

theJournalist

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Mr Bates, the Post Office

and some first-class journalism



Contents



Journalism can achieve amazing outcomes. But the best results are often hard won. Our cover feature by Neil Merrick looks at the dogged journalism that led to the Post Office Horizon scandal becoming the huge news and political issue it long deserved to be. It started with Computer Weekly and went on to be followed by the then local broadcaster Nick Wallis and Private Eye.

Nick is about to go on tour to talk about the inside story. His determination to pursue the Post Office is a master-class of the best of our profession. Ray Snoddy salutes him in his column.

Elsewhere we have accounts of courage and determination in reporting, not least of course in Gaza where the loss of journalists' lives is unprecedented.

Jen Stout writes about reporting in Ukraine as we reach the second anniversary of the Russian invasion. And Barrie Clement speaks to Len Olea, the leader of the journalists' union in the Philippines, about working in very difficult circumstances.

Journalism can appear undervalued sometimes when news organisations make continued job cuts and move further into the realms of clickbait and TikTok. But this issue highlights what a critical profession it is.

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Dogged determination and great journalism

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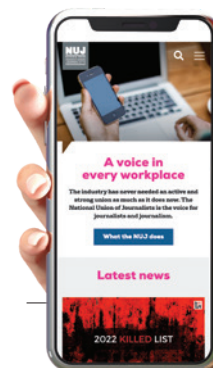
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Access all the latest NUJ news and views by scanning the QR code here or by visiting www.nuj.org.uk



Key step towards recognition for journalists at PA Media

THE NUJ has moved closer to achieving union recognition at PA Media, which used to be called the Press Association.

The Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) said that PA should work with the NUJ chapel there, which has existed since 2021, on the scope of a potential collective bargaining unit.

The CAC decided that “on the balance of probabilities” a majority of those in the proposed bargaining unit would be likely to support recognition of the NUJ and for the union to negotiate pay and conditions on their behalf.

PA Media declined to voluntarily recognise the NUJ chapel in July last year, so the union took its case to the CAC.

The NUJ’s proposed bargaining unit comprised non-managerial editorial staff that ultimately report to editor-in-chief Peter Clifton.

The union submitted a petition signed by 166 people, of whom 132 were in the proposed bargaining unit, saying they supported the recognition application and wanted the NUJ to collectively bargain for them.

A union can apply for recognition if it has at least 10 per cent membership within the proposed bargaining unit. A majority – at least 51 per cent – of employees in a bargaining unit is then required to demonstrate that they favour recognition.



A PA chapel spokesperson said: “This is a momentous occasion and we are delighted all the hard work has paid off to enable us to reach this critical point in our journey towards a fairer workplace.

“We believe union recognition and the establishment of a recognised bargaining unit is the only way for hundreds of PA editorial staff working across the UK to have a real say on pay and other important issues.

“While the CAC finding this is a very welcome step, the hard work has just begun and we will need everyone’s support to get over the next hurdle.”

If you’re a PA journalist, you can join us at www.nuj.org.uk/join To contact the chapel in confidence please email publishing@nuj.org.uk and we will put you in touch.

inbrief...

LORDS SAY AI MUST HONOUR COPYRIGHT

The House of Lords communications and digital committee said AI companies shouldn’t violate copyright or use works without permission. The committee urged the government to publish its view on whether copyright law provides sufficient protections to rightsholders, and to consider options for legislation should uncertainty arise.

RUSSIA DETAINS US REPORTER FURTHER

Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich has had his pre-trial detention in Russia extended until the end of March. He was arrested in March last year during a reporting trip to Yekaterinburg. In December, President Putin said Russia and the US were in talks over a possible release.

PAUL FOOT AWARD OPENS FOR ENTRIES

The Private Eye Paul Foot award 2024 for investigative and campaigning journalism has opened with increased prize money. The winner receives £8,000 - up from £5,000 - and the runners up get £1,500 each. The deadline is March 26 at 1pm. Please go to: www.private-eye.co.uk #paulfootaward

NUJ calls for Gaza investigation

THE NUJ’S national executive council has called for an investigation by the International Criminal Court into the killing of nearly 100 journalists in Gaza. It recorded its appreciation for the journalists “who have

worked as the eyes and ears of the world, despite suffering extraordinary personal privations, loss of their homes and personal bereavement...”

It said that the Israeli Defence Forces have

sophisticated surveillance and AI-assisted targeting technology. These allow people to be identified, and targeted – but also record actions in a way that may deliver detailed evidence. The International

Federation of Journalists has been sending aid via the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate, helping to provide battery packs and trauma kits.

Donate at <https://www.iffj.org/safety-fund>

Gaza journalists, page 8

Post Office reporter on tour

NICK WALLIS, the journalist who has been instrumental in getting the Post Office Horizon scandal recognised as one of the biggest miscarriages of justice in British history, is going on tour. The broadcaster and NUJ member who began work on the story 13 years ago is taking his talk – Post Office Scandal – the Inside Story - on a national tour with some special subpostmaster guests. His book *The Great Post Office Scandal*, for which he initially

struggled to find a publisher, is also now stocked in all major booksellers. Wallis’s overdue recognition comes in the wake of the hugely successful ITV drama – *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* – for which Wallis was an advisor.

<https://www.postofficescandal.uk/live-events/>

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Jilly Cooper becomes a dame

Jilly Cooper, the novelist and former journalist, was given a damehood in the new year honours list for her services to literature and charity. Dame Jilly, who is a member of the NUJ’s Gloucestershire branch, said she was “incredibly bowled over...delighted, bewildered and ecstatic.” She is known for her *Rutshire Chronicles*, which focus on scandal and adultery in upper-class society and an aristocratic character called Rupert Campbell-Black. Last year Rishi Sunak told ITV’s *This Morning* that he was a fan of the chronicles.

Irish executive backs Mediahuis staff under threat of redundancy



TIMON SCHNEIDER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE NUJ'S Irish executive council has pledged to support Mediahuis Ireland staff after the company announced up to 30 editorial redundancies.

The media group employs about 340 journalists on titles that include the Irish Independent, Sunday World and Belfast Telegraph as well as regional newspapers including The Kerryman and Wexford People.

Mediahuis said it was cutting staffing numbers as part of a pivot towards digital output.

Cearbhall Ó Síocháin, Irish executive council cathaoirleach, said: "In this era of digital misinformation, newsrooms need more

journalists – not fewer – if they are going to be able to fact check information, stories and audiovisual output. Media organisations cannot continue with these never-ending rounds of personnel cuts if they want to continue to provide reliable news and information as a public service to readers, listeners and viewers.

"During the Covid pandemic, when misinformation was rife, the public turned to local and national newspapers, radio stations and TV for accurate information in that time of crisis. Has that lesson been so easily forgotten?"

"The titles now owned by Mediahuis have seen countless rounds of redundancies under the current and previous owners over the past 15 years."

Ian McGuinness, NUJ Irish organiser, said: "The fact that the reduction in headcount will, in the first instance, be done via voluntary redundancy, job sharing or reduced hours will be cold comfort to many of those who remain working in Mediahuis's titles, whose workload – already unmanageable – will undoubtedly spiral out of control.

"Referring to the company's pivot towards digital, Peter Vandermeersch, Mediahuis chief executive, said that the company wants to repair its roof while the sun is shining and not wait for the storm. However, the NUJ's view on this is clear that more staff – not fewer – are needed for increased digital output. Further staffing cuts are more likely to cause the roof to cave in.

"The NUJ's concern is for the health and safety of the journalists who remain at Mediahuis. If 15 years of cuts have taught us one thing, it is they result in bigger workloads, longer hours and higher stress levels for the journalists who continue working."



Media organisations cannot continue with these never-ending rounds of personnel cuts if they want to provide reliable news and information as a public service

Cearbhall Ó Síocháin, Irish executive council cathaoirleach

End of Di's innings

FRIENDS and colleagues gathered in January to mark Diana (Di) Peasey's end-of-an-era retirement after 25 years' service as chair of the Nottingham branch, *Benedict Cooper* writes.

A life member and former national executive committee postholder, Di said she would retire as chair last year.

Di worked for the BBC in Nottingham, where she was mother of chapel for 17 years

On January 17, well-wishers packed out the Long Room at Trent Bridge cricket ground for her farewell dinner, with NUJ members travelling from around the country to attend.

Several members spoke,

including John Hess, former political editor for BBC East Midlands, and NUJ honorary general treasurer John Barsby, another former BBC colleague.

NUJ Northern and Midlands senior organiser Chris Morley praised Di's "formidable track record" at both branch level and nationally.

He said: "It is a testament

to Di that in the torrid world of journalism over the last 15 years particularly, she has been there as a rock I could rely on in our battle to promote and defend the interests of our members."

Colleagues thanked Di for her years of dedicated service and support to members.

Her huge efforts in an effective joint chair and



secretary role led to the Nottingham branch being one of the largest and most active in the country.

PETE JENKINS

Refugees praise NUJ branch for donation and support



AFTER hearing of the difficulties facing refugees relocating to the north-east, members of the NUJ's Sunderland, Shields and Hartlepool branch wanted to help.

The branch donated £100 to support the work of the North of England Refugee Service (NERS),

which has offices in Newcastle and Sunderland.

Kurdish Iraqi photojournalists Ako Ismail and Shahor Omar are both freelance journalists who fled their homeland in Iraqi Kurdistan. They have been closely supported and mentored by the branch.

Ismail said: "It is not just about the money although this is important to support the work of NERS. It is more about networking and understanding the needs of refugees. I am pleased that our NUJ branch decided to help as this can only lead to better integration."

Unions rally against strike law 40 years after GCHQ union ban

SIMON CHAPMAN

NUJ activists were among thousands of union members at a rally in Cheltenham to defend the right to strike and mark 40 years since unions were banned at GCHQ, the UK's national security and intelligence agency.

About 5,000 people joined the demonstration, organised by the TUC, according to union estimates.

Paul Nowak, TUC general secretary, told the rally: "It doesn't matter how much the government tries to ban, bully and intimidate unions, we know that right is on our side.

"The GCHQ workers had to wait 13 years for justice, but we expect Labour to live up to its commitment to repeal the Strikes Act within 100 days of winning the general election."



Mark Serwotka, outgoing general secretary of civil service union PCS, told those at the protest: "Our message today is the same as it was in 1984 – we shall fight

this injustice for however long it takes."

When Margaret Thatcher introduced the ban in 1984, citing security concerns, most workers quit their unions but 14

refused on principle, including Gareth Morris and Brian Johnson, who were sacked. Both were at the rally.

The ban was lifted in 1997 when Labour came to power.

inbrief...

UK HAS THE LEAST TRUST IN THE MEDIA

The UK suffered the biggest drop in confidence in the media and was the least trusted out of 28 countries surveyed for the Edelman Trust Barometer. The research, carried out by PR company Edelman in November, found just 31 per cent of people in the UK said they trusted the UK media.

FEEES FOR DIGITAL NEWS UP ONE FIFTH

The price of a digital news subscription has risen by 19 per cent on average in the UK over the past year, according to a Press Gazette analysis of 23 paywalled publishers. Online news price rises are well above inflation, which is about five per cent. The prices tracked by Press Gazette are full-rate offers and exclude discounts.

JOURNALISTS AT RISK IN PHILIPPINES

Len Olea, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, met the NUJ and the International Federation of Journalists in January amid concern over media freedom and the use of intimidation by government officials against journalists.

Interview, page 20

Cuts loom at Business Insider

BUSINESS INSIDER, an international financial news service, is cutting eight per cent of its newsroom staff with specialisms being 'refocused' for those staff remaining.

The move was announced in late January and came several weeks after

the Central Arbitration Committee recognised an NUJ chapel in the London newsroom, which has 70 journalists.

The Business Insider chapel said it was "concerned about declining mental wellbeing of journalists, many of whom no longer feel they can trust

the leadership or that it has their best interests at heart."

It added: "We urge Business Insider to engage meaningfully with the NUJ and note the pool of journalists at risk in the UK includes both women journalists and men of colour. We are disappointed with the lack of consultations prior to the recent announcement."

Jenny leaves Welsh council

JENNY SIMS was given a miner's lamp and flowers as she resigned from the union's Welsh executive council (WEC) after more than 10 years. She stood down as she is moving from Cardiff to London.

Nick Powell, WEC chair, and Martin Shipton, chair of Cardiff and South East Wales branch, thanked Jenny for all her work including organising freelance salons, helping to organise conferences and being a branch and WEC delegate at several NUJ delegate meetings. She also held a national executive council job share for two years, was a Wales member of the 60+ council member and WEC's delegate to the Wales national pensioners' convention as well as campaigning on digital exclusion and inclusion.

Jenny said: "I'm moving back to London to be near family, but am sad to be leaving Wales and will miss my NUJ colleagues."



NATASHA HIRST

Another woman takes helm at Sun papers

Fiona Wynne, deputy editor of the Irish Sun, will replace Kieran McDaid as editor as he leaves after eight years. Wynne joined the paper as features editor in 2006 and was then made assistant editor in 2014 and deputy editor two years later. Her appointment strengthens a female top team at the paper where Victoria Newton is editor in chief, Gill Smith is editor of the Scottish Sun and Natalie Evans is editor of the US Sun. Wynne said: "Every day, across print and digital, we work tirelessly for our readers to inform and entertain them, to fight for their rights and the things that matter to them most."

Launch of free paper demonstrates 'vital role' of print in local news

AN INDEPENDENT monthly newspaper has been launched in Hull. The first edition of The Hull Story newspaper was published with a print run of 10,000 copies late last year.

The free title is available on news stands at locations with high footfall across the city, including shopping centres, community hubs and libraries. Hundreds of copies have also been delivered to the homes of housebound residents.

It runs alongside The Hull Story website, which was launched by co-editors Simon Bristow and Rick Lyon in 2020.

Bristow and Lyon, both experienced local journalists, said they felt the time was right to launch a print version of their title.

Bristow, who previously worked for The Yorkshire Post and the Hull Daily Mail, said: "It's a proud moment, personally and professionally, to have launched our own newspaper.

"Print still has a vital role to play in local news and the newspaper and website will complement and enhance each other as we strive to reach all communities in our great city.

"As well as wanting to share our content more widely, we've launched the newspaper because there's digital poverty in Hull and not everyone has access to a smart phone or computer. We've committed to making it a free title because we want to reach people whatever their circumstances.

"We're also aware that in Hull, as in many other cities across the UK, the local media landscape is changing, and many traditional outlets are contracting. That's bad for local communities and bad for local democracy. We believe that local news matters."

The Hull Story runs an online patrons scheme, whereby readers can sign up to support the platform by paying a monthly subscription of £2.50. In return, they receive a regular e-newsletter and exclusive access to an editor's journal.

Lyon, a former news editor at the Hull Daily Mail, said: "The response so far to the launch of the newspaper has been fantastic, both in the communities we serve and across social media.

"We've asked the city to get behind us and that's exactly what it's doing, which I think shows the demand for a free, quality local title like this in Hull."

Bristow and Lyon are supported by freelance contributors including local politics and history reporter Angus Young, business and features writer Phil Ascough, music journalist Russ Litten, international affairs columnist Paul Knott, arts columnist Vicky Foster and Hull City correspondent Sam Hawcroft.

The foundation of The Hull Story newspaper follows the successful launch in autumn by Bristow and Lyon of a pilot newspaper in Grimsby, The Grimsby Story, which is issued quarterly.



We've launched the newspaper because of digital poverty. We've committed to making it a free title because we want to reach people whatever their circumstances

**Simon Bristow
Co-editor
The Hull Story**

SIMON CHAPMAN

From Virginia to Trowbridge

THE LAST time he received an award, Wiltshire Times photographer Trevor Porter was flown to Virginia in the US. There, he was feted by Gannett, owners of the paper's publisher, Newsquest.

Recently, Porter was awarded life membership of the NUJ, after clocking up four decades' membership. To collect it he had to travel all the way to.... Trowbridge. Colleagues from the

region celebrated with him at The Village Pump, the music venue behind The Lamb Inn.

James Garrett, NUJ branch chair for South-West England said: "It remains as important as ever that

local news media can call on journalists who know their patch intimately.

"Trevor spent 15 years as a freelance photographer before joining the Wiltshire Times. Across his 40 years, there will be few stories in west Wiltshire he hasn't covered."



Trophy for a half-century career

A PRESTIGIOUS lifetime achievement award has been presented to Gordon Fyfe to recognise a media career spanning more than 50 years.

Gordon, 70, spent 20 years as a reporter on local newspapers in Inverness and 24 years as a media officer with The Highland Council and Highland Regional Council.

He was presented with the Barron Trophy in front of media colleagues at the annual Highlands and Islands Press Ball.

The Barron Trophy was established by the late Evan Barron, editor/owner of the Inverness Courier, in 1950 to recognise the excellence of a local journalist at work and in the community.



ALISON WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

Court throws out 'scandalous' defamation case against journalist

STEPHEN BARNES/POLITICS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



THE UNION has welcomed the decision of the master of the High Court in Northern Ireland to strike out a defamation claim against Belfast journalist and author Malachi O'Doherty by Northern Ireland Assembly member Gerry Kelly (pictured).

Master Evan Bell described the claim by Gerry Kelly MLA as "scandalous, frivolous and vexatious" and awarded costs against him.

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, said the determination was "extremely significant" amid ongoing concern at the use of strategic lawsuits known as SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation) against journalists.

In the decision, Bell described Kelly's defamation action as an abuse of process that "has no realistic prospect of success" and failed to "pass a minimum threshold of seriousness".

Mr Kelly was ordered to pay the costs of the application and the costs of the action on an indemnity.

Bell said: "Where a court is satisfied on the balance of probabilities that a defamation action amounts to a SLAPP then an award of costs to the defendant on an indemnity basis is an inevitable consequence as a demonstration of the court's repudiation of the way in which a plaintiff has abused the processes of the court."

Dooley said: "The unambiguous language used in the determination should give those intent on using SLAPPs pause for thought."

In 1973, Kelly was sentenced to life imprisonment for his part in the IRA bombing at two locations in London including the Old Bailey, and 10 years later was involved in a mass break-out from the Maze prison outside Belfast.

In 2020, he issued a writ claiming damages for defamation over two radio interviews in 2019, in which O'Doherty said he had shot a prison officer. Kelly claimed he had been "gravely damaged in his character and reputation" and his standing as an elected public representative had been "called into disrepute".

inbrief...

ONE IN FIVE PEOPLE SUBSCRIBE TO NEWS

Nearly a fifth (19 per cent) of people in the UK have a print or online news subscription, according to research commissioned by subscriptions management platform Zuora. However, 37 per cent of them are considering cancelling. The research also found that a further 10 per cent had had a subscription in the past year and cancelled it.

SOCIAL MEDIA MAIN LOCAL NEWS SOURCE

Some 65 per cent of British people follow local news - and social media is the most popular way of doing so, according to Ofcom. The regulator's survey of nearly 2,800 people also showed that almost as many people follow local news on TV as via social media platforms.

PODCAST HELPS NEW EUROPEAN PROFIT

The New European newspaper has reported its first profitable month, fuelled in part by a marketing partnership with The Rest is Politics podcast. In an interview with Press Gazette, the pro-Europe weekly said it had more than 28,000 subscribers at the end of November, a 62 per cent year-on-year rise. Some 17,400 of the subscriptions are digital and 10,800 are for print.

Mentors for college journalists

A NEW six-month mentorship programme kicks off this year for young graduates who cut their teeth on student papers or radio stations who want to pursue journalism careers in print, television and digital.

It is managed by the UK branch of the Commonwealth Journalists Association.

The CJA ran a successful conference with student journalists in Birmingham before the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The scheme, for aspiring journalists in the UK, offers a one-hour session each month by phone or online, and was set up following a pilot project.

It was put together by Lucy Skoulding, who has worked

with Women in Journalism's mentorship, and been both mentor and mentee.

There will be space for 20 mentees this year, with mentors including William Keegan, David Hencke, Rita Payne, Catherine Pepinster and Gamal Fahnbulleh as well as a few younger journalists.

Tortoise blames investments for loss

TORTOISE MEDIA, originally founded to produce 'slow news' through long-form journalism, made a £4.6 million loss before tax in the year to 31 December 2022, its most recent published accounts show.

The figure is a 45 per cent increase on its losses in 2021 and the publisher's cumulative losses from its launch in 2019 to 2022 are £16.3 million.

In its Companies House filing, Tortoise, which has concentrated on podcasts and audio reports for the past two years, said 2022 had been "a year we decided to invest in the business and are confident this will enable us to achieve our goal of

profitability". Those investments were made in staffing, the launch of its Kite festival and staging Responsible Business Forum events.



More family courts open to reporters

Journalists are now allowed to report with comparative freedom from 19 family courts in England and Wales in an expansion of a pilot scheme to boost transparency. The pilot began last year, allowing journalists to report from three family courts in Cardiff, Carlisle and Leeds.

At the end of January, 16 more courts opened their doors: Liverpool, Manchester, West Yorkshire, Kingston-upon-Hull, Nottingham, Stoke, Derby, Birmingham, the Central Family Court in London, East London, West London, Dorset, Truro, Luton, Guildford and Milton Keynes.

Gaza's slaughtered journalists

Victoria Brittain reports on the people behind the numbers

Journalist Ayat Khadawa was killed with her family at home in Beit Lahya on November 20 after writing her last message to the world: "We had big dreams, but our dream now is to be killed in one piece so they know who we are."

As *The Journalist* went to press the International Federation of Journalists reported that 99 journalists had been killed in Gaza since the Hamas attacks of October 7. Among them are other young women killed by Israeli air strikes in their homes. Shaima El Gazzar, Ola Atallah, Duaa Jabbour and Duaa Sharaf all had their dreams of journalism and its power to show the world their reality in hope of changing it. None of them could have imagined the terror of their last days working as journalists while hungry, thirsty and exhausted, with no electricity, rare communications, successive forced moves under fire and, above all, no safety in any place in Gaza.

Never has journalism seen anything like this. Many were freelancers, working for small Palestinian offices; some have become Gaza's faces known around the world, notably from Al Jazeera's English television service. Fifty media offices have been attacked or destroyed, journalists have been killed in their cars and on the streets and have seen colleagues buried under the rubble and their families wiped out in their homes. The pattern of targeting journalists and their families is unmistakable.

Images of grief are indelible, such as photojournalist Ali Jaddallah in Gaza City in October doing a live video feed

from his car as he prays aloud with the body of his father in the back seat as he took him for burial. He had raced to his parents' house moments after it was bombed and his father, sister and two brothers killed. He said he didn't find his sister's body. He managed to pull his mother out – the only survivor – and took her to Al-Shifa hospital where he was living and working with a team of photographers. He said: "The most important thing now is to report what is happening. I feel numb. I am a working machine."

Wael Dahdouh, Gaza bureau chief for Al Jazeera, was on air on October 25 when he was told by a colleague that his wife, 15-year-old son Mahmoud, seven-year-old daughter Sham and 18-month-old grandson Adam had been killed by an Israeli air strike where they were staying in Nuseirat camp. For a moment he turned away from the camera, then turned back to be interviewed by a colleague, his voice breaking with tears as he said the children's names.

Dahdouh had moved the family south for safety as ordered by the Israeli army ahead of the threatened ground invasion. After the funeral, Dahdouh immediately returned to work documenting Gaza's systematic destruction by the Israeli military forces.

On December 15, Dahdouh and his colleague of 19 years cameraman Samer Abu Daqqa were hit by an Israeli missile as they reported the aftermath of the bombing of a school, Dahdouh was wounded and evacuated, but Abu



FRIEMANN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

SHUTTERSTOCK



Daqqa was buried under rubble and the Israeli army refused access to an ambulance for five hours and he bled to death. Al Jazeera has referred his death to the International Criminal Court as an assassination.

On January 7, Dahdouh's eldest son Hamza, 27, an Al Jazeera journalist, was killed with video journalist Mustafa Thuraya when their car was hit by an Israeli air strike after reporting on the aftermath of an earlier air strike. Israeli officials admitted they were targeted and claimed Hamza was "an operative for Palestinian Islamic Jihad" and Thuraya "a terrorist" Hamas member "who operated an aircraft that posed a threat". He routinely used drones to film.

Al Jazeera and the families rejected the claims and condemned the attack as an assassination, asserting the Israeli Defence Force "has systematically targeted" Dahdouh's family. The next day, two of his nephews, brothers Ahmed Al-Dahdouh and Muhammad Al-Dahdouh, an accountant and an electronics engineer, were killed by an Israeli air strike on their car near Rafah.

These deaths echo of that of Al Jazeera's star journalist in the West Bank, Shireen Abu Akleh, who in May 2022 was shot by an Israeli soldier in Jenin camp. At her memorial service in London, the names of 46 journalists killed by the Israeli military since 2000 were remembered. Today, so many journalists deserve our recognition for their exceptional service to history.

//
The most important thing now is to report what is happening. I feel numb. I am a working machine

Victoria Brittain worked for the Guardian for 25 years. She reported from wars in Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Uganda and Eritrea

Dogged determination and great journalism



Raymond Snoddy hails the reporter who stuck with Post Office story

We can now state for certain that freelance crime reporter Nick Wallis has a place in Post Office history.

Computer Weekly may have been first onto one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in British history and Private Eye never let go over the years. But it was Wallis who kept going when few in the established press were interested.

If you visit the Postal Museum's bookshop there - alongside books for children such as Meerkat Mail and The Jolly Pocket Postman - is The Great Post Office Scandal by Nick Wallis.

As Neil Merrick notes in his feature on page 14, publishing was another sector of British society that did not distinguish itself. Only a small legal publisher, Bath Publishing, was willing to take the risk with its first mainstream book.

The story of Wallis is a tribute to patience, commitment and downright dogged journalism but it started with an outrageous piece of serendipity - a lesson for all journalists. The biggest stories can have the smallest origins.

It began with a tweet from a taxi owner asking if he could pitch for the taxi account for BBC Radio Surrey where Wallis was presenting the breakfast show.

The local radio station was 'a one man and a dog' operation and did not have a taxi account. Instead of ignoring the tweet, Wallis - always on the look out for stories and interesting people to talk to on air - asked the taxi driver if he would come on and tell some of his best stories.

The reply? "I've got a story all right. Call me after the show." Seema Misra, the wife of taxi driver Davinder, had been thrown into prison on her son's 10th birthday, while pregnant, for supposedly stealing £74,000 from her sub-Post Office. Wallis was off and

running in what was soon to become the consuming story of his career.

There is no point in debating the precise contributions of journalism and the campaign group of wronged sub-postmasters and mistresses or the ITV drama Alan Bates vs the Post Office in overturning the injustices.

History will show it was the drama, watched by more than 10 million people, that finally blew the story apart and gave it the political momentum and urgency that had been lacking.

Historians such as Roman specialist Mary Beard have been quick to point out that drama has been a force for change and reform for centuries.

Wallis is also surely right to observe that without the stories and programmes such as Panorama over the years, the drama would probably never have been made.

"There is no need to be embarrassed. It was a drama underlined by journalism," Wallis told Merrick.

Now that the mysterious process where a strong story becomes an overwhelming social and political scandal has been completed, plenty of Post Office journalism remains.

The most pressing matter is to make sure those who were wrongly targeted are promptly and properly compensated, not just for the money they lost but also for the turmoil wrought on their lives, reputations and relationships.

All should be completely and personally exonerated rather than receive mealy-mouthed mass pardons.

Further justice will probably have to await the publication of the official inquiry report but journalists should keep up the pressure for prosecutions, however high the positions occupied at the Post Office or Fujitsu, the company

that produced and endlessly stood by its flawed Horizon computer system.

Journalists should also examine whether the present Post Office structure - government owned but privately operated - is the right one. Quite apart from the scandal, its service is inadequate as multi-millions flow out in dividends to shareholders.

As the number of paper items continues to decline in favour of digital, would not just government ownership but also public operation in the public interest be the best solution in future?

Apart from their role in helping to get justice, is there another lesson to be learned by journalists?

When confronted with a scandal in plain sight - and there are no shortage of candidates - news outlets should suspend their usual definition of news as 'the new'. They should not hesitate in telling such stories however many times it takes to overturn injustices.

Two stories in need of never-ending coverage are indeterminate sentences and the contaminated blood scandal.

Indeterminate sentences for crimes other than murder were abolished years ago but not retrospectively and thousands remain in prison with no release date for, in some cases, relatively minor crimes.

Then there is the scandal of more than 30,000 people who were given blood products contaminated with hepatitis C and HIV between the 1970s and the 1990s. A delayed public inquiry report is due in March; in the meantime, people die with no interim compensation or compensation at all.

Contaminated blood and indeterminate sentences would also merit a drama. Or after Nick Wallis comes to the end of his Post Office odyssey and has more free time...

When confronted with a scandal in plain sight, news outlets should suspend their usual definition of news as 'the new'

Edinburgh

Ruth Addicott on work and life with a lot of culture

There aren't many places you can find a Victorian seance, Rupert Murdoch and a fish jumping on a trampoline – but Edinburgh is one of them.

Throw in a couple of drag queens, some gratuitous nudity and a philosophical meditation on existentialism and you get a sense of what it's like covering the Fringe.

Founded in 1947, the Edinburgh Festival is the biggest arts celebration in the world and, together with the TV Festival, attracts thousands of journalists and media professionals every year.

Brian Ferguson, arts correspondent for *The Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday*, describes it as “the cultural equivalent of the Olympics on your doorstep every year”. He says he has more to say than ever about the importance of arts coverage for the industry and there is “a growing emphasis” at *The Scotsman* on long-form features, exclusive interviews and in-depth insight pieces.

Ferguson moved to Edinburgh in 1992 for the journalism course at Edinburgh Napier University and one of the first events he went to was a screening of a new film at the Cameo cinema. It turned out to be *Reservoir Dogs* followed by a Q&A with Quentin Tarantino – and it was Tarantino who made him think about a career in arts journalism.

“I was amazed at the idea that an American film director was so accessible at a tiny cinema in Edinburgh,” he says.

He now covers the whole of Scotland and says some of the most interesting stories come from far-flung parts such as the islands.

The city's cultural scene also provides plenty of material for freelancers. Ferguson says it can be a good way to break into

arts journalism and *The Scotsman* is involved in a couple of projects to support emerging critics.

“I've always felt that Edinburgh is a terrific place to work in journalism,” he says. “It's a proper international city but small enough that it's easy to get to know pretty well. There are hundreds of years of history to explore on every street in the city centre, but there also seem to be new things happening – and opening – all the time.”

The main newspapers are *The Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday* and the *Edinburgh Evening News*. *The Scotsman* started out as an eight-page ‘radical’ weekly in 1817 and became a daily broadsheet in 1855; the *Edinburgh Evening News* was established in 1873. The newspapers were famously based in a beautiful baroque building on North Bridge (now the luxury *Scotsman Hotel*) with attached printworks connected to Waverley Station. It remained the base for 90 years before a move to Holyrood in 1999.

The papers are now owned by National World and staff are about to relocate again to city-centre offices in Princes Street – their fifth home in 10 years. There have been significant cutbacks and there is an ongoing industrial dispute over pay.

Edinburgh Live, which feeds into the Glasgow-based *Daily Record*, has also had major cutbacks. Owner Reach is implementing mass redundancies across the UK, including 75 jobs at risk in Scotland.

As in other cities, there's a frustration that some stories are not getting heard, and various digital platforms and hyperlocal news websites are offering an alternative. These include *The Ferret*, *The Edinburgh Reporter*, the *South Edinburgh Echo* and the *Edinburgh Inquirer*, a digital newsletter covering business, politics, the environment, city life and culture.

The *Inquirer* was set up by Euan McGrory (former editor of the *Edinburgh Evening News*), Kenny Kemp (ex *Sunday Herald* and former editor of *Business Quarter*) and David Forsyth (ex *Evening News* and former director of communications at Hibs football club).

ANDREW O'BRIEN



Big event for small screen

TV festival and more

The Edinburgh TV Festival attracts more than 2,000 industry professionals every August and offers debates, workshops and networking opportunities. Past speakers

include Emily Maitlis, Jon Snow, Armando Iannucci and Rupert Murdoch. It runs three talent schemes for: people who wish to break into TV; mid-career TV professionals; and PhD students interested

in working in TV. There are events, training and mentoring all year.

Links and branches

The NUJ has two branches in the city - Edinburgh

freelance and Edinburgh and District; each has around 200 members. The Edinburgh freelance branch meets weekly and holds regular events and invites speakers. There are also the Edinburgh Editors' Network and Women in Journalism Scotland.

Cost of a home

Brian Ferguson, arts correspondent for The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday, says Edinburgh's international appeal has pushed up house prices. "The wages of journalists have not kept pace with the cost of living in the city," he says.

"We wanted to create a title that would really get under the skin of what is going on in Edinburgh, celebrate the good stuff and hold power to account in an intelligent and thoughtful way," says McGrory.

"The one thing that the first few months of running the Inquirer has shown me is that there is a huge appetite for high-quality, independent journalism about what is without doubt one of the world's great cities."

The Inquirer has a small team of freelancers and welcomes pitches.

Magazines include The List, Bella Caledonia, The Skinny, Hood, The Cryer and political and current affairs fortnightly magazine Holyrood.

Although Edinburgh is not as big a media centre as Glasgow (where BBC Scotland and Scottish broadcaster STV have their headquarters), it has a large number of Scottish government buildings and Holyrood, home of the Scottish Parliament, where a lot of political journalists are based. The NUJ has members and a chapel at Holyrood, and BBC Scotland has a base there. STV, Global and Bauer have studios in the city, as does local community radio station Radio Forth.

Laura Alderman, political reporter at STV, says one of the pros is the transport connections; if stories break in the Lothians, Fife, Glasgow and beyond, it is usually easy to get there. "The only drawbacks would be the price of property and soaring cost of renting," she says. "There is an acute housing shortage."

A lot of journalists live outside the city and commute in. Working from home has made it more affordable for some as well as opening up opportunities further afield.

McGrory says a lot of people choose to live in nearby towns and villages in places such as Midlothian, West Lothian and even the Borders (a 40-mile commute).

"From the Fringe to the Hogmanay street party, the thriving cultural and foodie scene and the historic centre, Edinburgh is never boring."

Laura Alderman, political reporter at STV

"It's a beautiful city with lots of accessible outdoor spaces from beaches to urban parks and the Pentland Hills on the doorstep."

Euan McGrory, co-founder of the Edinburgh Inquirer

"This year has been one of the most difficult for the Scottish journalism industry that I can recall, with a lot of folk leaving their roles for a variety of reasons."

Brian Ferguson, arts correspondent for The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday

"Some of the most popular places are along the coast in East Lothian and Fife," he says. "Dalgety Bay and Dunbar are on commuter train lines, so you can combine living by the sea with working in the city without having to pay a king's ransom."

"The train services are much more reliable than in many parts of the north of England and relatively affordable, especially if you are not in the office every day."

"Within the city itself, Leith is very popular and more affordable, and the bus and tram services are generally excellent and reasonably priced."

Nick McGowan-Lowe, national organiser for Scotland, says the media industry in Edinburgh is quite compact, most of the journalists and photographers know one another and it's good for building contacts.

Another advantage is that politicians and MSPs can turn up in person and support union members on picket lines. Former Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard and MSP Daniel Johnson joined members at National World, when they were out on strike in September.

Aside from two major football clubs (Hearts and Hibs), and the home of Murrayfield and Scottish rugby, the city has a large student population. The University of Edinburgh offers courses in film, TV and digital communications. Its newspaper The Student (founded by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1887) is the oldest student newspaper in Europe and was saved from closure in 2023 after a crowdfunding campaign.

Alderman, who grew up in the city, says it's a great place to be based, whether you're a young budding journalist or an 'old timer'.

"You constantly bump into people you know," she says. "I remember covering protests outside Edinburgh City Chambers over potential cuts to free school music tuition, and my old piano teacher was on the picket line."



Two years on, one big journey

Fifteen nervous journalists gathered round a laptop in the draughty room of a London journalists' club. The crack of a gun sounded and on the screen a giant tin of chopped tomatoes seemed to collapse in on itself from the force of the sniper's bullet. The video showed the tin flying through the air; it came to rest on the grass, unrecognisable and seeping bloody liquid.

"That's your HEAD," the instructor shouted.

It was early April 2022 and I was learning about different types of bullets and the things they do to soft, breakable objects. Like heads.

We were a varied bunch on the course, from experienced reporters taking a refresher to absolute newbies looking a bit stunned. Most were there because of Ukraine: the full-scale invasion had taken place just over a month earlier. Journalists were scrambling to go and cover this war in Europe.

I'd been in Siberia when Russia began bombing Ukrainian cities on February 24, and I made a hasty exit, getting first to Istanbul, then Vienna, then to a border post on the Danube river in southeast Romania.

From there, I'd covered the mass exodus of people from southern Ukraine, freelancing for radio and print. With volunteers, I'd taken the ferry across the Danube and spent

Jen Stout knew Ukraine well and, having prepared for conflict conditions, headed there to report on the war

the day in Ukraine a couple of times in March, going to Bilhorod-Dnistrovsky, to Orlivka – relatively safe places near Romania.

I wanted to go further. But it was a difficult decision. No one wants to be the idiot rushing into a war zone unprepared, putting others at risk or make their family horribly worried.

But I knew Ukraine well and had friends and contacts there. I'd been able to speak Russian with the refugees on the border for a month, and could understand Ukrainian. I knew the context, the history behind this conflict. And I'd always wanted to do precisely this kind of reporting – actually being there on the ground, not behind a desk. On the edge of the biggest story in the world, I knew I wasn't going to sit on the border forever.

I'd flown back to the UK from Bucharest to do this two-day course and meanwhile was frantically working on the rest: trying to find a flak jacket when they were sold out across Europe; trying to find insurance I could afford.

Others I knew were going in without any of these protections. A war that you can reach by FlixBus is going to attract a lot of very

inexperienced people. Someone on the course that day told me he was going to Ukraine – a student in his early 20s with no reporting experience at all. I tried to dissuade him. Perhaps this was hypocritical. Yes, I'd been working as a journalist for seven years, yes I could get by in Russian. But did I know how I'd react if caught in shelling? I didn't – no more than this student did.

A week later I was in Odesa. I'd reached it by aid convoy taking medicine to its military hospital. It was a bright, sunny spring day; my memories are of cherry blossom and birdsong and the chatter of the volunteers as they unloaded boxes. I was struck by the feeling of solidarity, of people coming together to take on a huge, terrifying threat.

It's easy to forget now that western opinion in early March predicted Zelensky's government falling within days. But here I was in April in Odesa, a major target for the Russians, the jewel in the crown of their old empire, and it was still in Ukrainian hands.

I'd been as diligent as my budget would allow, joining Reporters Without Borders (RSF) to access discounted insurance (about £40 a

week. Other options cost upwards of a grand). The volunteer in Romania, Marian, who had kindly let me live in his boat repair workshop near the border, tracked down an old UN flak jacket and sent it to Odesa.

But, like so much body armour, it was huge, XL men's size, and went past my knees; I couldn't even run in it. Somehow, Marian managed to send another a few days later, a nifty little UK police stab jacket, and I transferred the ceramic plates to the front and back pockets, pleased as punch. A ballistic helmet was even harder to find, but by the end of April, organisations such as RSF and the Institute of Mass Information began loaning equipment, and I got one just in time as I headed east.

Over the next year and a half, I'd travelled all over Ukraine. I was lucky to be frequently writing for a good Scottish paper that paid a decent rate and – importantly – paid promptly. As all freelancers know, this isn't the norm.

The dire picture for freelancers is more acute in conflict reporting. Obviously, low pay makes things more dangerous – but also the ease with which anyone can go to Ukraine means some are accepting incredibly low rates or even working for free and, in doing so, driving down pay for everyone else.

Major outlets are complicit in this. I was gobsmacked to find, when I got home at one point and opened my paper remittances for



Sheltering in a basement in Kharkiv April 2022

Bohorodychne church after Russian occupation, March 2023



In Vilkhivka, deoccupied village in Kharkiv Oblast, May 2022

highlight and challenge low pay and poor conditions, and I'm grateful we have that in the NUJ.

The union has been a great source of help and support throughout the past two years. My branch, Edinburgh freelance, meets online so I've been able to join them no matter where I am. Their support, both practical and emotional, has been immense.

I took the full hostile environment course in late 2022, a three-day marathon of intense first aid training and other practical skills: how to bail out of a car under fire, how to prepare for kidnap and questioning, and how to understand trauma response and keep yourself mentally healthy.

I could only do this thanks to another key source of support for UK freelancers - the Rory Peck Trust. A bursary from the trust paid for half of the £1,500 cost of the course; the rest I met through the help of Women in Journalism Scotland, the

newspaper I was writing for and taking on a bit more debt.

Only once I'd done this training did I feel equipped to cover frontline stories, going straight back to Ukraine from Hereford and reporting on a drone team's mission near the Russian border, then from positions near Donetsk.

I discovered I liked this kind of reporting - not military strategy, not the specifics of weaponry and ballistics, but just people, under intense pressure, carrying out roles they could never have imagined doing previously.

When there was shelling close by, it turned out my reaction was pretty calm. I think the training helped a lot: understanding the body's response to fear helps to control it, and also to be aware of the possible after-effects. I've been scared, of course. I never want to hear the buzz of a drone overhead again. But far more intense in my memory is the emotional pain of other people, the moments I had to ask them to recount the most painful things and how that, in turn, made me feel.

With all the interviews, photos and the detailed diary I keep, there was far more than could fit into the articles and radio pieces, and last year I took a break from Ukraine to put everything down on paper. It was a tough process: I wrote solidly for seven weeks up in Shetland, seeing almost no one, completely immersed in the stories.

But it was cathartic. I was piecing everything together, making sense of it all. The only problem was that in describing these places I'd loved so much - beautiful Lviv in autumn, rich with colour - or Donetsk Oblast with its misty forests and mining towns - I missed them so badly it ached.

The book, *Night Train to Odesa*, comes out on May 2. It is an account of how I did all this, of the people I met and the extraordinary places I ended up in; it is about Russia and Ukraine and the roots of this war, but told through anecdotes and stories. It contains no famous people whatsoever; you will not find Zelensky pacing his bunker or ambassadors or opportunistic British PMs. But the people in it, I think, are unforgettable.



Others were going in without these protections. A war you can reach by FlixBus is going to attract a lot of very inexperienced people



some radio work, that several stations had paid me not the £67 minimum for a live, but £35. Thirty-five quid for reports which I spent hours preparing, some of them done from basements during air raid alerts.

It took many emails and NUJ officer involvement to sort it out. I can't see things improving on this front: a toxic mix of undercutting, opportunistic bosses and dwindling budgets for foreign news is driving rates down everywhere, and war zones are not exempt. It's why we need a fighting union to

Red letter day for journalists who stuck at it

Neil Merrick charts the meticulous reporting that laid bare a huge miscarriage of justice

By the time the public inquiry into the Post Office scandal resumed in early January, reporters were spilling into an overflow room. Karl Flinders got there early to make sure of a seat. Since the inquiry got under way in 2021, Computer Weekly's chief reporter had generally been one of just two or three journalists present. But this day was very different.

Thanks to the power of television, the UK media had suddenly discovered a thirst for learning about a miscarriage of justice that exerted limited impact on the news agenda for 15 years.

A reporter from one of the nationals gasped as Stephen Bradshaw, a Post Office investigator, explained how he doggedly pursued postmasters even though they claimed that figures on the Horizon IT system were incorrect.

For Flinders, the testimony did not come as a surprise. During the 13 years since he first wrote about the scandal, he had heard far worse. "It was four out of 10 on the shock Richter scale," he says.

Rebecca Thomson was not at the inquiry that day but had been an occasional visitor in previous years. A former colleague

//
It was terrifying back then for them to go on the record. Many were worried about what else they could lose

Rebecca Thomson

of Flinders, it was Thomson who first broke the postmasters' story in 2009, a year before leaving Computer Weekly.

Thomson is now freelance and used to drop into the inquiry out of interest on days off. Though she managed to sell a couple of stories, commissioning editors were not exactly falling over themselves to pay for news about dodgy computer software.

Back in 2009, Thomson was disappointed her exclusive was ignored by mainstream media. "We tried really hard to sell the story," she recalls. "The Post Office lied so aggressively, saying it was inaccurate, and that killed the story."

Computer Weekly was first tipped off about Horizon's failings in 2004 by Alan Bates, leader of the postmasters' campaign. It was only when a second postmaster, Lee Castleton, contacted the magazine four years later that Thomson was asked by editor Tony Collins to begin her investigation.

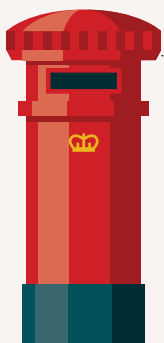
More than anything, Thomson felt for the postmasters when the story did not grab greater attention. "It was terrifying back then for them to go on the record. Many were worried about what else they could lose," she says. "Although you're giving people a voice, it's hard to keep asking them questions when you're not getting results."

Since 2011, Karl Flinders has written about 350 stories on Horizon, mostly during the past six years.

At first, postmasters were slow to come forward. "We just needed proof," he says. "I was in contact with Alan Bates for 14 years. Sometimes, when a lot was happening, I spoke to him two or three times per day."

It took another three years for the story to make the nationals and some local media. In 2015, rather than just deny

How the story unfolded



2004

Alan Bates contacts Computer Weekly about the postmasters' campaign

2008

A second former postmaster, Lee Castleton, also contacts Computer Weekly and reporter Rebecca Thomson starts investigating

2009

Thomson's first story appears in Computer Weekly. While ignored by most media, it is picked up by Taro Naw, a Welsh-language current affairs series

2011

Nick Wallis covers the story on his BBC Surrey breakfast show and on BBC Inside Out South, while Private Eye runs its first story

2014

Nationals start to cover the story. Wallis appears on the BBC's One Show and local media begins to highlight likely miscarriages of justice.

VICKI COUCHMAN / COMMISSIONED BY THE SUNDAY TIMES

The story that struggled to make the main news agenda

Why did it take a TV drama to reach the parts that journalism could not? Much of the media, it seems, was afraid to expend too much energy pursuing a story that meant taking on one of the UK's most revered institutions. "The main reason the story didn't get away is because the Post Office put pressure on the body politic to make sure it didn't," says Nick Wallis, who pursued the scandal for more than a decade. "It never became

an obsession with Westminster political journalists in the way it could have been." Rebecca Thomson (pictured), who broke the story in *Computer Weekly* in 2009, believes much of the media stepped back because the story revolved around accounting software. "It was hard to get the human element across," she says. But this was never a techy story requiring a deep understanding of IT. For

Richard Brooks of *Private Eye*, the lack of interest on the part of the mainstream media was partly due to the profile of the victims. "For many of the national press, the postmasters were quiet, unassuming people who don't make great subjects for a story," he says. "They don't appeal to the instincts of newspapers." There is also the media's obsession with exclusives. Once the story had been

covered by *Panorama*, nationals were less inclined to follow in the tracks of the BBC, says Tom Witherow, who covered the scandal for the *Mail* and, more recently, *The Times*. Even if editors had been willing to put resources into the story, newspapers generally struggle to influence the 'national conversation' in the way they once did, he adds. He says: "It's taken the drama to get that level of emotional response from a large chunk of the public."



there were problems, the Post Office threatened legal action if *Computer Weekly* kept reporting the postmasters' claims. Bizarrely, the Post Office accused Flinders of failing to give it a right of reply, when in fact the press office had ignored many of his enquiries. "I could see they were trying to hide something," he says.

The first Nick Wallis heard about the scandal was in 2011 when, as presenter of BBC Surrey's breakfast programme, he was contacted by Davinder Misra, owner of a local taxi firm. Misra's wife Seema had been imprisoned for theft after working as a postmistress in West Byfleet but insisted she had done nothing wrong.

Wallis, a freelance, also expected the scandal to be picked up by other media. "It was an 'on the day' story. I couldn't get much else to happen," he says. But Wallis persevered, taking the story around the BBC as well as to *Private Eye*.

Richard Brooks is no stranger to IT cock-ups, having written about flawed private finance initiative contracts since the 1990s. Having alerted *Private Eye* readers to the scandal, he also felt the wrath of the Post Office, which queried why he was writing about people who had been convicted in court.

"There is a difficulty with any story when you're challenging a case involving people who were found guilty," says Brooks. "You need to put time into seeing there is a pattern over a number of cases and show there is real substance in what they're saying."

Exonerated at last: outside the Royal Courts of Justice



PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

- 2015**: *Panorama* broadcasts its first documentary, *Trouble at the Post Office*
- 2018**: Wallis raises £6,000 through crowdfunding site Kickstarter so he can cover the High Court case brought by postmasters.
- 2020**: Second *Panorama* documentary, *Scandal at the Post Office*, is delayed due to Covid lockdown
- 2021**: Wallis's book *The Great Post Office Scandal* is published as postmasters see their convictions quashed at the Court of Appeal
- 2022**: Third *Panorama* documentary, *The Post Office Scandal*, is broadcast
- 2024**: *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* is broadcast by ITV. Sky and other broadcasters live stream the public inquiry, three years after it began and two years after it became statutory

For Wallis, his appearance on BBC's One Show in 2014 was an important turning point. Suddenly, an early-evening TV audience knew about the scandal and further victims came forward, aware that others were suffering the same fate.

Yet when Wallis decided to write a book, he struggled to find a publisher. In 2017, he was the only journalist to cover the start of the postmasters' litigation case against the Post Office, when it was revealed that individual accounts could be accessed remotely through Horizon.

He rushed to the BBC from the High Court with the story. But, as a freelance, what was he to do next? "I thought 'this is huge'. I needed to be in court every day but no broadcast editor was going to pay for that."

Instead, Wallis raised more than £6,000 through Kickstarter, a crowdfunding website so he could cover the litigation. Subscribers had the first opportunity to read stories via his newsletter but the wider impact remained minimal. "I was speaking to a small audience," he says.

Richard Brooks praises local media for taking up the cases of individual postmasters, as well as the tenacity of Wallis. "Nick never relented from the moment he picked up the story," says Brooks. "He stuck with it to an almost mind-numbing level of detail and really listened to the victims and their stories."

By 2019, when the Post Office agreed to pay compensation, Wallis was convinced the floodgates would open and there would be mass interest. But the story seemed fated. A second

I thought 'this is huge'. I needed to be in court every day but no broadcast editor was going to pay for that



Nick Wallis

Panorama was scheduled for 23 March 2020 – the day the UK went into lockdown – and was delayed by two months

Wallis's book was finally published in 2021 by Bath Publishing, which specialises in legal books. Around the same time, ITV signed him up as a consultant for Mr Bates vs The Post Office. "I was a mere fact carrier for the TV drama," he says.

Thanks to the drama, millions became familiar with Alan Bates and Jo Hamilton, even if we know the actors better than the real people. As the media frenzy gained pace, journalists were in as much demand as the postmasters. "I did about 40 radio interviews in a week," says Karl Flinders. "I was so nervous, but you just talk."

The Sunday Times reunited Flinders with Thomson for a major feature on how the story was uncovered by Computer Weekly, while journalists pestered Wallis and Flinders for Bates's private phone number.

But was this ultimately a victory for TV drama over journalism? Probably not, says Wallis, who also pays tribute to editors and producers at Inside Out and Panorama for sharing his belief in the postmasters' case.

If it had not been for the many stories and programmes over the years, even those having limited impact, the drama would probably never have been made and Toby Jones would still be best known for his role as a detectorist. "There is no need to be embarrassed," says Wallis. "It was a drama underpinned by journalism."

'It didn't add up': how local media took up the gauntlet

It was the most unusual court case that Mark Jones, former editor of the Basingstoke Gazette, can remember.

A former postmistress from the small village of South Warnborough had pleaded guilty to fraud, but instead of going to prison, walked free to the delight of residents who once used her shop.

Today, millions of TV viewers are familiar with the story of Jo Hamilton, who spent more than a decade fighting for justice. Back in 2008, following the court ruling, the Gazette had to make a judgement call.

While it was bound to report Hamilton's admission of fraud, Jones and other staff felt the real story was the reaction of villagers. The Gazette's headline read: 'Community rallies round for Post Office fraudster'.

"It felt weird," recalls Jones, who edited the Gazette for 13 years until

2015. "We couldn't work out why she'd pleaded guilty. It did not add up at all."

During the next 15 years, the Gazette kept in regular touch with Hamilton, reporting how local MP James Arbuthnot was campaigning for her case and those of others to be reviewed by the Post Office.

Not all victims were as fortunate. In an ITV documentary that accompanied the drama, Jess Kaur, who ran a post office in Dudley, described how relatives rushed to buy local papers so people would be unaware of her prosecution.

Back in Hampshire, Jones is delighted to see Hamilton cleared and eligible for compensation. "We need to value local press for covering stories like this," he adds.

For feature writer Mark Andrews, January's media frenzy came after nearly a decade of writing in the

Shropshire Star about how victims of the scandal were fighting to clear their names.

In 2014, he introduced Star readers to Rubina Shaheen from Shrewsbury, who had been jailed four years earlier for false accounting. Having spoken to Shaheen and later to Ron Warmington, an investigator appointed by the Post Office, he became convinced of her innocence. Others in the newsroom concurred.

Meantime, following the article about Shaheen, Andrews was contacted by the sister of Tracy Felstead from Telford, who was also wrongly prosecuted. Another feature followed.

The Post Office, meanwhile, continued to lie to reporters.

"Every time we rang the Post Office press office, we got the same generic message saying Horizon serves the public every day without problems," he recalls. "We have a duty of impartiality but we believed that both women were innocent."



In 2021, the women were cleared at the Court of Appeal, along with Carl Page, a former postmaster from Rugeley, who has also been featured in the Star. A fourth former postmistress from the West Midlands had her conviction upheld.

While the features published by the Star generated interest among readers, it was nothing compared with the response to ITV's drama. "It's terrible it's taken so long to get justice," says Andrews. "It shows you shouldn't put such faith in computers."



What made you become a journalist?

As a student, I spent much of my time acting and directing plays, but then the time came to think of something that would earn a living. What can you do with a degree in English? I returned to the notion of trying journalism, which I had been keen on a few years earlier.

What other job might you have done/have you done?

I was unemployed briefly after university and started to apply for non-journalism jobs. I was turned down for a job in marketing at Rowntree in York and another as a travelling salesman selling technical books. If I had got either of those jobs, my story might have been different.

When did you join the NUJ and why?

In 1976, in my first job on a weekly paper in Yorkshire. I created a chapel for the staff of four journalists, of which I was the FoC, and managed to win an increase in expense allowances.

Are many of your friends in the union?

Among journalist friends, I imagine mostly yes.

What's been the best moment in your career?

There have been lots of enjoyable

moments. One of the best was when I was editor of Scotland on Sunday (owned by the Barclay Brothers) in the mid-1990s. We were voted Sunday Newspaper of the Year in the Newspaper Awards 1997 – one month before the Barclays' editor-in-chief, Andrew Neil, fired me.

What is the worst place you've ever worked in?

As assistant cellarman in a central Manchester hotel.

And the best?

It's hard to choose between the Financial Times and Scotland on Sunday. At the FT, I did several fascinating jobs, with enormous variety, over almost three decades. At Scotland on Sunday, launching a newspaper in 1988 (I was deputy editor when it began) was an exhilarating if sometimes exasperating experience. Both of the papers

were admirable in striving for objectivity.

What advice would you give someone starting out in journalism?

Always keep the readers, viewers or listeners at the front of your mind. They are trusting you to keep them informed. They look to you to explain what is happening, why and what the implications and consequences might be. They are the reason you are doing what you do.

Who is your biggest hero?

John Lloyd, who was my boss when I was an FT labour reporter in the early 1980s, is as good a journalist as I have ever worked with. He was rightly voted Journalist of the Year in the British Press Awards for his coverage of the miners' strike of 1984–85, which combined a series of exclusives with depth of understanding.

NUJ & me

Brian Groom is a former political editor for the FT, editor of Scotland on Sunday and now an author

And villain?

William the Conqueror comes out pretty badly in my book *Northerners: a History, from the Ice Age to the Present Day*.

Which six people (alive or dead) would you invite to a dinner party?

Elizabeth Gaskell, Josephine Butler, the Venerable Bede, George Stephenson, LS Lowry and Gracie Fields.

What was your earliest political thought?

That posh chap Sir Alec Douglas-Home seemed out of his depth as prime minister.

What are your hopes for journalism over the next five years?

That a market for paid-for, serious journalism survives – at local and regional levels as well as national and international levels.

And fears?

That serious journalism becomes fatally swamped by culture wars.

How would you like to be remembered?

As someone who did his best to tell the truth.

GLOBAL JOBS ACTION

As media employment is increasingly precarious around the world, unions are working to protect all types of journalism work, says **Conrad Landin**

Reach, according to its chief executive Jim Mullen, is changing “the way we operate, the way we’re structured and the way we’re meeting the challenges facing our industry”.

For the media giant’s workforce and journalists across Britain, this kind of language will ring alarm bells. In Reach’s case, it accompanied the announcement of 450 more job losses – the latest round of redundancies in rapidly shrinking newsrooms at the Mirror, Express and Star titles, Scotland’s Daily Record and scores of regional newspapers and websites.

The UK’s Labour Force Survey has shown rising numbers of people in journalism, against the perception of an industry in decline. But the nature of their work has changed dramatically, with a rise in self-employment from 14 per cent in 2012 to 36 per cent in 2018, according to research for the National Council for the Training of Journalists.

A more precarious sector, staffed by increasing numbers of freelance and casual workers, means fewer journalists are able to earn a living from journalism alone. It also makes organising and collective bargaining significantly more difficult.

So how can journalists’ trade unions cater to a workforce that is very different from the one they served two decades ago?

The NUJ is far from alone in grappling with this question. A recent anthology of global responses to the jobs crisis, *Journalists and Job Loss*, charts the impact of media decline and redundancies on workers in countries as varied as Australia, Indonesia, Finland, South Africa and the UK.

The book also lays bare the impact on trade unions seeking to organise journalists. Australia’s Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) had 86 per cent density among the country’s journalists at its formation in 1992, when a merger between the Australian Journalists Association and other cultural and media unions created the super-union. By 2013, just 48 per cent of journalists were members.

The New Beats project, which provides the basis for much of *Journalists and Job Loss*, started with surveys of Australian journalists who had left the trade thanks to job cuts before spreading internationally. In one study of Australian journalists in 2017, it found that just 43 per cent of journalists

who lost their jobs but were then re-employed in the sector were unionised in their new posts.

The MEAA lost journalist members rapidly during this period but a massive round of redundancies in 2017 prompted the union to take stock. Cassie Derrick, the MEAA’s media section director, says: “What we’ve tried to do is shift out of where we’ve been – which is a very workplace, enterprise-focused model of unionising people, where you’ve got these specific media houses and you unionise people there – and we looked at freelancers who move across the industry and do what they can to piece together pay and employment.”

AI: help or hazard?

The growth of artificial intelligence means journalism is “very much at risk of going through a [big] change”, says Cassie Derrick of Australia’s Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance. “What we’re looking to do is to find the place for generative AI in the newsroom,” she says.

She believes the sector must “find the balance between AI being a useful tool for a very busy journo to make their job easier, versus replacing a journalist”.

Dehumanising the sector would remove the best guarantees of ethical practice, accountability and scrutiny of the powerful.

Might media bosses look back on past headcount reductions and not want to risk another drop in quality? “There’s a real commercial motivation, in commercial media at the very least, and a real drive for subscriptions for example,” Derrick adds.

“And they look at the types of works that drive subscriptions. Some seem to be looking at quality over quantity, more so than maybe they were a couple of

years ago. But certainly others are focused on the short-term bottom line.”

She adds that winning the argument on quality will require educating employers plus consumers demanding news of a certain standard.

Wits University’s Glenda Daniels does not believe the industry is prepared for more job losses. “Even though they know it’s likely to happen, they don’t know the rate or whether it’s going to be in a year or two or 10 years,” she says. “[AI] can be used for the good of journalism, but you’re still going to need fact-checkers and human being journalists, who know how to write a story, put things together and add the context, and so forth.”



This involved convincing freelancers that the union was still for them. “We drew up a charter for the industry as a whole and we had over five hundred members endorse that charter, which sets out the key minimum standards that a freelancer should be provided with – and that includes things such as protection of their right to ethical journalism, a minimum rate of pay, timely payment and insurance cover and protection from defamation [claims].”

While only a few employers have signed the charter in its entirety, it has brought about significant improvements at a number of large media groups.

“Where we’ve fallen short of getting an agreement that is signed by a representative of the freelancers and signed by the employer, we’ve been able to get some major employers to commit to and/or improve their engagement for freelancers,” says Derrick.

At Nine Publishing, the second biggest media group in the country, a freelance policy was negotiated based on some of the charter’s principles. At The Guardian, which has sought to expand significantly in Australia, freelancers are now paid above the global commissioning terms thanks to union pressure. “We’re gradually shifting the dial to employers looking at their freelancers as workers and starting to commit to certain pay and conditions,” Derrick adds.

The NUJ published its own freelance charter in 2020, which is a call for legislative change as well as voluntary agreement of better terms from employers. It calls for “trades union collective bargaining to improve terms and conditions for freelancers side by side with staff” – something long resisted by many media groups. But progress has been made with some employers.

“We are constantly looking at new house agreements to include freelancers,” says NUJ freelance organiser Andy Smith. “What that has translated to in practice has been a mixture: we have some agreements where freelancers are covered, others where members of the chapel negotiate on behalf of freelancers and others where the employer refuses to have any kind of collective bargaining for freelancers.”

Improving conditions for freelancers can get media companies to bring workers back in house, Derrick believes. “I think while we have a kind of underclass of journalists who can be paid as little as the employer wants – that will always be a threat to jobs – so we need to have a much bigger-picture strategy. That is, set a floor for freelancers and for anyone who’s been locked outside our enterprise agreements. And then [we need to] lift that floor so that it starts to become essentially a better value for money proposition for employers to actually give people secure jobs in house, and there’s no cheap fix of make them redundant and engage a freelancer at a fraction of the cost.”

The MEAA’s freelance strategy has allowed it to turn its rapidly declining membership into modest growth. It was initially quite difficult to persuade journalists to stay on as members after losing staff jobs, but it’s “getting easier by the day”, according to Derrick.

In South Africa, the impact of job losses has been so devastating that it led to the closure of the South African Union of Journalists. Glenda Daniels, associate professor of media studies at Wits University and a contributor to *Journalists and Job Loss*, has witnessed it all. “South African trade unionism has been very strong in the past, including in the journalism sector,” she says. “In the journalism sector in

“
The media is used to giving priority to things that are going wrong. They may not see the resonance in stories about things that are going right”
”



particular [they have been] completely decimated – in the sense they actually do not exist right now.”

But journalists have ‘never fought’ job losses in the way that other groups of workers have, she says. “In the other industries in South Africa, you hear about downsizing, cost-cutting, retrenchments, and then everyone’s out on the streets marching, protesting and striking and what not. It just doesn’t seem to happen in [journalism].”

Of course, journalists on gig economy style terms have less security in withdrawing their labour. “All this impacts on the fact that, in many instances, there’s no fightback,” says Daniels. “It’s almost like there’s a gratitude for still having a job. It’s very sad to be honest.”

The shift away from secure, staff work in the sector also raises the question of how to better engage with part-time journalists. The NUJ currently limits full membership to those who earn at least 50 per cent of their income from journalism. But a recent discussion paper from NUJ finance committee chair Chris Frost notes: “This is not always possible when starting out and, for freelancers, may often be difficult to maintain.” Branches are being encouraged to discuss ways forward before an advisory national webinar in the spring.

“There are people who are working as journalists but have a day job as well,” says Derrick. “We think it’s vital that they’re participating in the union and have a place in the union. And, if you have this one group of the workforce that’s not organised, it’s pretty easy for an editor to pick up the phone and get some to work.”



'They fear an inform

Barrie Clement meets Filipino journalists' leader Len Olea

Should we call him a 'strong man' or a 'dictator'? That was the debate in a newsroom in the Philippines ahead of the country's

general election in 2022.

The subject of the argument was Ferdinand Marcos, who ruled the Southeast Asian country from 1965 to 1986. To fair-minded people, there should be no disagreement. Wikipedia, for instance, refers to him as a 'kleptocrat' whose rule, before he was deposed, was "infamous for its corruption, extravagance, and brutality." Under him, media organisations were shut down wholesale and hundreds of journalists jailed. There was no question of press freedom.

At the time of that newsroom debate, Marcos's son, known as Bongbong, was standing in the election and went on to win, allegedly with a majority of 31 million votes – although the figure might have been imaginative.

The people in charge of that newsroom-cum-debating chamber were anxious that Bongbong should not be displeased by seeing his father referred to as a dictator. Clearly, they feared there would be financial consequences – at the very least. Unfortunately for the younger journalists who were keen to use the word 'dictator', management's view prevailed.

There were similar arguments in other Filipino newsrooms and it is almost certainly the kind of debate that occurs in authoritarian countries all over the world – if such a debate could even be contemplated.

The cautionary newsroom tale was related to The Journalist by Ronalyn 'Len' Olea, the indefatigable secretary-general of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) who visited London recently.

Olea, editor-in-chief of independent online news outlet Bulatlat, hopes the new president isn't seeking to emulate his father or, indeed, the regimes that succeeded him. Unfortunately, there are signs that some of his father's corrupt and authoritarian traits have been inherited.

Since 1986, 198 journalists have been killed in the Philippines for falling foul of the

authorities or the powerful clans that dominate parts of the 7,000 islands making up the country. Many of the murderers have remained at large under the current regime.

The most notorious incident was the massacre in Maguindanao province in 2009 in which 90 people were killed. Among the dead were 32 journalists who were accompanying a politician registering as an electoral candidate in opposition to the dominant Ampatuan clan in the region. It was the largest single slaughter of journalists in history, according to the US-based non-profit Committee to Protect Journalists. The subsequent trial was meant to be a critical test of the judicial system.

But it took more than a decade before five members of the Ampatuan clan were sentenced to life in prison; another was acquitted. Those who were ordered by the clan to carry out the killings received jail sentences of between six and 10 years. Police officers who were among the accused were found not guilty.

Olea points out that, more than 15 years later, 80 suspects are still at large, including police officers and Ampatuan clan members. Under Marcos Jr, there seems to be no great rush to bring them to justice. The warlords are still appealing against sentences.

Another case preoccupying Olea is that of 25-year-old community journalist Frenchie Mae

Cumpio who has spent four years in detention. Cumpio and four other human rights activists were arrested by police and soldiers in Tacloban in February 2020 accused of possessing illegal firearms and explosives which they say were planted by those who arrested them. In addition Cumpio, along with a church worker with the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, was accused of financing terrorism; she says the money in question was for funding a local radio show.

"Frenchie was also accused of actually waging war, of participating in armed encounters," said Olea. "It was a ridiculous claim. She made programmes in the city. She was always very visible."

Cumpio was executive director of the Eastern Vista news website and a radio news anchor at Aksyon Radyo Tacloban, which frequently covered alleged police and military abuse.

Olea says that prior to Cumpio's arrest, she was the subject of well-documented surveillance and harassment. The NUJP leader pointed out that the detention was a violation of the 'right to communication' by farmers, the poor and workers in Tacloban and the entire Eastern Visayas region because they lost a key platform to express their views. Four years later, her case is still going on.

It was one of the issues Olea was hoping to discuss with UN special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression Irene Khan during her visit to the Philippines in January. The NUJP leader was also hoping Khan would be able to see her detained colleague.

Ahead of the visit, the Filipino department of foreign affairs claimed Khan would see a 'flourishing' democracy and the government's progressive agenda. Olea begs to differ.

The UN official will hear from human rights activists that one tactic used by the authorities and their acolytes to gag journalists is to accuse them of being communists. In the Philippines, this can blight people's lives and careers and lead to imprisonment or even death. As we speak, the Communist Party is illegal in the country and operates underground with the stated aim of overthrowing the



Frenchie Mae Cumpio: accused of terrorism



ed citizenry'

government through armed revolution.

Cumpio has been 'red-tagged' as they call it, accused of being a 'communist terrorist' and a high-ranking official in the party's New People's Army. The NUJP secretary-general and the union's chair have been the subject of similar smears. "They are trying to discredit us and spread fear among our colleagues," says Olea.

Other ways of keeping journalists in their place include strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). They are typically brought by large corporations or the rich, with the intention, according to a UK government website, "of harassing, intimidating and financially or psychologically exhausting opponents via improper use of the legal system".

Part of the armoury of the Filipino autocrats is the country's law of libel; those found guilty can be imprisoned. Also brandished before any journalists daring to publish inconvenient truths is the accusation that they are 'terrorists'. The term is so vaguely defined in Philippine law that any criticism of the ruling administration can be said to be encouraging political violence.

Olea's website, like others, has been blocked for running stories about human rights. This is where international solidarity can help. In the case of news outlet Bulatlat and a number of similar cases, Sweden-based Qurium Media Foundation kept the site online.

It is such links with the outside world that are vital to countries such as the Philippines and others on the Impunity Index, which is compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists. Countries figure on the index because murderers of journalists have not been convicted.

Olea says: "Journalism around the world is under threat, especially with the rise of authoritarianism even in supposedly 'democratic' societies such as the Philippines. The powers that be fear an informed citizenry and so they strive to undermine the role of journalism. Journalists must, along with citizens, push back against efforts to obfuscate the truth."

One of the main reasons for Olea coming to London was to meet NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet. The NUJ leader says: "At a time when journalists around the world face greater threats than ever before, it's vital we stick together. There may have been a change in

government in the Philippines but, sadly, the tactics of smearing and criminalising journalists remain the same. The NUJ will do all it can to highlight their battles and to help the NUJP to bring about genuine media freedom."

Since Cumpio was detained, Filipino journalists generally are being 'very careful' about being critical of the government, says the NUJP leader.

One young woman employed at Olea's website was told by her father to stop working as a journalist. "I understand why he did it. He feared for the safety of his daughter," she says. So presumably being a journalist in The Philippines and in other 'impunity' countries requires guts. "I suppose you could say that but journalists are humans who have to deal with the anxiety." Such colleagues need all the support we can give them.

Show support for young journalists

A trust helps early media careers, says **David Stenhouse**

Some recent polls show that 52 per cent of adults haven't made a will yet. If you have yet to make one or if it is time to revise an existing will, making a bequest to a journalism charity is a great way to support the future of our trade.

The John Schofield Trust is a small charity working to help journalists at the beginning of their careers with mentoring, support, skills-based masterclasses and networking sessions.

The charity was founded by the family and friends of John Schofield, a young journalist who was killed in 1995 while on assignment for BBC Radio 4's The World Tonight during the Yugoslav civil war.

In the aftermath of his death, his widow Susie received scores of letters from his bosses and colleagues saying what a great journalist her husband had been. She decided to create a charity in his name to ensure young journalists received all the support and encouragement they needed at the beginning of their careers.

In the 27 years since, some of Britain's best-known journalists, including ITN's Tom Bradby, Laura Kuenssberg and Jeremy Bowen of the BBC, have mentored for the John Schofield Trust, and more than 1,000 young journalists have benefited from the trust's mentoring schemes.

The trust mentors journalists working in print, digital, multimedia and broadcast across the UK and Ireland. In 2024, there are more than 120 John Schofield fellows.

The trust is also a social mobility and diversity charity, so offers support to journalists from backgrounds that are under-represented in journalism.

As well as our early career mentoring programme, the trust runs two other schemes to support the ambitions of young journalists.

Student mentoring

This year, we've partnered with 11 universities in the UK and Ireland to offer the first national mentoring programme for students finishing an undergraduate degree in Journalism and taking their first steps into the world of work.

We pair each student with an experienced mentor to help open doors into news organisations.

In January, Anna Rainey tweeted to thank her mentor Vicki Hawthorne, the political correspondent of UTV News, who had arranged a visit to her Belfast newsroom.

After the care system

In 2022, we received a record number of applications for mentoring from people with experience of the care system.

With the support of Barnardos, we've created the very first programme for people in this group who want to get into journalism.

Journalism Cares offers people who have been adopted, fostered or spent time in care an opportunity to be paired with an

Sophia Alexandra Hall of The Big Issue says those who have been in care make the best journalists



experienced journalist, and take part in a 10-week introductory programme on becoming a journalist.

We've received a lot of support for this scheme from journalists who have spent time in the care system themselves.

Sophia Alexandra Hall, the deputy digital editor of The Big Issue, says: "Before I became a journalist, I spent my teenage years in the foster care system. Now I use my experience to connect with interviewees and help tell their stories.

"I'm supporting Journalism Cares because I want other aspiring journalists from similar backgrounds to see that there is a proud care-experienced representation in the media.

"I didn't think a career in journalism was for someone like me, but the empathy and strength I gained in the system are crucial ingredients in telling my interviewees' stories.

"I think people with experience of care truly make the best journalists, and I want everyone to have access to this training."

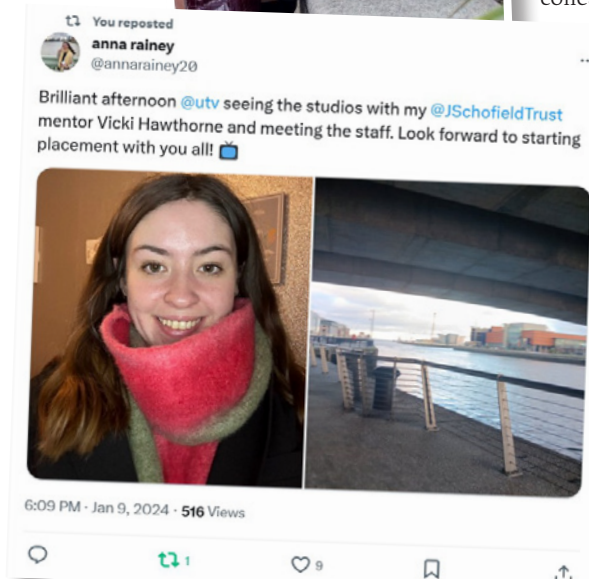
The John Schofield Trust is a small charity that makes a huge difference in the world of journalism.

We have received generous donations from retired journalists who believe in supporting the next generation of talent.

We've also received in memoriam bequests from the families of journalists who were natural mentors and supporters of young colleagues during their careers.

If you would like to find out more about the trust's work for young journalists, donate or make a bequest to us in your will, you can visit www.johnschofieldtrust.org.uk or contact **David@johnschofieldtrust.org.uk**. Our charity number in England and Wales is 1061065.

The NUJ with Thompsons solicitors and BBH Legal, offers members a free online will writing service for simple wills. Contact info@nuj.org.uk



Paperback writers

Samantha Downes, who is hoping to get her first novel published, weighs up the business of books

The hardest part of becoming a published author is not writing the book itself – as you would expect – but the process of getting it into print, as I am finding.

Paying for time

Getting an agent is the holy grail for anyone wanting to get published.

Traditionally, writers sent copies of their manuscript to several agents who specialised in their genre, be it modern fiction, fantasy, crime or children's fiction.

The agent then would like or dislike their work. If they liked it, the writer was signed up and the agent would then speak to their publishing contacts. Hey ho, the lucky writer got a publishing contract and the agent got their cut.

At least that was the case until about 10 years ago. This route is still open to writers, but it's becoming tougher.

Kirsten Rees, a book editor and author coach, says: "It used to be a case of sending off a synopsis and a covering letter and a sample of writing but, in recent years, it has got much harder."

Everyone wants to write a book

Rees, who helps writers hone their final manuscripts and gets clients via word of mouth, is part of an industry that has popped up in recent years to help writers to get published.

A growing trend is workshops that offer writers one-to-one coaching sessions or introduction sessions with an agent – for a fee.

The idea of having a one-to-one with an agent sounds like one way of avoiding the schlep of the slush pile (a

phrase I've learned since starting this process) but to get this time you'll be charged £250 or more – and there is no guarantee you'll get an agent or a book deal.

How to get published:

Step one Sell yourself

There is no easy way around this – publishers and agents want writers who can market themselves.

So, once you've finished and refined your manuscript, you'll need to sell yourself.

Rees says publishers and agents prefer writers with a social media presence.

It's not all about hawking yourself on the 'gram or X though – she points out that social media can help connect writers with readers and may even help with research.

Step two Get tough and dig in

Barbara Copperthwaite, journalist turned bestselling author, warns writers to prepare for "a lot of rejections and frustrating silences".

"Things are particularly tough at the moment, and agents are being even pickier than usual because the market is oversaturated and a lot of readers are having to tighten their belts.

"Agents themselves are also finding that publishers are slower to get back to them, and commissioning editors are being pickier."

Bookworm terms

Self-publishing When an author designs and markets their own book

Vanity publishing A self-publishing service offered by large publishers

Slush pile The pile of unsolicited manuscripts that an agent or publisher has to wade through

Further resources
<https://jerichowriters.com/>
<https://www.writersdigest.com/>

Step three Do your research.

You can find an agent the traditional way through the Artists' and Writers' Yearbook or go on Querytracker.net.

"But you still need to research the agents you do approach as a listing doesn't guarantee they can get you a deal," says Rees.

Step four Go direct

Some publishers take manuscripts directly but Copperthwaite says these tend to be digital only. She adds that you'll hear back quickly and, while you are far less likely to see your book in a shop, you're "more likely to earn a living from them as they pay higher royalties".

Step five Self-publishing versus vanity publishing

You can publish your own book, but you'll need to do your own marketing, design your book cover and do your own editing, or pay people to do these.

Rees says some large publishers offer a self-publishing service, which is also known as vanity publishing: "This is a new revenue stream for some of the large publishers."



by **Mark Fisher**

arts

Books >

The Price of Life: in Search of What We're Worth and Who Decides

Jenny Kleeman
March 14
Picador

The broadcaster and journalist picks apart the cost of everything from life-saving drugs to hiring a hit man. If you pay \$500 for an Afghan bride, what is a life worth?

<https://tinyurl.com/bdhndv4r>

The House Detective

Julian Macqueen
Out now
Flint Publishing

He was treasurer of Oxford branch and deputy father of chapel at Lloyd's List. Now freelance member Julian Macqueen has branched into crime fiction with a tale of a far-right group and the Stoke Newington housing market.

<https://tinyurl.com/ymj93qqo>

No Cure, No Pay, Boarding Excepted

Mike Jempson
Out now
Bristol Radical History Group

NUJ life member Jempson delves into the story of the family that ran private asylums known as Mason's

Madhouses for more than a century in the Fishponds area of Bristol.

<https://tinyurl.com/yl264mvp>

Comedy >

Dom Joly: The Conspiracy Tour

On tour
February 24–March 28

On the back of his recent book, the sometime TV prankster talks about his encounters with followers of QAnon, UFO hunters and flat-earthers.

<https://tinyurl.com/ymrghjq2>



Exhibitions >

Photo City: How Images Shape the Urban World

V&A Dundee
From March 29

Images by Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris and Thomas Annan in Glasgow sit alongside a new diorama of Dundee by Sohei Nishino in a show about how photography makes sense of our cities.

<https://tinyurl.com/yqfyx2h4>

The Time is Always Now: Artists Reframe the Black Figure

National Portrait Gallery, London
February 22–May 19

Ekow Eshun curates a display of contemporary artists from the African diaspora while considering the presence – and the absence – of the black figure in Western art.

<https://tinyurl.com/ypt8ern3>



In depth >

Love on the frontline

Life member Wendy Moore started writing books when she realised she had too much to say for a regular newspaper article.

"I wanted the freedom to write at length and indulge my writing," says the London freelance branch member.

"Most of all, I love the research."

Having been published everywhere from The Sunday Telegraph to The Lancet, she branched out in 2005 with The Knife Man, a biography of 18th-century surgeon John Hunter.

Four more books followed, including Endell Street (2020), about a wartime hospital run by women. That gave her the idea for her new one.

Jack and Eve: Two Women in Love and at War is about Vera Holme, known as Jack, and her life partner Evelina Haverfield.

After a career as an actress who specialised in cross-dressing roles, Jack joined the suffragettes. A keen driver, she worked as Emmeline Pankhurst's



chauffeur. She was also a talented musician.

Eve, the daughter of a Scottish baron, proved no less intrepid, becoming one of the suffragettes' most active speakers and agitators.

With Jack, she was imprisoned for the suffragette cause and ran field hospitals in Serbia, Russia and Romania.

"It's a love story with lots of ups and downs and unconventional relationships," says Moore.

"It's also a story of action, bravery and immense resilience.

"Both of them felt they could do anything a man could do and probably better."

Drawing on Holme's extensive diaries, Moore uses their story as a lens

to view women, sexuality and lesbian identity in the early 20th century.

"Jack had lots of other relationships," she says.

"There are hints at these in her diaries – or she'll put an asterisk on a page after saying so-and-so stayed the night. You have to join the dots.

"This is not long after the Oscar Wilde case when there was a furore about homosexuality but, for women, they were hiding in plain sight.

"Jack and Eve had a double bed that had their initials carved on either side.

"They were a devoted couple but nobody comments on it – it was known but they were invisible at the same time."

Jack and Eve: Two Women in Love and at War, Atlantic Books, April 4

<https://tinyurl.com/ypa9tyad>

Acts of Creation: on Art and Motherhood

Arnolfini, Bristol
March 9–June 2

The Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition looks at the mess, myths and mishaps of motherhood, a blind spot for anyone who thinks parenting in art begins and ends with the Madonna and Child. Tours to Birmingham, Sheffield and Dundee.

<https://tinyurl.com/yoe342e4>

Festivals >

Simple Things

Various venues, Bristol
February 23–29

Tenth year of this celebration of musical culture, with acts drawn from across the pop spectrum. Names on the bill for the opening Saturday include US art punks Les Savy Fav and producer/DJ Ireen Amnes.

<https://tinyurl.com/yp64xa8c>

Hippodrome Silent Film Festival

The Hippodrome, Bo'ness
March 20–24

Scotland's first and oldest purpose-built cinema hosts the annual celebration of pre-talkie film accompanied by live music. Expect lost classics, international surprises and experimental masterpieces.

<https://tinyurl.com/yl4q489p>



Films >

Shayda
General release
March 8

Acclaimed on the festival circuit, Noora Niasari's debut is a slow-burning drama about an Iranian mother who flees to a women's shelter with her six-year-old daughter.

<https://tinyurl.com/ytr385ru>

Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World
General release

March 8

Black comedy by Romanian director Radu Jude about an underpaid production assistant making a video that whitewashes her employer's image.

<https://tinyurl.com/yokav6pd>

Radio >

The Old Haunts
Radio 4/BBC Sounds
Out now

The debut novel by Edinburgh Freelance member Allan Radcliffe, now on the radio, is about love, recovery and coming of age at the time of section 28.

<https://tinyurl.com/y8rn6xf>

Theatre >

Audrey or Sorrow
Abbey Theatre, Dublin
February 23–March 23

The Abbey is marking 120 years of the National Theatre of Ireland and its founder Lady Gregory with a season starting with a new play by Marina Carr. Like Gregory, Carr is fascinated by ancient myth.

<https://tinyurl.com/yq5waz7v>

Spotlight >

Bevan fantasia

He was the Labour politician who, as Clement Atlee's minister for health, was the driving force behind the establishment of the National Health Service.

Now, Aneurin 'Nye' Bevan is being commemorated by playwright Tim Price at the National Theatre in London and the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff.

Directed by Rufus Norris, Nye is described as a surreal Welsh fantasia that takes a death-bed journey through a life that went

from the coal mines of Monmouthshire to union activism and a place in history as the most influential politician who was never a prime minister. Without Bevan, we might never have had a welfare state.

In the lead role is Michael Sheen, who portrayed Tony Blair in three films by Peter Morgan as well as broadcaster David Frost in Frost/Nixon.



A former reporter and designer on the Pontypridd Observer, Price is the author of plays including The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning, Protest Song (about the Occupy Movement) and Teh Internet Is Serious Business.

"To bring the story to Nye Bevan's home in Wales feels very special and an appropriate way to further honour his legacy through this production," says Norris.

Nye, National Theatre, London, February 24-May 11; Wales Millennium Centre, May 18-June 1
<https://tinyurl.com/yrfgj2v>

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John Pilger

Australian journalist John Pilger was one of the foremost campaigning reporters and documentary makers of his generation. Hard-hitting, opinionated and frequently controversial, he roamed the world reporting on what he saw as injustice and human rights abuse.

He admitted in an interview that he had a romantic view of journalism. He declared: "Journalism is nothing if it's not about humanity and is about people's lives." A long-standing NUJ member, he had "a natural feeling for the underdog".

Twice Newspaper Journalist of the Year, he also won a Bafta and an American TV Academy award. His 1979 film *Year Zero, the Silent Death of Cambodia* was named by the British Film Institute as one of top 10 most important documentaries of the century. He received prizes and honorary degrees for his journalism and campaigns.

At the same time, Pilger would receive criticism for what was described as his deeply personal approach to making documentaries. A new verb 'to Pilger', defined as 'to treat a subject or present an investigation in a

manner supposedly characteristic of the investigative journalist John Pilger' was included in the 1991 Oxford Dictionary of New Words.

John Pilger was born in the then working-class area of Bondi Beach in Sydney. His father was a carpenter, his mother a teacher. His older brother would become disability adviser to Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam.

His father brought up his sons to question authority, and Pilger would say that had helped forge his uncompromising attitude.

His first involvement in journalism came at school where he ran a newspaper and sold papers from trolleys. He went on to work on the Sydney Sun and trained with Australian Consolidated Press, leaving them to spend a year in Italy before arriving in London where he joined Reuters.

Moving to *The Daily Mirror* in 1963, he found a natural base that allowed him the space to develop his skills. The *Mirror* recognised they had someone who could attract readers and lead the way in establishing its crusading credentials. Much of his time was spent overseas when he became chief foreign correspondent.

He was banned from South Africa and was later congratulated by Nelson Mandela. He was in the hotel passage way with Robert Kennedy, who he had interviewed two days previously, when he was assassinated.

In 1969, he began broadcasting for *World in Action*. He was one of the first journalists to link papers and TV to work on stories.

He was a natural broadcaster – charismatic and straightforward. But it was a style that would often bring him into conflict with regulators and critics. He could be accused of shaping stories to back up his arguments and being a propagandist, with much of his work aimed at criticising America and the West.

He joined ATV to produce his own Pilger half-hour documentaries which ran for five seasons from 1974 to 1977. One of his most successful programmes was a four-year investigation into the cases of 98 thalidomide victims who had been left outside of the agreement with Distillers. Outrage

and compensation followed.

In 1979, Pilger and his crew were the first to enter Cambodia following the overthrow of Pol Pot. His report detailing the murders and horrors of the displacement sold out a special issue of the *Daily Mirror*. His documentary *Year Zero: the Silent Death of Cambodia* led to an outpouring of generosity as some \$45 million was raised worldwide to provide relief to Cambodia.

He also challenged Australia's mistreatment of its indigenous people and was one of the first journalists to enter East Timor after the Indonesian invasion in 1975.

In 1985, his relationship with *The Mirror* ended. Maxwell wanted him out, telling NUJ father of chapel Terry Pattinson there could only be one 'numero uno'. The circulation figures went down. He returned to write for it in the 1990s.

He continued broadcasting and writing for a number of outlets and wrote some books. Chosen to be the first editor-in-chief of *News on Sunday*, he parted company with it after a row with the editor and the decision to move it to Manchester.

His continuous criticism of the West and sometime praise of Russia and those seen as against the West hardened, leading to him to be accused of ignoring what he did not want to see. He faced legal actions and mounting opposition, accused by some such as the Jewish Board of Deputies of taking a one-sided approach.

He refused to acknowledge such criticism and denounced the failure as he saw it of the media to attack the establishment.

Age did not soften his approach. He continued commentating, writing and campaigning for what he believed in. Despite losing money on bailing out Julian Assange, he continued supporting the man he hailed as making journalism 'free'. His last programme – a tribute to the NHS – was made four years ago when he was 80.

Asked on *Desert Island Discs* what would be his luxury item, he said: "My typewriter, I think I would want to write. Not to write would make life on the desert island pretty unbearable."

Peta Steel

Facts: getting in the way of a true story



But **Chris Proctor** looks forward to getting his personal fact-checker

I have nothing against the truth. In general, I'm in favour. My problem is that I don't care much for facts.

You have no idea how often people interrupt when I'm relating a story to say, "It wasn't exactly like that."

Such a complaint astonishes me. When I'm chatting, I frequently make a few additions to the strict truth if it makes a story more entertaining – but I see this more as a diverting embellishment than a porky pie.

Say I arrive home late. I could report that I'd missed the bus but, while factually correct, it's a tedious anecdote. For the benefit of my audience, I don't hesitate to create a few additional characters and/or drop in one or two bizarre incidents. Something like, "I was at the bus stop and Paul McCartney was getting off. He had a worried look, so I asked if there was anything I could do to help. It seemed he was going to a gig and didn't have a drummer. 'All right, I said, 'I'll stand in this once but I've got to be home by seven.' So that's where I've been. It's lucky I didn't bump into Bruce Springsteen or I wouldn't have been home before breakfast."

No one believes me but it diverts attention: instead of being blamed for being late, I am merely accused of lying which I think you will agree is a considerable improvement.

I accept that I have additional obligations at work and, as dismissal is inconvenient, during working hours I tend towards veracity. But it's not always easy because I am conscious that readers like to be entertained as well as informed and I'm on their side. Mr Gradgrind's formula that "Facts

alone are wanted in life" might be all right in some circumstances but they're definitely not enough for the media. This is where the problems arise. Facts are frequently mind numbing. They can ruin a discussion and deaden a debate. They also discriminate against those with poor memories.

Pure fact-giving is producing minutes rather than writing articles. They make copy as interesting as a company's annual report. There are solutions, such as having side panels with a few diverting observations or a small screen featuring flippant remarks. For example, next to a NIB about larceny figures could be a 'fact brightener' pointing out that those robbing flower shops could be charged with robbery with violets. Or if two blokes pinched a calendar they could both get six months. That sort of thing.

Then again, facts have become even more complicated now that we incorporate fact checkers like the Beeb's Reality Check. What if you don't agree with the people checking the facts? For example, the Beeb has a list of 'Advantages and disadvantages of trade union membership'. The top disadvantage is that "trade unions take industrial action based on the votes of their members".

I think this is an advantage. If they took industrial action on the basis of a few hands of three-card brag or best-of-three heads or tails, I'd put this down as a disadvantage. But a democratic vote looks OK to me. I suspect the checkers sneaked this in because they couldn't come up with meaningful disadvantages and needed to look balanced.

Its second argument is that if you're on strike you'll "experience the stress

and pressure of having less money" (which I'd suggest is often the cause rather than the effect of industrial action) and it adds that "the company will expect that you catch up on your work when you come back".

Clearly, we need a body to check the verifiers or verify the checkers. And, while we're about it, they could do with someone to oversee the check-checkers' conclusions as well. Not to mention how to deal with 'no comment'.

Fact checking is not as straightforward as you might think because, while the truth is permanent, facts are temporary. Take the example of the London Underground (LU) strike threatened at the start of this year. The facts were plain: LU had made a 'full and final offer' that was unacceptable to tube workers. There was no more money. Compared with LU, Mother Hubbard's cupboard was crammed full. The truth, however, was that there was another £30 million ready to gallop to the rescue.

Also, how do you deal with Baroness Michelle Mone when she asserts her integrity by claiming she was honest with the government but lied to the media? Is she reliable or not? The issue would need to be considered by a specialist Deeply Philosophical/ Possibly BS division.

The good news is jobs. Every journalist would be allocated a personal fact-checker, which would double our numbers at a stroke. And, obviously, every word produced by AI would require verification as it is by nature inhuman and immoral. Of course, employers would complain about additional expense, which might lead them to ban the use of facts entirely. This splendid innovation would allow us more time to report the truth.

Facts have become more complicated now that we have fact checkers. What if you don't agree with them?



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