: “The pursuit of innovation and opportunities in AI must not be at the expense of our members... Choice and control over how copyright-protected works are used must remain with journalists, whose work plays a critical role in our democracy.”

Fears as Getty and Shutterstock to merge

GETTY IMAGES and Shutterstock are to merge, triggering concerns over how much control photographers will have over their work and losing income.

The company will be called Getty Images and be worth

\$3.7 billion (£2.97 billion). Photographers fear the merger could undermine livelihoods and public trust.

The union has written to Getty seeking assurances that contributors via Shutterstock will be have the option to

refuse permission for Getty’s AI generator to use their images. In addition, the NUJ is pressing for fair rates for photojournalistic and news photography, and that the AI image library should never be used to produce images

purporting to be of current or historical events.

Natasha Hirst, NUJ president and a photographer, said: “This monopolistic merger is a real risk to photographers trying to sustain a living. The

drive to increase generative AI outputs also endangers public trust in our work.

“Driving us out of our profession in the race to provide ever-cheaper images devalues the vital role of photojournalism and ignores the risks and costs often involved in it.”

Steve Bell





Forced to share for little reward

A scheme to pay creators for works shared privately may sound good but brings risks, says **Andrew Wiard**

Are you happy for people to make use of your pictures, articles, books, drawings and other creations free of charge?

The culture media and sport committee recommends, in its Creator Remuneration Report issued last year, a compulsory scheme whereby anyone can make private use of our copyright material, without permission or payment.

What exactly does 'private' use mean? According to the government, when such a scheme was first proposed in 2014: "If you lawfully own it, you can copy it, as long as you do not give copies to other people." That covers personal, private uses such as format shifting, which would include transferring music from CD to a mobile phone or archiving.

That scheme fell then because it did not pay creators for waiving these rights. Today, the culture, media and sport committee is considering a similar proposal whereby we do now get paid – from a 'smart fund'.

This would work by imposing a levy on technology manufacturers, who would pay a small fraction of the value of each device they sell into the smart fund. A smallish chunk would then be siphoned off for community and cultural institutions and we would get what is left through five collecting societies. These societies represent artists, musicians, performers, authors and TV and film directors. The two most likely to represent NUJ members are the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) for writers, and the Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS) for photographers.

Why would we agree to this?

First, the argument goes, is because while these private uses are in clear breach of our copyright, we find it extremely difficult to track and collect payment, so let's just put a ring round them and let them go. We would then get something (not much!) from the levy.

Second, it would also allow for reciprocal payments from collecting societies abroad. As far as the government is concerned, it is good PR as it bungs some money (our money) at cultural and community organisations.

It is claimed the smart fund will provide a 'purposeful and sustainable solution to rebuilding the UK's cultural economy'. (The report doesn't go in for managing expectations.) Whatever its value may be to others, this scheme will not save us from the food banks. It's a case of a loss of rights for minimal payments.

While ALCS and DACS bring in significant sums for some, for most of us, payouts from them are peripheral to our main sources of income.

It bungs some money (our money) at cultural and community organisations

What we freelancers really need is whatever it takes to see us through our daily jobs, week in week out. For that, we need something far more radical. Fair contract law would be a good place to start.

So would the following. The above report also recommends "that the Government appoint a Freelancers' Commissioner with appropriate powers and cross-departmental oversight to advocate in the interests of creative freelancers and address wider issues around contracts and working conditions". Now that's a big deal and it would make a real difference.

But it's not a case of either or here, so what's not to like?

Just one word. Sharing. The report talks about 'private copying, storing and sharing on electronic devices'. Where did that word sharing come from? What on earth does it mean? Where does sharing begin and end? No clarity here from the smart fund:

"Every day, millions of people access and store content like music, art, books and films on their personal digital devices. Whether downloading films and albums, or sending pictures to our friends, we use creative content to stay connected and express ourselves. Unlike streaming services or some social media, storing and sharing content for personal use infringes the creators' copyright, and creators do not get paid. Other countries have already solved this problem by changing copyright to make storing and sharing content lawful, and paying the creators in the meantime," it says.

You can see what this could open the door to. Buying pictures of mine then copying them for personal use is one thing. That was the deal in 2014. Sharing them with others is quite another. I would lose all control of my work.

We did not ask for this scheme. It would not be voluntary. So it is essential that the rights we would be compelled to surrender are not open-ended but strictly limited. Parliament got it right first time: "If you lawfully own it, you can copy it, as long as you do not give copies to other people."

Exactly so. If – and only if – they say the same again, then OK, let's do it. That would be a good deal for all.



Paris branch takes a critical look at AI. **Sylvia Edwards Davis** reports

Dodgy with facts, but it'll get better

The Paris branch of the NUJ hosted a panel on how AI is affecting journalism. This was part of a seminar held jointly with the Anglo-American Press Association, which I moderated as the continental Europe representative on the new media industrial council.

Regulation emerged as a critical concern. Eric Scherer, director of News MediaLab and international affairs at France Télévisions, addressed the nature of this revolution. "If the last great wave of technology was about disseminating information, the new wave is about producing it," he noted.

While it would be shortsighted to limit its potential to help society in fields such as health or the environment, Scherer made the case for treating news differently.

"The new tools can be used to twist reality, to manipulate facts or events. AI does not do any research, does not question sources, does not give its own sources," he said.

Scherer added that a handful of giant private platforms are engaged in a "very secret arms race". With AI becoming more powerful and radically cheaper by the month, "we just don't know anything about what is under the hood. We don't understand how it works and sometimes [the platforms] don't know either."

Scherer underlined that high-ranking scientists and developers are urging regulators to slow down the roll-out to gain visibility.

"Some say that artificial general intelligence, where AI will be smarter than humans, is still far away – there is a big debate raging – but I would be very cautious."

Scherer spoke from the front row as a member of the commission led by Nobel Peace laureate Maria Ressa,

which crafted the Paris Charter for AI and Journalism, under the umbrella of Reporters Without Borders. He sees the charter as an initiative to establish an ethical framework to protect the integrity of information and the profession.

"The core principle is that ethics must govern technological choice within the media; human agency must remain central in editorial decisions in a human-machine-human model. The charter calls for the media to help society distinguish with confidence between authentic and synthetic content and, of course, for the media to participate in global AI governance and defend the veracity of journalists when negotiating with these platforms."

The commission comprises 32 members from 20 countries with support from 16 partner organisations including the Canadian Journalism Foundation, DW Akademie, the European Journalism Centre, the Pulitzer Centre, the Thomson Foundation, the European Federation of Journalists and the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, among others.

Given the pace of AI development, both panellists agreed that continuing education and adaptation are essential if journalists are to maintain a competitive edge.

Chris O'Brien, founder and editor of The French Tech Journal and its weekly newsletter La Machine: France AI Radar, warned: "While AI productivity tools are everywhere all of a sudden, the output is still pretty recognisable in the repetitive writing or cartoonish images but, in the very near future, we won't be able to tell."

O'Brien, who is involved in the implementation of AI, said that it was key that a journalist engaging with the tools understood their limitations. "You could be unknowingly

Journalists will distinguish themselves by the nature of the relationship they have with AI

Talking ethics and governance: **Eric Scherer, Sylvia Edwards Davis and Chris O'Brien**

plagiarising, because AI has gone out and taken a line from someone else's article. If you have to spend all this time fact-checking and making sure you haven't plagiarised, the question is: did you really save yourself time?"

AI's propensity for sloppiness and creating illusions can lead to a journey down a rabbit hole of accuracy. "Everything sounds reasonable and then you go: 'Wait a minute! I'm pretty sure Hitler didn't win World War II,'" says O'Brien.

His concerns are in line with data. In October, OpenAI released the SimpleQA benchmark, which measures the ability of large language models (LLMs) to answer questions on facts. Its own o1-preview model was correct only 42.7% of the time, while ChatGPT 4.0 came in with 32.8 per cent and Anthropic's Claude 3.5 Sonnet with a dismal 28.9 per cent.

Scherer recounted a recent experience in the newsroom at France Télévisions, a counterpart of the BBC, where AI is generally given a wide berth. A blurring tool was applied to protect female Iranian protesters; it later became known that face blurring could be undone by another AI tool, "so this is a big risk on the network's archives in a very sensitive case for people who trusted us to protect their identity".

Scherer believes that LLMs are not going to replace journalists in the short term. However, he added that someone "who knows how to use it will far outstrip all others. Journalists will distinguish themselves by the nature of the relationship they have with AI."



PAUL GRAYSON: PHOTENOS.COM



Does another humble day beckon for Murdoch?

The media proprietor faces more damage to his reputation, says **Raymond Snoddy**

There are clearly those who believe that the reputation of Rupert Murdoch has no further to fall.

They might well be wrong. There could be a lot more humble pie on the way for the man who famously told MPs about “the most humble day of his life” following the phone hacking scandal at News International’s News of the World.

Murdoch wasn’t that humble – the line had been fed to him by the late Lord Bell, Margaret Thatcher’s PR and advertising guru. Naturally Murdoch said he had been let down by unidentified others and knew nothing about the illegality.

As the world reels from the spreading chaos caused by the second coming of Donald Trump and the US descends into authoritarianism, it must never be forgotten that one of those responsible for the lies that helped create Trump was Murdoch and his Fox News channel.

It can even be argued that the culpability of Fox was greater than that of any other media outlet as they allowed falsehoods to pass unchallenged for fear of losing their hold on their right-wing audience and the billions of dollars they have generated. It wasn’t just about the January 6th attack on the US Capitol but also the channel’s stance on climate change and vaccination.

It is all set out in a book by a former Murdoch editor, Eric Beecher. In *The Men Who Killed The News* the author ranges through the history of newspapers and many infamous proprietors but obviously there is a starring role for Rupert Keith Murdoch.

For Beecher it was the court

revelations in the Dominion case against News that let the cat out of the bag. The voting machine company had been falsely accused on Fox of being involved in rigging the 2020 Presidential election and won a \$787 million settlement.

The Dominion revelations showed that “Fox was only about the money. Credible journalism was a façade its Potemkin village” argued Beecher.

He added that running “an entire organisation on lies and quackery” to mollify its audience is the work of a cult not of a broadcaster or a publisher.

There can be arguments about how much Murdoch knew and when, but none that, when he was executive chairman of the company, he had the power to stop the pro-Trump conspiracy theories being broadcast.

Surely another very humble day in the life of Murdoch. With Fox, their days in court might not yet be over.

Another voting machine company, Smartmatic, has been given the right to go ahead with a \$2 billion claim for allegations made on Fox programmes. Back in the UK there could also be another act in the Murdoch grand opera before the fat lady finally sings. Ironically for the Australian-American republican the ultimate nemesis could come from the Monarchy.

Another settlement, though probably only around £10 million this time, but certainly another humble day as Prince Harry effectively won his long-running intrusion case against News Group Newspapers and The Sun. The newspaper group offered a “full and unequivocal apology” for the damage inflicted on Prince Harry’s relationships, friendships and family by using private investigators to snoop on him.

There was an abject admission that some private investigators used by the Sun between 1996 and 2011 had used

unlawful methods to find out information about the Duke of Sussex and his late mother Princess Diana.

It was the first time that admissions of illegality concerning the Sun had been made. Pointedly there was no admission involving journalists or executives and News Group said that there had been no voice interceptions on The Sun.

It was also made clear that allegations of a corporate cover-up and destruction of evidence made by Prince Harry would have been “significantly challenged” if they had been put before the court.

The clue that this affair may not be finally over for Murdoch and News Corp came on the pavement outside the High Court from Prince Harry’s somewhat theatrical barrister, David Sherborne.

Clearly relishing the occasion Sherborne spoke on behalf of the Prince about a ‘monumental’ victory.

“Today the lies are laid bare. Today the cover-ups are exposed. And today proves that no-one is above the law,” said Sherborne.

The kicker came in the form of a plea from Prince Harry urging the police and Parliament to investigate.

Some have used the case to argue for a second Leveson inquiry to be launched.

That won’t happen, not least because the Government said it won’t, and anyway an industry-wide investigation would be disproportionate. However, the Duke of Sussex is right. The police and Parliament should investigate this particular matter to see whether there is evidence of further wrongdoing and above all who knew what and when.

Obviously private investigators did not commission or pay themselves.

Looking from the outside it doesn’t look as if the entire story has yet been told. If there is more to come out, who knows, Rupert Murdoch could face yet another humblest day in his life.

“
The kicker came in the form of a plea from Prince Harry urging the police and Parliament to investigate
”

The battle for

Jenny Sims reports on Ofcom research and a conference that looked at the public's views on false online information and how news is produced

Three in 10 UK adults believe there is a single group of people who secretly control the world together, and a similar proportion believe there is significant evidence of large-scale election fraud, according research by communications regulator Ofcom.

How to combat election fraud, prevent damage to democracy by the spread of mis- and disinformation on social media and restore trust in mainstream journalism were all explored at a conference organised by Ofcom.

In line with its remit, it brought together a range of experts including academic researchers, media leaders and other stakeholders to share information and insights on what is being done to tackle both misinformation and disinformation.

Setting the scene, Alison Preston, Ofcom's head of media, literacy policy and evaluation, commented on attitudes and habits in the current era of misinformation. She said research showed: "There is little understanding of the norms of journalism."

She added that the more something is understood to be edited, the less likely it is to be believed.

The need to restore trust in mainstream journalism was a key takeaway from the conference.

Julie Firmstone, professor of journalism and political communications at the University of Leeds, who attended the event, has been involved in research projects on the issues of ethical journalism and engaging the public in news literacy.

She has written: "Ethically produced journalism that the public can trust is essential to democracy. Declining public trust in journalism is already having social consequences, with misinformation, disinformation and the turn to unregulated social media making it harder for the public to develop the level of media literacy required to identify reliable information."

An analysis of focus groups that were part of a University of Leeds project funded by press regulator Impress concluded: "Trust is deeply intertwined with visibility – whether that is through branding on news articles, understanding what the code of conduct is, the ease and convenience of making a complaint if there has been perceived wrongdoing, generating more publicity about decisions made, or demanding that there are more obvious retractions, all of which would better

hold news publications to account."

Ofcom's report, *Understanding Misinformation: an Exploration of UK Adults' Behaviour and Attitudes* (see boxes), found that over three-quarters of UK adults agree that it's important to check different sources for news, and seven in 10 acknowledge that there will always be a mixture of reliable and unreliable information online.

A quarter of people surveyed for the report said they used fact-checking tools, and one in 20 used BBC Verify regularly.

But, as Marianna Spring, the BBC's social media investigations correspondent and several other speakers and panellists said, fact checking is not enough.

The Global Risks Report 2024 presented at the World Economic Forum in Zurich named misinformation and disinformation as top risks that could destabilise society as the legitimacy of election results may be questioned.

It also said the convergence of the 'post-truth era', election processes and the surge in generative AI over the past year means that tech companies, governments and media must consider how they can help protect democracies.

Although it is difficult to hold people on social media to account, conference attendees learned about several initiatives that are already proving effective in tackling election misinformation and disinformation.

Tackling disinformation and conspiracies

'Pre-bunking' is a relatively new tool to enable people to identify misinformation before it gains traction. It presents pre-emptive counterarguments to false claims. Proponents compare it to vaccination. Misinformation has what was described as an 'Achilles heel' – it frequently employs repetitive tactics and patterns; by being able to recognise these patterns, pre-bunking can anticipate and counteract future misinformation.

Social enterprise Shout Out UK provides impartial political and media literacy training to young people, and campaigns on democratic engagement and combating disinformation online. Amanda Gurruchaga, its head of programmes, offered some insights into the work of the multi-award winning social enterprise at the conference. Its work is tailored to local circumstances and culture

Shout Out UK's podcast, *Media Minded*, focuses on

25%

of UK adults say they have used a fact checker website or tool at least once.



truth



HOWARD MCWILLIAM

misinformation and conspiracies. Its website says: “Each episode focuses on a different global event that sparked misinformation as we speak to ex-cultists, anti-vaxxers and more who describe their slow descent into the untrue, and those who experience the brunt of the lies and hatred explain the effect that the proliferation of these ideas has.”

Richard Burgess, BBC director of news content, said in a panel discussion on combating mis- and disinformation: “It’s a battle for truth right now.” The consensus was that there was ‘no silver bullet’ and people and organisations needed to work collectively.

Under the Online Safety Act, Ofcom has to establish and maintain an advisory committee on disinformation and misinformation. The chair is appointed by Ofcom and other members appointed by the Ofcom board.

At the conference, Ofcom announced the new committee will be led by Lord Richard Allan, an existing Ofcom board member. Lord Allen, a former vice president of public policy at Facebook and Lib Dem MP, said: “There is a growing body of research and expertise on the challenges posed by misinformation and potential responses to it. Our new committee will draw on this knowledge to provide the best possible advice to Ofcom and other stakeholders.”

Ofcom’s events team set up a ‘commitment corner’ where delegates could suggest action they might take after the conference. I wrote on the board: “Raise awareness in the NUJ of Ofcom’s work on misinformation and disinformation.” First step taken – thanks to The Journalist.

Ofcom’s findings

- More than four in 10 are sceptical about conventional news production and only one-third agree journalists follow codes of practice.
- Nearly one half say they ignore potentially untrue online content. One quarter search for information to check it.
- Around a quarter (26 per cent) say they have used a fact-checker website or tool at least once, with one in five having used BBC Verify at least once.
- Almost half (45 per cent) feel confident they can judge whether information sources are truthful and (37 per cent) can assess whether statistics are being used accurately.
- More than three-quarters agree it is important to check different sources for news.
- Three in 10 believe a single group of people secretly control the world together, and a similar proportion believe that there is significant evidence of large-scale election fraud.
- One-third (33 per cent) are not confident in judging whether an image, audio recording or video has been created by AI.
- Over two-fifths (43 per cent) say they have encountered misinformation or deep fakes.
- Nine in ten of those who see misinformation are concerned about its societal impact, and almost two-thirds about its effect on themselves.
- Among those who encountered false or misleading information in the previous four weeks, seven in 10 said they saw it online, four in 10 on TV, and one in five in print.

Watching the numbers nosedive

How papers' websites are run is hitting local news, says **Roger Lytollis**

Twice a year, sales figures for the UK's regional daily newspapers are published. For nearly 20 years, I've been reading these with a mixture of disbelief and despair. Circulations continue to nosedive. In the first half of 2024, the dailies' sales were down by an average of 17 per cent year on year.

Papers that in some cases sold hundreds of thousands of copies a day are selling... rather less. Liverpool Echo: 10,961. Yorkshire Post: 9,461. Scotsman: 7,133. Manchester Evening News: 6,519. Birmingham Mail: 4,401. The biggest beast of all, the London Evening Standard, has just moved to a weekly edition after 197 years of daily publication. Of course, many more people look at newspapers' websites than their print editions. But the way the websites have been managed is a big part of local journalism's problems.

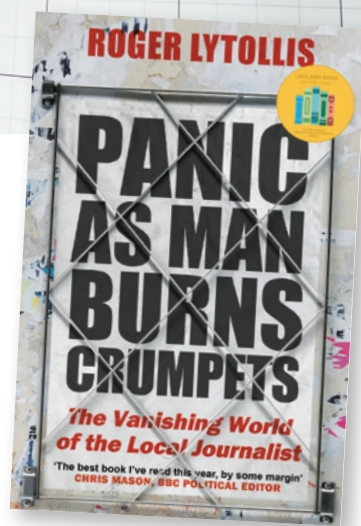
I was a feature writer on local papers, mainly in Cumbria and also in Edinburgh, from 1995 until being made redundant by Newsquest in 2019. During my first decade in the job, local papers were still flying high. Then publishers began prioritising websites. At the same time, the music and film industries were fighting piracy, maintaining the notion that their work should be paid for. Newspaper publishers were determined to give their work away.

In principle, I don't care if people read newspapers as a hard copy or on a screen. What matters is whether the publisher receives enough money to run a sustainable business. Publishers thought their websites would bring in sufficient ad revenue to cover the loss of newspaper sales and advertising. Many of us argued that giving away our product was not a good strategy. So it has proved.

Post Covid, the big groups launched online-only titles. Many closed within a couple of years. One statistic highlights the struggle to turn clicks into cash. Reach is the UK's biggest newspaper publisher. Its titles include the Liverpool Echo and the Manchester Evening News. In 2023, after two decades of paper sales being cut while the websites were promoted, print still accounted for 75 per cent of Reach's revenue.

Numerous factors have conspired against the industry, such as social media companies creaming off ad revenue from newspapers' online stories. But bad decisions by newspaper bosses have played a major role in local papers – those that survive – becoming shadows of their former selves.

I explore these issues in my memoir, *Panic as Man Burns Crumpets: the Vanishing World of the Local Journalist*. First published in 2021, it was recently released with a new afterword. This describes how trends have accelerated.



Local papers are still caught in a vicious circle. Falling revenue leads to cuts. Cuts lead to poorer products. Poorer products lead to falling revenue.

The results are evident. One of my former papers splashed on a city-centre scheme, reporting it will have 'twin pathways'. I've spent far too long wondering what that means. 'Twin pathways' is all the information given. This is what happens when journalism is reduced to copying press releases, with overworked reporters too busy churning out stories to ask even basic questions.

It has finally dawned on some publishers that they should charge for access to their websites. But this is only after the quality of the content has plummeted, and after readers have had it for free for 20 years. Publishers have encouraged the idea that their work is worthless. The big groups' strategy for local papers is one of managed decline – keep cutting costs to keep making a profit until there's nothing left to cut.

People are willing to pay for local news. Hyperlocals – independent papers and websites – are thriving or at least surviving. Mill Media's model of good-quality long reads and investigations, funded mostly by subscribers, has seen it expand from Manchester into Sheffield, Liverpool and Birmingham, with plans for London and Glasgow. Whether this model could work in the many smaller towns left with little or no local journalism is debatable. More certain is the dedication of those still striving to keep communities informed.



Many of us argued that giving away our product was not a good strategy. So it has proved

Panic as Man Burns Crumpets, Little, Brown

Our changing landscape

Dan Walsh gives a perspective from south east Ireland

These are difficult days for the media. Journalists are being squeezed into retirement or pressured to surrender their jobs as multinationals buy out traditional regional titles. Those in control of journalism, photography and other media-related work, operate under the guiding principle of 'do more with less' as the workforce declines.

The Irish South East branch of the NUJ has more than 90 members, which is a healthy membership. However, the wide area it covers can make it difficult for people to attend meetings. Nonetheless branch chairman Damien Tiernan, who is also an active member of the Irish national executive council, and myself (I am secretary/treasurer), recently held a highly successful branch meeting at Talbot Hotel in Wexford. A key part of the gathering was to pay tribute to three retiring members – journalist Maria Pepper and photographers Ger Hore and John Walsh. They had given 'outstanding service to local journalism' and, between them, unselfishly devoted almost a century to local press coverage.

Those attending the event included members new to journalism and employed at Wexford's only surviving newspaper office. The company is known locally as The People Group and is still serving readers with individual titles in the towns of Gorey, Enniscorthy, New Ross and Wexford.

In June 2017, the Wexford Echo group of newspapers, which has titles in Gorey, Enniscorthy and New Ross, went into liquidation with the loss of 27 in-house jobs at its Enniscorthy headquarters.

Consequently, membership of the NUJ was dealt a severe blow. There were also fewer opportunities for a place on the news desk, covering the great sporting events at the weekends and to write opinion pieces, as well as the loss of popular specialised articles on history, farming, humour and community events.

Pepper said she joined the NUJ as a young reporter and recounted "a time when the job was very different" from the one she left earlier this year.

"In the early days, I typed my copy on sheets of paper on a manual typewriter before putting it in an envelope on the train from Wicklow to the head office in Wexford town to be edited and printed," said Pepper. "If I missed the train, I had to drive like a lunatic to the next station."

Pepper recalled the introduction of the computerised newsroom, the Internet, email and more recently digital first. "I am proud and pleased to have experienced the full trajectory," she said.

Hore and Walsh both recalled the long list of tasks and the tight schedules in meeting the deadlines for getting pictures onto the editorial desk. Nonetheless, they always obliged and

took pride in the saying "a picture paints a thousand words".

"There was always great camaraderie amongst all the photographers – some of the best laughs we had were at the most serious of events," recalled Walsh.

Hore was described at the meeting as 'the most famous man in Wexford'. This description was underlined by the fact that he had already been honoured at a civic reception by the mayor and members of Wexford district council, as well as by members of Rosslare municipal district.

Pepper summed up the current situation perfectly: "For anyone who chases the news and writes the stories, covers the courts and council meetings, the job is essentially the same. In an era of audience analysis, page views and push notifications, there is probably more need now than ever for people to be part of a union to protect the livelihoods and working conditions of journalists."

I will never forget a quote from a Welsh delegate at last year's conference in London. He said: "Our town once had four separate newspaper titles. Today we have none. That doesn't mean there is no news in our town every day – it is just there is no means of sharing it."

Following the serious business of the meeting, the emotion and the nostalgia began to flow.

Proud, retired journalists, who retained a passion for the craft that they had practised so professionally for the weekly pleasure and informed dialogue of their readers were relived – even if only over a coffee or a beer.

There was great camaraderie among the photographers - some of the best laughs were at serious events

Gavin Aitchison of Church Action on Poverty explains how his charity helped to bring people together to put the ‘human’ into human interest stories

Bringing issues to life

Charlotte had never spoken up in the media before – but her story is now helping to improve housing services in her community. John and Dave were also media novices but are now helping others to press for change.

Tammy and Anne, too, were new to all of this but are now helping others to access greater support and be heard.

Five people, all of whom had reasons to be wary of journalists, are now speaking up and helping to change the systems that hindered their own lives. Charlotte, John, Dave, Tammy and Anne were the five contributors to Unheard York, an experimental media collaboration that took place in the city this summer. It involved YorkMix (an independent local media outlet), Lived Insights (a grassroots group of people who have been through homelessness, addiction or other difficulties) and Church Action on Poverty (the charity I work for).

Lived Insights knew they had powerful and important stories, but saw speaking to a journalist as a daunting prospect for most of their members.

YorkMix earnestly wanted to share stories from people who had experienced acute challenges but, like all local outlets, has a small, stretched team.

Church Action on Poverty always wants to amplify the voices of people who have experienced poverty, and knows

that people with first-hand insight need to be at the heart of any attempt to improve systems – but is aware that its own channels have a limited audience.

So we got together and asked: could we team up to tell new stories and make change happen? If so – how?

The idea was several years in the making. In early 2020, just before Covid-19 arrived in the UK, a research report landed in my inbox and immediately challenged and inspired me.

Lankelly Chase’s Telling A Different Story looks at how the media report on people facing multiple disadvantages. In a nutshell, it found the media tended to be pretty lousy at covering how complex issues interconnect. They often reduce stories to single elements, rarely convey the voices of people actually facing the issues and often lack empathy.

That report also highlighted opportunities, including: maintaining a local focus; working especially with online media; striving to foster trust between journalists, charities and people with experience of social issues; and deliberately putting ‘multiplicity’ at the heart of stories, rather than over-simplifying unsimple situations.

One of the report authors wrote: “A striking conclusion made in this report is that the majority of articles lacked the diversity of views and voices of people with direct lived experience of severe disadvantage. Coupled with an apparent lack of trust between journalists, people with lived experience and the charity sector, one of the most important recommendations is the undeniable need to form stronger and deeper relationships. If we can create empathy amongst ourselves, then it will make it easier to bring in distinctive voices, and different types of stories into mainstream media.”

So, several years and one pandemic later, a few of us in York decided to see if we could make these recommendations work.

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The media often reduce stories to single elements and rarely convey the voices of people affected



An editor’s view: making a difference

We’re aware a lot of our news coverage is reactive, but resources limit how much long-form journalism we can do, writes *Chris Tittley*, YorkMix editor’.

Being able to work with

Gavin and a team of people rich in talent, insight and lived experience was a wonderful opportunity.

Tourists who see the ‘chocolate box’ image of York are rarely aware the city has

some serious social issues.

The team worked with the storytellers to build trust and get a true insight into their lives and challenges.

The Unheard York articles not only gave voice to these

residents but also revealed flaws in the national and local support systems that compounded their problems.

The stories generated a lot of positive comments from readers, who shared their

own experiences.

It’s been a positive experience, and proves long-form human interest journalism still has a place and can make a real difference in a city like York.



"I enjoyed being able to gather others' thoughts to highlight the good, bad and ugly of York's housing offer (when you're being evicted because the landlord's decided that). I hope my experience is shared with the decision-makers, in ensuring that they take more account of the human pressures anyone experiences when others decide you can't live at 'home' any more - the family impact of upheaval, the bureaucracy of systems and the trauma of being scared it could happen again. I truly hope my sharing results in 'real change.'"

Charlotte, storyteller



I spent about nine months meeting with Miles and Astrid from Lived Insights, and getting to know some of their members with experience of complex, related disadvantages, such as homelessness, undiagnosed mental health conditions, poverty and the criminal justice system. We worked together to tell those complex stories and identify things that powerful institutions could have done differently. Complexity was never seen as a hindrance, but we did ask each storyteller to consider: who would you most like to read your story, and what would you like them to do as a result?



"It's been a great collaborative project bringing together experiences of people into a powerful series that asks the public and change-makers to consider reframing how they view circumstances they might have previously judged people on."

Miles Goring, Lived Insights

Top: Miles Goring and Astrid Hanlon from Lived Insights, Above: Gavin Aitchison from Church Action on Poverty

The issue of trust was evident throughout. Contributors wanted to be heard, but felt very wary of 'the media' either through experience or a general fear. Even where there was not full-on distrust, there was a striking absence of trust. Organisations doing collaborative work on a far larger scale have observed this. In reporting its People's Newsroom project, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism called trust 'the existential problem facing journalism'. It should not surprise us that people who have been mistreated by many systems are wary of 'the media'. Trust needs to be earned over time, and part of that is a commitment to tell authentic stories rather than shoehorning people into case studies for preset ideas.

Time, reliability and clear agreements were key. The stories were written and rewritten with the contributors, everyone could use pseudonyms and contributors were told exactly when the stories were going live so they were not caught by surprise. The immediate result was a series of stories published by YorkMix over this summer.

Charlotte had been pushed into homelessness because her landlord wanted to sell her home and rents nearby were unaffordable. She told of what she had learnt from navigating York's homeless system and suggested practical changes.

Anne told first-hand about the links between poverty, addiction and deteriorating mental health. She described the effects compassionate support staff can have, but also the rigid, gruelling process of applying for social security support.

John and Dave spoke of need for more flexible support for people who have been homeless, and of the positive impact that NHS support had had on their mental health. They are now contributing to a local film about homelessness in York.

Tammy told first-hand of the harm drug dealers cause to teenagers, the problems that spiral from there and the years-long wait for the diagnosis that opened the door to support.

The issue of trust was evident. People wanted to be heard but felt very wary of 'the media'

All the stories were well read and, notably, generated overwhelmingly supportive comments on social media.

There was a quick second result as well: Lived Insights was approached by others who had been through similar challenges and wanted to speak up in the same way.

And a third result: the grassroots group held discussions with the council and a feedback system for people who had been through the homeless system is now being explored.

None of this was easy but it is doable and replicable elsewhere. I know many journalists would love to dig deep into social issues but are overstretched. I also know that many people would like to speak out but are wary. By taking the time to work together in an organised, purposeful way, we can lower each other's barriers, produce uplifting, meaningful journalism with people who are almost always drowned out in society and, hopefully, help to accelerate change.

We agreed a set of purposes for the project and four principles: every story should be told primarily by the individual with first-hand experience of the issue, ideally in the first person; every story should look at solutions, showing things could be done differently; all stories should include some wider context as they are not isolated examples but evidence of flawed systems; and articles should reflect the real complexity of people's lives – multiple issues should not be reduced to make the narrative easier.

Gavin Aitchison is media and storytelling coordinator for Church Action on Poverty, and worked with the NUJ and others on the Reporting Poverty guidelines in 2021

Spirit amid the

Jeff Farrell looks back on his reporting of the war in Ukraine as it reaches its third year

I travelled to Ukraine to report on the war just weeks after Russia's invasion on February 24 2022 in what Moscow billed as a three-day special military operation.

Enraged at the attack, I used my holiday time from my then staff sub-editor job to report on the war and the horrors that emerged.

President Vladimir Putin had ordered his tanks to roll over the border in a bizarre claim that he was 'deNazifying' a country led by Jewish president Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Most analysts expected that Kyiv, outgunned and outmanned, would cave in after just a few weeks. But it didn't. And, three years on, Ukraine continues to fight off the enemy.

I continued to report on the country's existential battle for publications in Ireland and the UK. Along the way, I earned a nomination in both 2022 and 2023 in the Foreign Coverage category in the Irish Journalism Awards.

I first started reporting in Lviv in May 2022 as a wet-behind-the-ears war correspondent. In my first brush with danger, Russia hammered the energy infrastructure of the city's railway station. I had been walking in the city centre, looking for a taxi to get to the station for a night train that would take me eight hours east to Kyiv.

Suddenly, a boom erupted in the distance and the ground below me vibrated and I fled for a bunker below a hotel. I sat there with my hands shaking, wondering what I was doing in a war zone, travelling to danger as millions fled.

But I stayed and, the next day, I interviewed a priest whose church had been damaged in the attacks. It stood just 100 metres from a railway power station hit in the strike. Petro Kurpita pointed at shattered stained windows and called the Russian military 'invader savages'.

Miraculously, no one was killed in the attack, and the resilience of Ukraine's railway network and its workers meant the trains ran as usual.

I later travelled to areas including Bucha and Borodyanka to see the rebuilding efforts after weeks of Russian occupation that had turned these vast areas to rubble. In Bucha, I visited the

site of a mass grave outside a church, where more than 300 civilians were buried after Russians murdered them and dumped their bodies there, Kyiv said.

I visited a shelled housing estate nearby where Natalia Alekseenko pushed a brush along a floor strewn with rubble in what was the kitchen of the burnt-out property, with a huge hole in the roof.

Natalia had lived here with her husband before they fled the Russian tanks. Now she was back in what seemed a futile bid to pull her home back together. She sighed and looked up at the gaping gap, her eyes glassy. "When it rains, the water falls down," she said, adding: "We lost everything here.

Everything is burnt out. We have nothing."

The monumental task to patch up Ukraine was already beginning in towns including Borodyanka, some 60km north west of Kyiv.

Hollowed-out apartment blocks lined the streets of Borodyanka, the area covered in rubble and walls pockmarked with bullet holes.

Lurii stood in a manhole shovelling dirt into a bucket, explaining that he was clearing debris from the town's water system. The task to rebuild Borodyanka looked mammoth, but people like Lurii were optimistic.

"I see photos of Hiroshima and Nagasaki totally destroyed in the Second World War and now they are prospering," he said. "It is some kind of victory of humanity that we can be destroyed but rise from nothing. Ukraine will do the same."

Most Ukrainians had fled from areas where early in the war Russia was advancing. But not everyone ran — some civilians stayed to defend their homeland.

In July 2022, I met one such family when I travelled to the southern port city of Mykolaiv, by the Black Sea, in an area under constant Russian attacks.

In the city, I met Ura Albeshenko, 37, as he stood in his garage. Below was a bunker where he and his wife Svetlana, 33, and daughters Alina, 12, and Kristina, 11, slept amid the regular strikes.

Svetlana strapped on an AK, telling how she refuses to flee Mykolaiv. "I am staying because I believe in my country," she said.

In early October 2022, on my third reporting trip, I was back in Kharkiv for a feel-good story. It came as Kyiv launched a successful counter-offensive to repel the Russians from large parts of Kharkiv Oblast and Donetsk Oblast. The war, it seemed, was turning in Ukraine's favour.

I travelled to Iziium in Kharkiv. In a forest on the outskirts of the city, the authorities later uncovered a mass grave of 447 bodies that showed signs of torture, officials said.

The living, however, were rebuilding their lives.

In the forest's outskirts of the forest, Viktor Dudka stood in a garden that was covered in broken bricks after a shelling. He had no running water or electricity. This was his late brother's home which he had gone to after his own house was bombed to rubble.

"Everything is gone that I earned and worked for for over 40 years," said the pensioner, 63. "I have to survive somehow to see out the rest of my life some way."

I reported on how many were even thriving — at least in cities such as Lviv in western Ukraine, some 1000km from the front line.

One day in Lviv's historical centre in late 2022, I noticed a couple who had just married and were posing for photos outside the Church of the Holy Eucharist. Andriy and Solomia told me that they hadn't thought twice about getting married.

"We wanted to have children so we planned a wedding because we realised it was important now," said Andriy, 25. "We decided not to wait for the war to end — life is still going on."

These rare 'love in war' stories were uplifting for me amid the usual death and misery copy.

I got back into the field in May 2023 with my first visit to the zero frontline in Kupiansk, Kharkiv Oblast. Ukraine had liberated the area just months earlier in late 2022 but the Russians were now pushing hard.

I stood in an abandoned shell of a house where brigade member Evgeny peered down the barrel of a Kord machine gun and said, "F**k the Russians," before he fired into the distance towards Moscow's troops.

No gunfire came back. I then chatted to Evgeny, 23, about what Kyiv needed for its then much-



e horror

trumpeted counteroffensive which had stalled and would later run out of steam.

“We need fighter jets, more ammo, shells, tanks,” Evgeny said – a common refrain I heard from Ukrainian troops when asked about what they need from the West to win the war.

In May 2024, I returned again. Kyiv was still on the back foot, with Russia continuing to make slow but steady gains in the east. It came as US aid had stalled for months in Congress. I didn’t have the stomach to visit troops again to hear them say they needed more weapons from the West; I focused on when the conflict would one day end.

I spent a day with a landmine-clearing brigade working to clear vast areas around Chernihiv Oblast, some 150km north east of Kyiv. Here, Russia had littered fields with explosive devices

before Ukraine pushed back Russian troops. I joined sappers of the 756 brigade in a field as they scanned for mines or other unexploded ordnance with metal detectors.

“Children bring devices home and they explode,” said Brigade member Yevgeniy, adding that people could die or lose arms and legs.

The bid to get my latest round of stories published in May 2024 was a challenge. Media interest had naturally dipped after time. My then employer, the Irish Daily Star, feared it would have a ‘duty of care’ to me should I get into danger and declined my war copy, even though I was filing after I had left Ukraine. I moved on and Byline Times ran several stories.

Roll on to February 24 2025, and the war will have been raging for more than 1,000 days. US

president Donald Trump had claimed he could pull off an agreement between Kyiv and Moscow in just 24 hours. Now his team has estimated 100 days. In an interview with US podcaster Lex Fridman in January this year, Zelenskyy said that he “will come to an agreement” with the ‘strong’ president who, he said, will be able to force Russia into peace talks.

A key proposal by Trump’s team, media reports say, would be to postpone Ukraine’s admission to NATO for 20 years. Moscow, in December, dismissed the reported plan.

It hit home while reporting war that life is short. So, in November I quit my job as a newspaper journalist after 20 years to pursue new goals, including book writing and long-form reportage through podcasts. I had long held a goal to report on a war, though, and, now that I have, I am ending my newspaper career literally with a bang.

Jeff Farrell’s first podcast, *The Fighting Irish in Ukraine: from the Frontline to Funerals*, is available online: jefffarrellonline.com

PHIL WILSON



Clockwise from left: Kristina and Alina, daughters of Ura and Svetlana Albeshenko, in the bunker below a garage where the family sleeps

Hollowed out apartment blocks in Borodyanka

Newly married couple Andriy and Solomia

JEFF FARRELL



PHIL WILSON

When journalists go into politics

The roles of politician and journalist can involve similar aims and skills – and cutting through spin. **Conrad Landin** looks across the divide

When Torcuil Crichton stepped into the House of Commons as the new MP for Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles) last July, he was already a familiar face to the doorman. As a political correspondent and Westminster editor for a series of Scottish newspapers from 2001 to 2023, Crichton became one of the longest-serving members of the lobby — the Westminster press pack with high-level access to politicians.

But it was still a shock to the system. “I hate to deal in clichés as a journalist, but it really is through the looking glass,” he says. “You think you know it. You even think you know the building but, of course, as a journalist there are only certain parts of the building you go to and other parts as a politician.”

Crichton — and fellow Commons newbies Paul Waugh, Yuan Yang and John Cooper — join a long line of journalists who have put down the pen in favour of the sword of electoral struggle. Winston Churchill got his start at the *Morning Post*, while Michael Foot worked on the *New Statesman*, *Tribune* and the *Evening Standard*, serving as editor of the latter two. Diane Abbott, now mother of the house, worked as a reporter and researcher for Thames Television and *TV-am*, where she became mother of chapel in the mid-1980s.

Many of those who have taken this well-trodden path speak of parliamentary politics as a means, like journalism, of holding power to account.

“It helps to go into journalism or politics with an enquiring frame of mind,” says Chris Mullin, who edited *Tribune* and worked for Granada Television’s *World in Action* programme before becoming Labour MP for Sunderland South in 1987. “I come from that tradition of journalism that tries to look beyond the PR handout version of events, and I carried it on into politics too.”

Mullin’s most high-profile journalistic campaign was to quash the convictions of the Birmingham Six, who were sentenced to life imprisonment in 1975 for the IRA pub bombings the previous year. In Parliament, he continued the campaign. “I now had the opportunity to confront those directly responsible for the criminal justice system, and I did so.” The six walked free in 1991.

Russell Findlay, who was elected leader of the Scottish Conservatives last September, had a stellar journalistic career at STV, *The Scottish Sun* and the *Sunday Mail*. He was also no stranger to the dangers faced by elected politicians in recent

years, having been the victim of an acid attack in 2015 while reporting on Glasgow gang warfare.

“The qualities of journalism, the skills of journalism, understanding complex issues, cutting through spin, understanding what makes people tick and being able to communicate with people and build trust with people — all of those skills are entirely consistent with being a good politician I think,” he says.

Findlay, who says he has “ink running through my veins” and despairs over the “demise of the newspaper industry”, saw an opportunity to continue his work in the Scottish Parliament. “I knew that journalism could sometimes make

Gamekeepers turned poachers

MANY former politicians have developed careers as media personalities after crashing out of Parliament — but it’s questionable whether their output can be described as journalism.

A slew of Conservative MPs took up presenting on GB News before losing their seats or standing down from Parliament after the election, and continued as presenters.

Former Labour cabinet minister Ed Balls is now a regular breakfast television presenter, and attracted outrage when he was allowed to interview his wife Yvette Cooper, now home secretary.

Others have returned to or embraced journalism

more straightforwardly. Jennie Lee worked for *Tribune* and the *Daily Mirror* after losing her seat in 1931, returning to the Commons in 1945.

Michael Gove, who went on strike as a young journalist at DC Thomson in 1989, stepped back into journalism almost as soon as he quit the Commons this year as editor of *The Spectator*.

Bill Deedes, who, as a young journalist was believed to have inspired the character of William Boot in Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Scoop*, served in the cabinets of Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home. He went on to edit the *Daily Telegraph* from 1974 to 1986.

“I went back onto investigations, I went right back into a column,” says former MSP Dorothy-Grace Elder. “It was at the *Express* — they gave me a deal that they were not going to impose their hyper-Toryism at that time. At that stage, papers wanted a voice that was normally against their line.”

She carried on campaigns she had spearheaded in Parliament — including on chronic pain — and found she could work more efficiently and effectively outside state and party constraints.



JEFF GILBERT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

change. But it was limited and, also having been a journalist for over 25 years in a market that was really going a bad way, I figured that becoming a politician would give me much, much greater scope and potentially a greater platform to take on things in society that were wrong.”

Denis MacShane (pictured below), who was president of the NUJ in the late 1970s and became MP for Rotherham in 1994, recalls that as a foreign office minister in the 2000s, his close relations with the press pack sometimes got him into trouble. “When Blair appointed me [as a minister], he said: ‘Do be careful about the press, won’t you?’” MacShane recalls. “He was always very suspicious.”

He remembers an overnight flight to Brazil where he was seated at the front of the plane with Blair and top civil servants. “I went back to have a drink and a gossip with [political editors] Michael White, Tom Baldwin and all the gang and, when I finished, I got up and went back to the first class cabin. Blair is standing there, glaring at me: ‘Denis! You’ve been talking to journalists, haven’t you?’”

Just a few months into the job, Crichton has already noticed suspicion of journalists among his colleagues. “You don’t realise how fearful politicians are of journalists until you see other MPs going, ‘Oh, how do you know all these journalists?’ In fact, all these journalists are your former colleagues. They’ll chew you up and spit you out as quick as any other politician, you hope, if they’re good at their jobs.

“But you do see from some new MPs a kind of caution. They ask: ‘How do you do that? What do you tell them?’ And, of course, the honest answer is that you have a conversation with them, an exchange of information, and you build up a relationship... and it becomes a relationship of trust and out of that come help with stories and issues and everything else.”

In other cases, this suspicion of journalists has turned into outright hostility towards new colleagues. Dorothy-Grace Elder was elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 in the first post-devolution elections after an extensive career in Scottish newspapers and broadcasting. “It’s good to have journalists because we have a background where we know how to ask things and who to ask,” she says. “But, personally, I would not recommend it because it’s quite a shock to see politics from the inside. A lot of them do not like journalists – they don’t like us at all.”

In politics, Elder witnessed behaviour she believes would simply not be tolerated in newspapers or broadcast journalism due to the importance of producing a professional outcome. “I was horrified, really, really horrified at the sort of stuff that happened — which could not have happened in a paper or in normal industry. You wouldn’t get a paper out that night.”

Many journalists-turned MPs end up raising issues relating to the media in Parliament. MacShane championed press freedom in countries such as China and Ukraine, and opposed ‘libel tourism’ during his time as an MP. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on media, Crichton plans to examine “the difference between platforms and publishers — the fact that Facebook and Meta and Google scrape up data from everywhere, and take the revenue from copy that has been generated by other companies and by individual journalists”.

Since becoming an MSP in 2021, Findlay, who is still an NUJ member, has supported striking journalists at STV and Reach — both former employers of his — on picket lines. “Some



IMAGEPLOTTER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



It’s quite a shock to see politics from the inside. A lot of them do not like journalists - they don’t like us at all



people might question why a Conservative would be on a picket line,” he admits. “I think it’s not inconsistent because, as much as you have to take each decision to take industrial action on its own merits, my position is, in respect of journalism, I completely understand the need for Scotland to have a really robust and diverse media, whether that’s newspapers or broadcast. If I can do anything that will champion that and protect those who are trying to protect what the public can receive from journalism, then I’ll do so.”

Crichton believes the relationship between journalists and politicians is symbiotic. “Politicians need journalists to get their message out, and journalists need to hold politicians to account. It’s a vital part of what we do, and having relationships with journalists is a really important part of being a politician.”

MacShane, who combined journalism with campaigning for many years, adds: “It’s such a natural segue really. I never thought it was anything unusual.

“I think on my grave when I die, it will be ‘journalist’, not ‘politician.’”

You won't stop me...

Mark Fisher looks at the political life and writings of Tony Benn

There is a clip on YouTube from the time of the 2009 Israel-Gaza conflict. Tony Benn is being interviewed on the BBC and is not conceding an inch. Furious with the broadcaster for choosing not to publicise the Disasters Emergency Committee Gaza Crisis Appeal, the veteran politician does the job himself. "I'm sorry, you're not going to stop me," he says, reading out the charity address in full. "I'm sorry, I'm a human being."

A decade after his death, the video captures the charisma of a man who was equal parts avuncular, patrician and subversive. He was as radical in his politics as he was charming.

"Grandmaster of not giving a single f***," says a comment below the video.

These are the qualities that come across in *The Most Dangerous Man in Britain?*, an anthology of political writing published to coincide with the centenary of Benn's birth.

"Communication was the essence of him," says his daughter Melissa Benn, who contributes the foreword and helped select the material. "He was a proud member of the NUJ and would have thought it represented the best kind of journalism and journalists."

Tellingly, the first piece in the book is addressed not to readers of a prestigious newspaper but to Benn's grandchildren. He was happy to engage with anyone. I once saw him speak in a small room in an Edinburgh bookshop. He must have spent nearly four decades as a prominent politician and could surely have attracted a bigger crowd –

yet he spoke with no less fervour, intelligence and persuasiveness.

"He was as at home in the back room of an Edinburgh bookshop as he was in front of thousands of people," says his daughter.

The opening piece about Britain's monarchy – eye-opening in its straightforward prose – kicks off a section on the British state. Chapters focus on democracy, industry, Britain's role in the world, the radical tradition and Benn's life after politics. Drawn from books, speeches, pamphlets and newspaper articles (in everything from *Marxism Today* to *Melody Maker*), they reflect his concern with the ambitions of socialism and how these might be realised.

Benn was the son and grandson of parliamentarians. "He'd been raised to feel at home in those worlds and the truth was he did," says Melissa Benn of her father, who renounced the title of Viscount Stansgate in 1963. "He had a great inner confidence about the establishment, how it worked and his relationship to it. Most representatives enter the world of power and are awed and defeated by it. My father understood power, he had exercised it, he could stand back from it and see how it could be restructured."

Benn's concerns ranged from transparency, participation and data to political flashpoints, be they the scourge of unemployment or Margaret Thatcher's assault on the miners.

"When you go back to the period in which Thatcherism became triumphant, it is interesting to see what the left were saying about



KRISTIAN BUUS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



alternative routes," she says. "Things like greater industrial democracy and redistribution of taxation seem to me today to be legitimate arguments that were outlawed as dangerous and ridiculous at the time."

Benn set his arguments in a historical context, referring to everything from the Roman empire to the peasants' revolt. He also wrote from a global perspective, calling for sanctions against apartheid in South Africa as early as 1964, and later debating the Falklands, Northern Ireland and Iraq.

Underpinning his arguments was his commitment to democracy. Workers, he believed, should "ultimately control their managers". When it came to the press, that meant "limiting the immense influence given to the small number of wealthy people who continue to own and control the British media" and handing power to the journalists.

The book's title is, of course, ironic. It is hard to regard as dangerous a man so moderate in expression, so logical in reasoning. Yet his daughter, who was hounded by press photographers on the first day of her O-levels, knows that is exactly how he was regarded.

"The amount of abuse, criticism and derision piled on anyone on the left in this country is something I can't help but feel personally," she says. "Was he ahead of his time? Often he was. Was he right? Often he was. Does he and the left still have things to say? Yes, they do."

The Most Dangerous Man in Britain?: The Political Writing, Tony Benn, Verso, April 8, <https://tinyurl.com/2yphm92w>



Workers, he said, should control managers. That meant limiting the influence of the wealthy people who control the media

Brian Harvey had his press card refused and found little recourse

The powerful who hold all the cards

Ever had your press card or pass refused? That happened to this Dublin-based NUJ member who tried to attend a spaceflight conference recently – as well as to France’s most prominent spaceflight writer, Christian Lardier.

For space journalists, the main event of the year is the Congress of the International Astronautical Federation (IAF). These are huge occasions, attended by up to 10,000 people: astronauts, engineers, scientists, administrators and exhibitors. They are the best single annual event worldwide to get news, information, interviews and photos. Press – normally a hundred or so – are admitted on presentation of a professional journalist’s card, the NUJ’s or equivalent.

For the 2024 congress in Milan, Italy, the IAF said ‘no’ to this writer, who had been attending since 1999 and to Lardier since 1974. On learning about the Irish case, the space community objected, urging reconsideration: space agencies (NASA), scientific bodies (the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), political parties, magazines (*Le Scienze*, *Quest*, *Astronomy and Space*, *Orbit*, *CapCom*, *Kosmonavtika* and *SpaceNews*), podcasters, universities (including New York) and the IAF’s 1951 founder, the British Interplanetary Society. NUJ Ireland repeatedly urged a reversal.

The executive director of the IAF was confronted face to face at the annual convention of the worldwide association of astronauts in Noordwijk,

Netherlands. The IAF was repeatedly asked for the basis of refusal, but no explanation was ever given.

So what was really going on? My article in *The Journalist* (“The mysterious secrecy around a mission to Mars”, December/January 2024) questioned why the European Space Agency (ESA) cancelled its 2022 flagship mission with Russia to explore Mars with a British-made rover, the Rosalind Franklin. ESA stonewalled enquiries to the point that the article called it ‘secretive’.

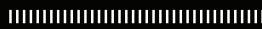
But what has the ESA got to do with this? Research by German space writer and publisher Jacqueline Myrre identified that the IAF executive director, Christian Feichtinger, was and is simultaneously a senior official in ESA, also in Paris, seconded to the IAF. In effect, a senior official in one governmental body (ESA) decided press admission to an entirely unconnected, non-governmental one (IAF). Did the ESA have an axe to grind with critical journalists? Payback time?

In Ireland’s parliament, the government minister responsible for Ireland’s ESA membership, Peter Burke, was asked: whether it was appropriate that the ESA determine press admission to the events of another organisation (IAF); why admission was refused; how that decision respected press freedom; whether political bias was applied; and if should the ESA secondment be withdrawn.

For journalists everywhere, the wider



A refusal to admit journalists might seem trivial. But it is on such incidents that press freedom is built - or undermined



question is: what can be done about the refusal of accreditation? The NUJ in Ireland says there is ‘no automatic entitlement to press accreditation to a conference organised by a private organisation’. Many organisations have tightened up on accreditation and require proof of commissions. At least one journalist approved by the IAF was ‘encouraged’ to ‘commit to display’ the event’s hashtags, banners and logos, including those of its commercial sponsors, in his reports. This implied that journalists should promote rather than report on the event.

Compared to the killing of reporters in war zones, the refusal to let journalists into to an event, even the most important one in their professional calendar, might seem trivial. However, it is on countless incidents like this that press freedom is built – or undermined. The IAF is subject to European conventions on press freedom, both those arising from the Council of Europe (to which Britain belongs) and the European Union.

The problem is their enforceability. The issue of the Irish and French journalists was taken up by Dublin MEP Regina Doherty, who made a formal communication to the new commissioner for democracy, justice and the rule of law, whose brief includes ‘media freedom’ and ‘protecting journalists’. The non-governmental side is weak: although there is a European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, it was uninterested in this issue.

The topic of press cards and credentials is a distinct field in journalism studies. The general view is that some form of professional accreditation is desirable. Most European countries have such systems in place but there seems to be little recourse when powerful institutions deny them. European countries have rightly been vocal on press restrictions in other countries. What about here?



Frenzy by the river



After Nicola Bulley vanished, a social media circus hit relationships with local people – and police stonewalled. **Ruth Addicott** reports

When mother of two Nicola Bulley disappeared on January 27 2023 while walking her dog along the River Wyre in Lancashire, no one could have envisaged the scenes that ensued.

The story of the missing mother, who vanished without a trace after dropping her daughters off at school, prompted a social media response never seen before.

The incident first appeared as a missing person plea on the Lancashire Post and Blackpool Gazette websites. Within 24 hours, Lancashire Constabulary had launched a major operation with drones, helicopters, search dogs and mountain rescue and underwater search teams. When Bulley's mobile phone was found at a bench – still connected to a conference call, along with her dog, the mystery deepened.

The village of St Michael's on Wyre was inundated with not only journalists but also an army of amateur sleuths, including TikTokers, bloggers and influencers.

With police keeping 'an open mind' and no background briefings, questions began to mount. The Sun led on a 'stained' blue glove and 'shabby red van'. The Mail turned to 'expert

diver' Peter Faulding. Paul Ansell, Bulley's partner, was targeted (despite being ruled out by police) – as were journalists. By week three, police were getting calls from landowners saying people were walking up their drives with spades.

Nicola Adam, who was editor of the Lancashire Post and Blackpool Gazette, says: "It went from a small community united in pulling out the stops to find a loved one to one wildly resentful of intrusion, questions and cameras.

"We were hounded night and day for a hot take and subjected to some particularly unpleasant hate across social media and in person, but also directly in our inbox which particularly affected younger members of the team."

Adam says the mantra was 'facts without speculation'. "Not every editor would agree and I'm fine with it," she says.

Former Sky News correspondent Inzamam Rashid also received abuse. "I was targeted for my reporting and, in some instances, accused of being the person who pushed Nicola into the river. I've never experienced covering a story as crazy as this. Not because of the story, but all the noise around it. I remember parents bringing their kids down to the river and the bench where Nicola went missing as if it was some sort of tourist attraction. At times, it felt like Blackpool seafront."

Rashid says there was 'a hunger' from newsrooms for updates and new lines, with the smallest bit of news making headlines: "There was a real pressure for the journalists on the ground. That pressure was sometimes hard to deal with

Investigators vs influencers

Ethics

One TikToker filmed Bulley's body being recovered from the river. The video was viewed nearly one million times. He was arrested, but not charged.

As Rebecca Camber, crime and security editor of the Daily Mail, told the Police Superintendents' Association in September 2023: "How long before one of those conspiracy theorists knocks

on the door of the deceased's family or attempts to meddle with a crime scene?"

Reporting

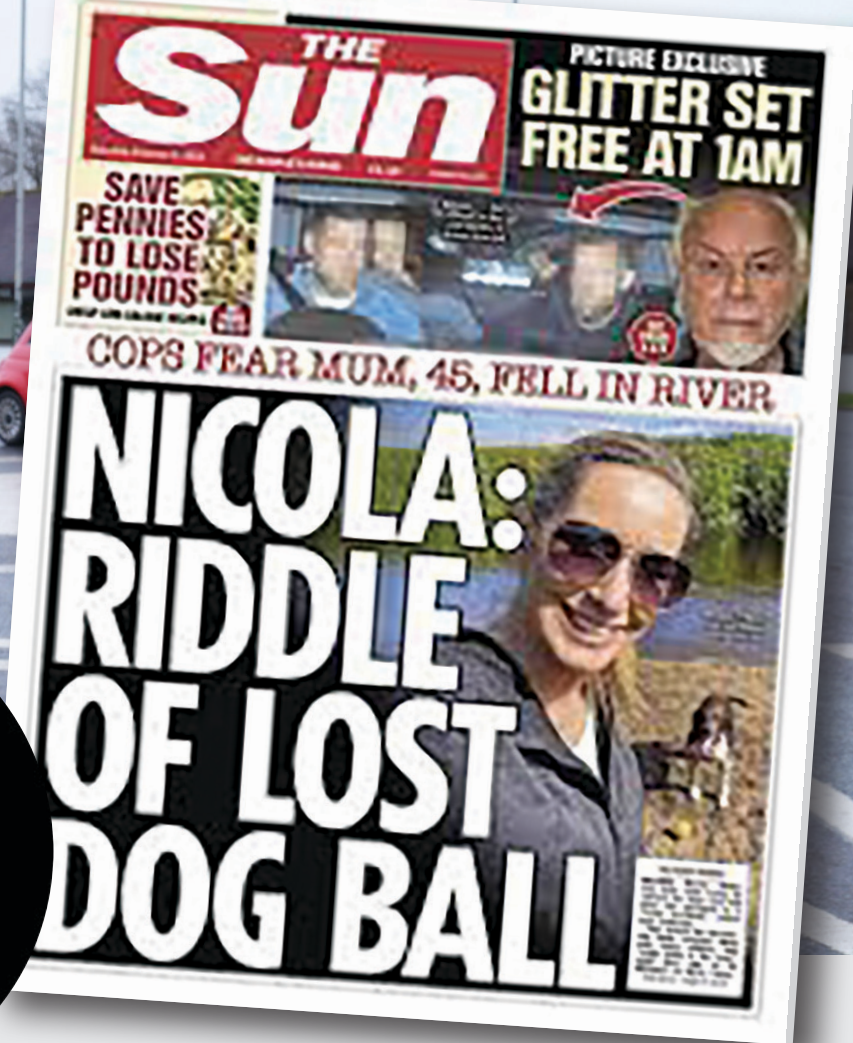
Hollie Bone, north west reporter for the Mirror, says:

"You've got to really question what you read on social media with an even stronger degree of scrutiny, particularly with the rise of influencers and armchair sleuths. Online journalists get excited by things trending and it's not always genuine.

"At the start, the family

wanted as much media coverage as possible and, by the end, they didn't want to speak to anybody.

"If we'd had an opportunity to understand the evolving message the family wanted to put out, the relationship might not have broken down in such a tragic way."



and it felt very competitive.”

He got the first exclusive with the family, which he says was “a really big moment”. “It was powerful to hear them and I’m glad I managed to give them the space to do it,” he says.

Elizabeth Haigh, senior reporter for MailOnline, covered the story from London, liaising with reporters in Lancashire.

“What shocked all of us was how big it became and how quickly it spiralled,” she says.

They were bombarded with videos from TikTok influencers.

“We knew these weren’t reliable,” she says. “So many people were getting their news from these sleuths turning up, never having had a day of actual investigation experience in their life. The amount of disinformation we had to wade through was way bigger than any other police case I’ve worked on, maybe with the exception of the Southport stabbings.”

Part of the problem was the lack of background briefings, which left accredited journalists being treated the same as amateur sleuths, and influencers being allowed to attend press conferences.

Haigh contacted Lancashire police around 20 times and says they got back once. “They didn’t answer any questions, they never picked up the phone, they weren’t even acknowledging they had received our emails and I know every journalist working on this case faced the same struggles,” she says.

ITV journalist Emma Sweeney recalls the day the search moved downstream and reporters were left to guess. “It meant journalists and crews were left driving up and down the road that runs beside the river trying to piece things together for themselves,” she says.

Hollie Bone, north west reporter for the Mirror, says it became so cloak and dagger that journalists had to work more as a pack. “People were asking, ‘Is it possible that she could have done this?’ And the police were saying, ‘Well, yes, that is a possibility, but we can’t say it actually happened,’ then the next day they were running with that news angle. I think it’s important that as journalists we take responsibility – you can’t just fabricate an angle.”

“We were extremely conscious that when the world media left, we would still be here – it was a responsibility and we all felt protective of Lancashire.”

Nicola Adam, former editor, Lancashire Post and Blackpool Gazette

“I’ve never seen an ongoing investigation like that where you just get ignored. They [police] didn’t acknowledge that we existed and that silence gave this environment where speculation was allowed to fester.”

Elizabeth Haigh, senior reporter, MailOnline

“To understand the complexities behind the scenes and the nature of the investigation is so essential to the principal of open justice and being able to report fairly.”

Hollie Bone, north west reporter, the Mirror

Then, on February 15, the police released a statement saying Bulley had ‘specific vulnerabilities’ due to ‘alcohol issues’ related to the menopause, prompting an outcry from politicians, including the then prime minister.

Haigh says the reaction at the Mail was shock: “I remember all of us having this conversation going, ‘Why have they put that in the public domain?’ They could have told us that as background to stop speculation. The big thing for me was we almost have to write about this now because it’s in the public domain, but what about her children, friends and family?”

Four days later, Bulley’s body was found in the river. An inquest found she had fallen into the river accidentally.

The next day, the family released a statement criticising the press and members of the public, singling out Sky and ITV.

In September 2023, journalists told a College of Policing review they believed the statement had been ‘inspired directly by the police to deflect criticisms from themselves’ and it unfairly conflated the actions of accredited journalists and media outlets with people on social media, particularly the line that media reported false claims about Ansell.

The review criticised Lancashire Constabulary for its media strategy and revealing ‘highly sensitive’ personal information, saying it was ‘avoidable’ and ‘unnecessary’. It said accredited journalists should have been given non-reportable briefings, and that trust between the police and the media broke down.

Although relations vary from force to force, reporters say they have seen some improvement. Bone cites Merseyside Police’s handling of the Southport stabbings; she says they tried to organise off-the-record briefings. Haigh has also had police officers asking to phone to give a full overview. “That has not been something I’ve had before,” she says.

Whether influencers learn from the case remains to be seen but, for journalists, it reinforced the need for respect.

“It is important to never lose sight that it is someone’s life,” says Haigh. “Always ask yourself: ‘If this was my family, would I find this acceptable?’”

by **Mark Fisher**

arts

Books >

Unholy Kingdom

Malise Ruthven, Verso

Subtitled 'Religion, Corruption and Violence in Saudi Arabia', Ruthven's book reflects on the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and suggests there is a dark side to the PR image projected by the House of Saud. <https://tinyurl.com/28ohptn>

'M.A.L.' The Journalism and Writing of Madeline Alberta Linford

Madeline Linford and Michael Herbert, Lulu.com

The first woman on the editorial board

of the Manchester Guardian covered everything from theatre to fashion to life in interwar Poland. This is the first anthology of her writing. <https://tinyurl.com/2bls748t>

Rebel Angel: the Life and Times of Annemarie Schwarzenbach

Padraig Rooney, Polity Books

The French-based Irish journalist and author turns his attention to an overlooked sexual and political radical of the 1930s. Rebelling against a pro-Nazi mother, Schwarzenbach headed to the lesbian nightclubs of Berlin and the jazz bars of New York. <https://tinyurl.com/28h7ys5a>

Comedy >

Eshaan Akbar: Live 2025

On tour until April 12

The sometime journalist (not to mention banker, policy adviser and speechwriter) makes light of racial politics from his perspective as a stand-up comedian of Bangladeshi heritage. <https://www.eshaanakbar.com>

Jamali Maddix: Aston

On tour March 5–May 24

A familiar face from Never Mind the Buzzcocks, Taskmaster and Frankie Boyle's New World Order, Maddix was most recently seen investigating extreme subcultures in Follow the Leader for Louis Theroux's production company. <https://www.jamalimaddix.com>

Exhibitions >

Leigh Bowery!

Tate Modern, London, February 27–August 31

The boundary-pushing artist, performer, model, TV personality, club promoter, fashion designer and

musician is celebrated for his contribution to 1980s nightlife and 1990s art and performance. <https://tinyurl.com/26euolcy>

Barbara Steveni: I Find Myself

Modern Art Oxford, March 1–June 8

The late activist and conceptual artist often worked outside conventional galleries via her Artist Placement Group to extend the reach of art. This collection of her work focuses on female stories and social impact. <https://tinyurl.com/4brkvvkh>



Festivals >

DaDaFest International 40

Various venues, Liverpool, March 8–31

This year's showcase of disability, deaf and neurodivergent arts is called RAGE: a Quiet Riot, a title that reflects frustration at the ongoing battle for equity and inclusion. Artists include Zack Mennell, Faith Bebbington and Matt Allen. <https://www.dadafest.co.uk>

HippFest

Hippodrome Cinema, Bo'ness, March 19–23

The line-up of the 15th annual celebration of silent film and live music includes New Found Sound, which teams young musicians with films from the National Library of Scotland's Moving Image Archive, Jeely Jar Screening, which introduces comedy greats to children, and the Friday Night Gala where the audiences dress for the theme of the film. <https://tinyurl.com/23arjsun>



In depth

Protests and photography

Artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen is the headline name behind Resistance, a major exhibition opening in Margate.

The work, however, is by the many photographers who have charted the great moments of political upheaval in the UK over the past century, from suffrage campaigns in 1903 to the anti-Iraq War protest of 2003.

With Clarrie Wallis and other researchers, McQueen aims to show how acts of resistance have shaped life in the UK and how photography – particularly before digital images – has played a key role in driving change. As the subtitle puts it, it is about “how protest shaped Britain and photography shaped protest”.

The exhibition and its accompanying book brings together the work of Vanley Burke, Henry Grant, Fay Godwin, Edith Tudor-Hart, Tish Murtha, Humphrey Spender, Christine Spengler, Andrew Testa, Paul Trevor and Janine Wiedel. It also features less well-known photographers who were at the frontline of demonstrations that grabbed headlines at the

time only to be forgotten when the history books were written.

The show, said Wallis, “reframes conventional narratives of British history, prompting viewers to reconsider our shared past”.

In films such as Blitz, Occupied City and 12 Years a Slave, McQueen has given voice to the underrepresented. In Resistance, he is reminding us of

the neglected story of popular struggle.

He has a special interest in the fight against racism and focuses here on the Black People's Day of Action on March 2 1981.

Also in the spotlight are women's liberation, LGBTQ+ rights, anti-fascist marches, anti-nuclear campaigns and the Greenham Common women's peace camp.

The book includes surveillance shots and press images, as well as witness accounts. There are also contributions by writers Gary Younge and Baroness Chakrabarti.

Resistance
Turner Contemporary, February 22–June 1, <https://tinyurl.com/23ash6qz>

Resistance
Fourth Estate, February 13, <https://tinyurl.com/26msod96>



Film >

On Falling

General release from March 7

Laura Carreira's gig-economy drama is about a Portuguese worker (Joana Santos) negotiating the algorithms in a Scottish fulfilment centre – a place where fulfilment is in short supply.

<https://tinyurl.com/287mq9lf>

Radio >

Assume Nothing

BBC Sounds

Award-winning NUJ member Tanya Fowles asks awkward questions about the suspicious death of Northern Irish showjumper Katie Simpson. This 10-part series for Radio Ulster presented by Susan Lynch examines the case.

<https://tinyurl.com/24kooc4k>

Theatre >

A Knock on the Roof

Royal Court, London, until March 8

Mesmerising monologue about living under the threat of war. Starring playwright Khawla Ibraheem, it is about a woman hoping to keep her

family safe in Gaza, knowing she will have only minutes after the warning of an attack.

<https://tinyurl.com/22p52fvs>

Punch

Young Vic, London

March 1–April 12

London transfer for James Graham's acclaimed telling of the true story of Jacob Dunne, a teenager who agreed to meet the parents of the man he had killed with a single punch one Saturday night.

<https://tinyurl.com/23vjyh32>



Spotlight

Making crime pay

After long careers in national papers, two NUJ members have adapted their skills to crime fiction. Maureen Paton is publishing her debut novel, while Tony Bassett has brought out his sixth.

Paton's *The Mystery at Rake Hall* is about a postwar Oxford don, CS Jack' Lewis, who investigates the case of one of his students, Susan Temple. Like Paton's mother, she has ended up in Rake Hall, a hostel for unmarried mothers – and all is not what it seems.

"Newsgathering and feature-writing are

great skills that equip us admirably for shaping stories," says Paton, who has a second novel lined up. "I'd like to encourage other journalists to flex the muscles of their imagination."

NUJ life member Bennett would agree.



It Never Rains is about a footballer whose stepson is kidnapped when his mansion is burgled.

Bennett is drawing on 40 years' experience: "After a career in which I spent a great deal of time writing about true-life crimes, I'm in the strange situation of using the knowledge acquired to invent crimes and describe how detectives investigate them."

The Mystery at Rake Hall
Swift Press, <https://tinyurl.com/2bvsowmo>

It Never Rains
The Book Folks, <https://tinyurl.com/2ajpb623>

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John H Morgan

A veteran South Wales journalist and union leader, who was the youngest reporter to cover the Queen's Coronation in 1953, has passed away peacefully but unexpectedly aged 87.

John H Morgan was the NUJ's regional organiser for Wales and the West of England from 1978 to 1991. He joined the NUJ in 1955 as a teenager and was later awarded life

membership. He was father of the chapel at the NUJ HQ in London and served as a member of the national executive council for many years.

He always enjoyed travelling and meeting people from all walks of life. He had a real interest in people, spending most of his life helping and supporting others in various ways to secure the best outcomes for them. As a result, he was passionate about his work and represented the NUJ in a professional manner at all times.

Aged just 15 years and working on the South Wales Voice, he was the youngest reporter in London at the late Queen Elizabeth's coronation on June 2 1953.

Over the years and in addition to his role at the NUJ, John H held many positions as a journalist as well as serving on various committees and councils.

In his early days, he was chief reporter and sports editor of the South Wales Voice in Ystalyfera, Swansea Valley, going on to become news reporter, chief court reporter and later sub-editor of the South

Wales Evening Post in Swansea. He then worked as a sub-editor at the Western Mail in Cardiff.

Apart from his writing and sub-editing roles, John H was chairman and assessor of the Wales and west regional committee of the National Council for the Training of Journalists and the TUC representative on the West Wales committee of the Sports Council for Wales. He also took on many community roles and was county councillor for West Glamorgan County Council. He had a great sense of public duty as well as professional pride.

Former journalist Mike Watkinson said his 46-year newspaper career would never have been possible but for John H.

"I first met him when I was an 18-year-old trainee journalist in the Swansea Valley," he said. "A couple of weeks later, during the national strike, I was threatened with the sack for committing the heinous crime of joining the NUJ. Suffice to say, John H intervened and I kept my job.

"I saw a lot of him over the next few years, usually on picket lines, which always seemed to be organised when snow lay thick on the ground.

"I remember he and I often commenting on the extreme reactions the sight of a picket line evoked in passing motorists.

"They were either totally for us or totally against us – no one ever seemed to sit on the fence.

"John H was committed to the union and his tireless campaigning and sheer tenacity left us in no doubt who was fighting our corner. Put quite simply, John H always had our backs.

"He was a man of his times, when the unions held sway, and I often wonder what his thoughts were on the modern era, when journalists are not afforded the kind of protection we could count on."

Should any NUJ members wish to send condolences to John's wife Bethan and his two daughters, please email e.w.morgan@btinternet.com.

Eleri Wyn Morgan



Mike Stares

One of the best-known West Country journalists died on January 13 at the age of 86.

Mike Stares was born in Chalford, Gloucestershire, and became a Life Member of the NUJ after a career spanning 60 years.

He first became a rookie journalist on the Leamington Spa Courier, progressing to the Buckingham Post, then on to the Doncaster Evening Post and the Blackpool Evening Gazette.

He then went on to spend a year

in America on the Hollywood Tattler.

He returned to the UK to marry his journalist wife Judith, and together they set up what was to become the longest-established news agency in the West Country.

First named the Cotswold News Service, launched in Tetbury, followed by a move to Swindon where the Cotswold and Swindon News Service held sway for 25 years. It covered not only crown courts in Swindon but also what became known as the 'Royal Triangle' in the Cotswolds, home to the future King Charles, Princess Anne, and then the Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.

Mike became known as a royal scoop specialist, and with his network of contacts was able to provide information on all the various royal activities. In those days good money was paid for a royal exclusive!

He was among the first to use the famous 'Tandy' for electronic story submission, and became intimately acquainted with every red telephone box in his area!

Nevertheless he maintained a deep

affection for his typewriter, and had to be forcibly prised away from it by Judith, who threw it through the window on one desperate day!

Mike was a proud member of the NUJ throughout his life and an enthusiastic chair of his local branch. He was also a founder member of the National Association of Press Agencies, who negotiated rates for freelance journalists in newspapers, TV and radio.

He fought for journalists' rights everywhere and refused to be defeated.

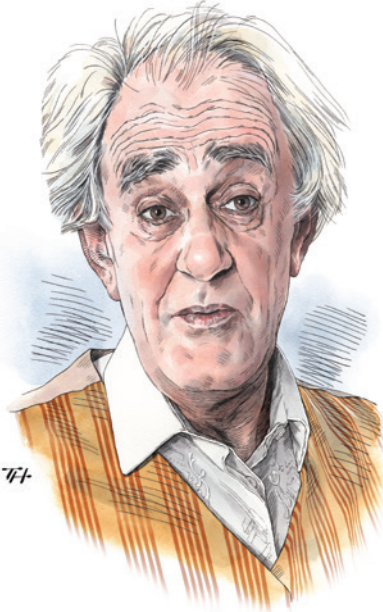
Towards the end of his career Mike took up lecturing in journalism, and was very popular with various colleges and institutions around the country, in addition to the ladies of the WI, where he was a regular speaker. He was patient and generous in passing on his expertise and modest about his own achievements. His students admired him greatly.

His greatest satisfaction was being able to give advice and encouragement to his two sons, who both followed him into the

media world. His contacts were invaluable when they were starting out, and neither of them minded being nepo babies. Justin is now news editor of the Brussels Signal in Belgium, and Elliott runs a thriving PR Agency in Miami.

By the time of his retirement Mike had been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, and moved to live in Ross-on-Wye where he continued to give the occasional lecture, and act as press officer for the local Probus Club.

Judith Stares



77

I'm failing at being an obnoxious online troll

Sparking fire and fury through offensive lies is a lot harder than it seems, says **Chris Proctor**

I've finally cracked it. I've found my metier. I'm going to become a rage-baiter.

I didn't even know this calling existed until recently, but I'm well up for it, and this column can be considered my official launch.

All I have to do is cheese people off. No problem. I've been doing this for most of my life. Ask any previous employer, partner or bank manager. I'm a natural.

So, I invent something offensive and stick it on the web. Furious readers regard my header/precis and are so moved that they click on it to read more, which earns me something like a farthing. In their heightened state, they cannot resist adding a comment to tell me I'm an appalling human being. This is the equivalent of my coming up with three cherries on a fruit machine, and my earnings rocket to something like 0.0001 pence.

(Although gratified, I cannot explain why they do this. If I read a header I don't like, I move on and read something else. It's not as though the internet is devoid of alternatives. There's quite a lot of material out there. I don't feel motivated to tell the writer to pop off. Perhaps I'm used to reading nonsense: I've worked as a sub. Still, I'm not going to criticise anyone contributing to keeping wolves away from my door. Good on them, I say.)

Here are a few prototypes I've been working on. Brace yourself:

- Mexico to build wall after Trump victory
- Was Starmer a pole dancer?
- China provocation: Charles to be King 'Hong' Kong

- Andrew to head sleaze department
- No denial from Rome about Pope trans claim.

I showed these provocative enticers to a few friends and was frankly disappointed by their reactions, from "I'm not surprised" through "Is that right?" to "I've heard that". That last one – a reaction to the news that our leader was formerly an exotic hoofer – enraged me to the point of clicktion. How could she have heard it? I'd only just made it up. Still, the market research did help to define the sub-standards required for my new line of work. It wasn't going to be as easy as I'd thought.

Expanding my fact-finding, I began to ask acquaintances what did enrage them, so that I could cater for popular tantrums. The results were, again, disheartening. In no particular order:

- Commas
- Farage
- Everton football results
- Squeaky doors
- People who make funny noises drinking tea
- Nails chipping even when they've been shellacked.

What's up with people? I'm looking for wide-ranging, hair-pulling, red-faced, full-on uncontrollable wrath. I want universal, ear-steaming, tooth-grinding, fist-clenching fury. And what do I get? Moans.

This is particularly irritating for a columnist. The usual approach to writing an opinion piece is to: listen to someone advancing an idea; steal it; write it down; and despatch copy. Without other people's opinions, you're lost. And these pathetic grumbles were not helping.

My next strategy was to consider the opposition. I took to scouring social media for professional enragers. It was not an edifying exercise.

One of them is a woman from New York called Winta something. (I won't give her full name in case you're tempted away from my own baiting.) She drives people to clicking by claiming she is the prettiest girl in the city or possibly the universe. Well, I know my limits – I'm not going to get away with that one. Apparently, she also takes videos of herself being rude to waiters. I'm not risking that. Waiters, always win. If they're not directly rude to you, there'll be spit on your side.

There's a chap called Mr Beast who angered people when he said he couldn't pronounce the name Farokh Sarmad. I can't see this idea has legs. If I tell the world I struggle to say Dostoevsky, are you going to bother clicking away to tell me I'm a Putin apologist?

Another fellow makes hundreds of 0.0001 pence from being rude about Rings of Power, which is a fictional prequel to the fictional Tolkien story. I get dizzy, not furious, when I'm this far removed from reality.

This rage-baiting game isn't as straightforward as I'd hoped. The only positive is that someone, somewhere is going to be enraged at anything you write or say or do, so you're more or less bound to get one click. You just have to hope it isn't a solitary moose shepherd in the Urals with a poor wi-fi connection and frost-bitten finger. And one click isn't going to pay Sixtus' school fees – not now, with the VAT.

My favourite recent angry star was about Telegraph journalist Alison Pearson who got a front-page lead for revealing that someone knocked on her door and asked her questions, which is a bit rich coming from a journalist. In her defence, it was the plod.

No, it's no good. I'm not cut out for rage-baiting. I'm giving it up.

Anybody enraged?

“
The reaction to the news our leader was formerly an exotic hoofer enraged me. How could she have heard this? I'd only just made it up
”

REASONS TO JOIN



Ending the Gender Pay Gap

A Press Gazette analysis showed that 91 per cent of UK media companies paid men more than women and 85 per cent of men got better bonuses and it's a similar picture in Ireland. One magazine group's gap was almost 37 per cent. Opaque, unfair pay structures and unlawful sex discrimination are contributing factors. The NUJ negotiates on transparent pay structures, progressive work-life balance policies, better maternity and paternity deals and fair recruitment procedures.



Be Part of a Collective Voice

As a member of the NUJ you are part of a united force championing the rights of media workers and defending attacks on press freedom. Successful workplaces are those where the management and workers share the same aims and talk to each other. Being a member of the NUJ means giving yourself and colleagues a real voice at work.

Respect at Work

The NUJ challenges work cultures which lead to bullying and harassment. It will represent you if you experience this behaviour. It uses its collective voice industry-wide to argue that media workers are treated with respect. We promote workplaces where workers and managers are constructive with their criticism during the creative process, and the union publishes codes of conduct and dignity at work policies.



Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at
nuj.org.uk/join

You can contact the NUJ at:
info@nuj.org.uk
or for membership queries at:
membership@nuj.org.uk

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