

the Journalist

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THE NEWZOOM

Does journalism need offices?

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The coronavirus pandemic is changing the way we live and work radically. Not least among the changes is our widespread working from home and the broader question of how much we need an office. Some businesses are questioning whether they need one at all, others are looking towards a future of mixed working patterns with some homeworking and some office attendance. In our cover feature Neil Merrick looks at what this means for our industry.

Also in this edition of The Journalist we have a feature on how virtual meetings are generating more activity in branches because the meetings are now more accessible. Edinburgh Freelance branch has seen a big jump in people getting involved, has increased the frequency of its meetings and has linked up with other branches for joint meetings.

Recently, the TUC held its first virtual conference. We have full coverage of the main issues and those raised by the NUJ.

As we work from home there's growing evidence of a revival in the local economy and a strengthening of the high street which not that long ago was suffering as consumers opted for large out of town centres. We can only hope that the revival of the local economy stimulates more interest in local news and helps to bolster our regional media.

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Thousands of redundancies become a stark reality

THE NUJ is dealing with thousands of redundancies across the media industry as announced cuts reach the end of their consultative process. It is the biggest round of cuts faced at one time as news organisations have triggered job losses to deal with the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. More cuts are thought likely at groups that have not yet outlined job losses such as News UK.

Union officials have been working to get the best deals in voluntary and compulsory redundancies and are challenging job losses with legal action where possible.

The cuts are being made as the Government's furlough scheme comes to an end on October 31. Government



support will continue for some small and medium-sized businesses that face lower demand in the winter under the Job Support Scheme which starts for six months on November 1.

The BBC has made the biggest number of cuts at more than 1100 across its operations. Voluntary redundancies at the corporation have been oversubscribed and some high-profile names are leaving the airwaves including

Carrie Gracie, the former China editor who with the NUJ campaigned for gender pay parity, and Simon Gompertz, the personal finance correspondent.

In newspapers, Reach is making 550 job cuts; the Guardian 180; the London Evening Standard 69 editorial jobs out of 115 redundancies; the Daily Mail Group 100; Newsquest about 40 journalists' jobs. Other cuts are being implemented at Dennis Publishing; Emap; Haymarket; Bauer; Conde Nast; and Harper Collins among others.

The NUJ launched its News Recovery Plan early on as the pandemic began to hit news organisations with advertising disappearing and print sales falling sharply.



The BBC has made the biggest number of cuts at more than 1100 across its operations. Voluntary redundancies at the corporation have been oversubscribed

inbrief...

REACH SEES DIGITAL REVENUE RECOVERY

Reach, which publishes the Mirror and Express and many regional titles, said that digital revenues have begun to recover from the effects of the coronavirus, climbing 13 per cent year-on-year in the third quarter of this year. Total revenue fell by 15 per cent year on year and print fell by 20 per cent.

SOBANDE IS CLAUDIA JONES LECTURER

Francesca Sobande, a lecturer in digital media studies at the School of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University, will give this year's Claudia Jones lecture. She will focus on 'the digital lives of black women in Britain' in the lecture which will be recorded later in October.

POSTAGE ERROR ON REDUNDANCY MAIL

Guardian staff waiting to hear about their individual terms for voluntary redundancy were told that they hadn't received letters because insufficient postage was paid. They were emailed instead after a wait and the deadline for voluntary redundancy was extended to October 19.

Pressure over public planning notices

THE NUJ has joined calls from the News Media Association (NMA) for the Government to re-think proposed legislation which would scrap the requirement for public notices to be published in local papers.

The NMA has calculated that the

obligation on local authorities to place statutory planning notices in local newspapers is worth about £10 million each year to the industry. The NUJ fears that as the coronavirus is putting further pressure on an industry already in crisis, this loss of revenue would

come at a very difficult time.

The NUJ is also concerned that the proposals, which are part of the Planning for the Future White Paper, could be a way of bypassing local people and their right to be consulted on changes to their environment.

RIP Sir Harry Evans, an NUJ supporter

SIR HARRY EVANS, one of the most admired newspaper editors, has died aged 92.

The former Sunday Times editor was a supporter of the NUJ although he stopped being a member when he moved to a managerial position. He wrote of his enthusiasm for the union in his autobiography My Paper Chase. Three years ago, he was honoured at an event celebrating his life and work at the NUJ's headquarters.

His greatest successes were in the 1970s when the Sunday Times broke a number of key stories including the devastating impact of thalidomide on unborn children and the exposure of the double agent Kim Philby.



Google hands out \$1 billion to news groups

Google is to give news organisations around the world \$1 billion over the next three years and allow them editorial independence about content that is promoted on Google's platforms. It will also allow them flexibility over the format of the story spaces it allocates. The initiative called the Google News Showcase comes amid pressure for a tax on the tech giants to help traditional media badly hit by the coronavirus fallout.



Fury as News UK photographers' contract grabs all rights for ever

THE NUJ and the British Press Photographers' Association have reacted with anger over a new contract for photographers who regularly contribute to News UK titles, which include The Times and The Sun.

They say the new contract strips photographers of almost all their rights in their commissioned work, drastically reducing their income.

One single fee will give News UK exclusive rights to use commissioned work in perpetuity across Times titles, leaving photographers unable to ever resell their commissioned work themselves.

Additionally, the publisher has demanded exclusive syndication rights to sub-license and resell the work in perpetuity.

News UK also wants to have three days' use of non-commissioned images both online and in print publications for the price of one use.

For both commissioned and non-commissioned work, the contract strips contributors of their secondary rights, requires all moral rights to be waived and subjects them to an indemnity clause, which would make contributors, not News UK, liable for

claims and costs incurred against the publisher in relation to the images provided.

Photographers were asked to sign the contract or no longer be classed as 'preferred' photographers.

Natasha Hirst, chair of the NUJ's photographers' council, said:

"This disgraceful contract is wholly unacceptable and has no place in our industry.

"It is completely exploitative, strips photographers of most of their rights and will leave them much worse off.

"Why a news organisation feels it needs to give photographers – most of whom have struggled to work because of Covid-19 – this sort of kicking beggars belief."

The British Press Photographers' Association

said: "Publishers imposing new contracts without discussion, explanation or negotiation is a poor way to deal with loyal and committed freelancers at any time – and to do this when incomes are down and in the middle of a worldwide pandemic would appear to be both opportunistic and ill-judged."



It is completely exploitative. Why a news organisation feels it needs to give photographers this sort of kicking beggars belief

**Natasha Hirst
chair, NUJ
photographers' council**

Legal bid to get freelancers in Covid-19 scheme halted

THE UNION has dropped its legal challenge for all freelancers to be included in the government's self employment income support scheme (SEISS) following legal advice.

The NUJ had sent a pre-action letter but it was obliged to lodge a claim before receiving a response from the Government. So it was agreed with the Treasury to lodge a brief

claim and then take a further legal view upon receipt of the response.

The Government has stressed its willingness to engage with the NUJ directly, which is the route now being

pursued along with renewed lobbying and campaigning.

Some freelancers, especially those who pay tax as PAYE on shifts, have been excluded from the SEISS. The chancellor had said that the

support scheme would be available to 95 per cent of self employed people but the NUJ's freelance office had found a large number of freelancers fell within the five per cent.

Ruling against Paul Blanchard

PAUL BLANCHARD, owner of Right Angles PR, has been found to be in breach of NUJ membership responsibilities by a panel investigating a rule 24 complaint against him by freelance Nick Huber who said he was owed money by Mr Blanchard.

The panel reported to the NUJ's ruling national executive council: "We uphold Nick Huber's complaint, and find that Paul Blanchard is in breach of the NUJ Membership Responsibilities, clause (b)(i),

which requires members to 'treat other members of the union and union staff, with consideration and respect and not to take actions which would threaten their livelihood or working conditions'.

"We note that Mr Blanchard resigned his NUJ membership on receipt of the complaint. However, we recommend that if he should re-apply for membership at any time he should provide evidence that he has paid all monies owing to Mr Huber."



Bullivant strike action saves jobs and opens up talks

NUJ members working for Bullivant Media in the Midlands have won concessions from the company and an agreement to future dialogue after they staged four days of strikes in August and September. Plans for five compulsory redundancies were reduced to three job losses last month.

All editorial workers are union members. They formed a chapel earlier this year amid concerns over unauthorised deductions from wages at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, targeted compulsory redundancies and detrimental working practices which saw non-editorial staff taking on editorial work.

The company runs weekly free newspapers and websites with titles including the Coventry Observer, Leamington Observer, Rugby Observer, Stratford Observer, Solihull Observer, Redditch Standard, Bromsgrove Standard, Worcester Observer and Evesham Observer.

The Bullivant Media NUJ chapel said: "We have secured agreement on working practices and been provided with details of the company's editorial structure for the months ahead.



"Our demands from the outset were fair and reasonable and based on the desire to produce quality journalism that serves our local communities.

"That is what our readers want and deserve. Quality journalism makes economic sense and is key to the survival of local media.

"Our thanks to the directors of Bullivant Media for the open and engaging way they approached discussions once meetings began. By listening to each other, we have been able to secure a positive and welcome agreement."

Jane Kennedy, NUJ organiser, said the chapel members "have been able to achieve a range of significant outcomes".



Our demands from the outset were fair and reasonable and based on the desire to produce quality journalism for our local communities

**Bullivant Media
NUJ chapel**

MARCUS MINGINS

inbrief...

NEIL SETS UP TV NEWS CHANNEL

Andrew Neil is leaving the BBC to start a new TV news channel - GB News. He will be the chair and evening programme host at the channel, which is aimed at people who feel under-served by the existing news media. The BBC had said that Neil's show would not return after it came off air during the pandemic.

LYRA MCKEE PRIEST TELLS HIS STORY

Broadcast journalist Siobhann Tighe has made a radio documentary - Heart and Soul - featuring the priest who gave Lyra McKee the last rites. Father Joe Gormley describes the impact of her death on him and the community. Hear it on BBC Sounds at <https://tinyurl.com/y2pmhtds>.

WHITE STARTS COMMUNITY PAPER

Aidan White, former general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists and founder of the Ethical Journalism Network, has set up a community newspaper in east London. Newham Voices is being published monthly with the hope it will go weekly.

TUC and NUJ events go virtual

THE TUC'S annual congress was scheduled for Brighton this year. But, instead of being beside the sea, delegates found themselves logging onto the first virtual

congress in the TUC's 152-year history.

Meanwhile, the NUJ is looking into virtual options for its biennial delegate meeting, which had been

due to be held in April this year. The finance committee is considering technological options and dates.

The TUC congress was joined by thousands of trade

unionists who watched the event as it was live streamed from Congress House in London.

There would usually have been around 500 delegates in the hall but this year it held just a few people.

TUC news, pages 6 and 7

PR workers more stressed

MORE than three-quarters of PR workers have been putting in longer hours than usual during the pandemic, with almost four out of five feeling more stressed than usual. Two-thirds told the NUJ they had experienced abuse through social media or from clients during the pandemic.

The NUJ's public relations and communications council survey carried out in July found the pandemic has had a significant impact on the work of PR workers, a specialism where many are not union members.

With most now working from home, it was positive to see that most employers had ensured the right equipment was provided with two-thirds of the 120 respondents saying they had the screens, chairs, desks, tools or software they would expect if working in an office.



Q magazine closes after 34 years

Q magazine, which was founded in 1986 by Smash Hits writers Mark Ellen and David Hepworth, closed in the summer with publisher Bauer blaming the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. It follows a review of the publisher's UK portfolio during which it was unable to find a new owner. The magazine's circulation had fallen to 28,000 per month from a peak of 200,000 in 2001.

Fair pay demanded as workers on Covid-19 frontline praised



It's not the great and the good who have kept the country going, not the hedge fund bosses and captains of industry but the labour of working people

**Ged Nichols
TUC president**

THE TUC congress paid tribute to key workers who saw the country through the Covid-19 crisis – and who may have to do the same again this winter.

Thousands of trade unionists watched online as workers from all sectors told their stories in a series of poignant videos on the first day of the conference.

The TUC has started a campaign demanding fair pay for essential workers. It is urging all trade unionists to write to their MPs in support of a pay rise and better working conditions.

Currently, 2.1 million key workers earn the minimum wage or less. The TUC believes the minimum wage should be at least £10 an hour for all.

Public sector workers make up 52 per cent of key workers and have been central during the crisis. They include carers,



JESS HURD

NHS workers, bus drivers, civil servants, postal delivery workers and others. The TUC said these workers deserved serious pay increases to reward them for sacrifices they have made.

Many key workers are in insecure employment – including people on zero hours contracts, agency staff,

casual workers and low-paid self-employed people. They include carers, delivery drivers and shop workers whose importance became apparent during the crisis.

The TUC is calling for an immediate ban on zero hours contracts to reduce the insecurity experienced by many essential workers,

including one in four staff in adult social care.

A TUC report launched at the conference says: “Despite doing the essential work caring for us and keeping food on shop shelves through this crisis, millions remain underpaid and without secure employment.

“Many made huge sacrifices, putting themselves and their families at risk... Workers who are carrying the country through this crisis deserve to be rewarded fairly.”

TUC president Ged Nichols said: “It’s not the great and the good who have kept the country going, not the hedge fund bosses and captains of industry but the labour of working people, people we are proud to represent.

“The crisis has shown that those doing the most important work are often those paid the least.”

Jobs loss ‘tsunami’ feared as state scheme ends

TUC GENERAL secretary Frances O’Grady has warned the government the country faces a ‘tsunami of job losses’ if it does not act when the job retention scheme ends this autumn.

The scheme, which the unions pushed for, has paid the wages of more than nine million workers.

“The pandemic isn’t scheduled to end in October so neither

should state support for jobs. It’s better to keep people working, paying their taxes, spending their wages and helping to rebuild the economy,” she said.

O’Grady said the government needed reminding of what mass unemployment does to a country – crushing young people’s dreams and people in their 50s joining the dole afraid

they will never work again. “The price of unemployment is too high,” she said.

The TUC is urging employers to bring people back to work using a package that could include shorter hours and training.

O’Grady said the TUC was proposing that in return for state support, firms draw up credible plans to rebuild hours and

productivity. The state should subsidise wages on condition that employers pay at least 80 per cent of the normal rate.

She added: “But there’ll be no blank cheques for business, no handouts for boardroom bonanzas; shareholders must tighten their belts. And, to qualify, companies must pay their share of taxes – here in the UK.”

Anti-racism taskforce launched

THE TUC has set up a taskforce to tackle racism. The group made up of members of the general council, will highlight the everyday racism black workers experience and will devise an action plan for change in UK workplaces and within unions.

Mohammed Shafiq, chair of the PCS national black members’ committee, spoke in the debate at congress on the general council’s statement about tackling racism. He said lasting change was required: “You cannot have a truly equal society until black workers feel safe and have the same opportunities as everyone else. This requires all of us to reflect on our language, behaviour and outlook towards black communities.”



JESS HURD

TUC backs news recovery plan

THE TUC welcomed the publication of the NUJ's news recovery plan to support innovative, public interest journalism and protect jobs. Congress acknowledged the importance of "trustworthy, relevant, impartial news", particularly at times of national crisis.

The NUJ campaigned successfully for this to be recognised by securing an agreement for journalists to be designated as key workers.

The plan, *From Health Crisis to Good News*, proposes measures to support and protect jobs by revitalising the industry and ensuring it is grounded in the public good.

In an extended session of the general council, the TUC agreed unanimously to back an NUJ motion calling for a campaign demanding that tech giants pay a digital



information levy. This is because companies have made huge amounts and exploited editorial content for years without paying for its creation.

The campaign will also call for tax breaks for news subscriptions and support for start-ups. Other proposals cover government investment in public interest news.

The TUC agreed that no public funding should be provided to any company that was making redundancies, paying out dividends or resisting union recognition.

The NUJ's motion also called for greater plurality in the media and tighter regulation over ownership.



Congress acknowledged the importance of 'trustworthy, relevant, impartial news', particularly at times of crisis

MATT KENNON

in brief...

CARTMAIL BECOMES TUC PRESIDENT

Gail Cartmail, who has represented workers for over 40 years and is assistant general secretary at Unite, was elected as the new president of the TUC. In 1983, she was the NGA print union's first female TUC delegate and she wants more women and young people to become active in their unions.

STARMER TAKES AIM AT FIRE AND REHIRE

The government must outlaw fire and rehire tactics, Labour leader Keir Starmer told the conference. He said thousands of workers had been given redundancy notices then offered new contracts on worse pay and conditions. "These tactics should be illegal. They punish good employers, hit working people hard and harm our economy," he said.

GENDER PENSION GAP TWICE THAT OF PAY

Research by the Prospect union shows that the pension gap between women and men is more than twice the gender pay gap. Sue Ferns, Prospect deputy general secretary, said it was a scandal that the government did not even report on the extent of the pension gap let alone have a plan to close it.

New ideas needed to reach young people

FRESH thinking is needed to keep news coverage relevant to young people, Unite's assistant general secretary Tony Burke told a TUC fringe meeting.

Speaking at the Morning Star's 'Media and the virus' meeting, Burke,

who used to work for a local newspaper group, said the media had changed even before the coronavirus lockdown.

There had been a boom in the use of social media, websites and radio. He said most younger people did not

buy newspapers or watch TV and they accessed news through mobile phones.

NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said at the meeting that the NUJ was proposing vouchers for news subscriptions for 18- and 19-year-olds.

Union busting called out

UNION busting has no place in our society and workers should be able to organise without fear of reprisals or bullying, NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said in a statement.

Her comments followed congress declaring support for workers at London-based broadcaster Iran International.

An NUJ motion condemning the actions of the British Association of Journalists, which made a secret recognition deal with Iran

International that allowed the company to undermine the NUJ's recognition bid, was unanimously approved.

The motion affirms the right of workers to be collectively represented by a union of their choice and commits the TUC to campaign to make union-busting moves unlawful.

The TUC's backing comes at a time when one NUJ rep at Iran International, who helped build an active chapel, has been made redundant and another redeployed.

General secretary joins TUC executive

Michelle Stanistreet, the NUJ's general secretary, has joined the TUC's executive committee. She said it was a time of great challenge with more people turning to the trade union movement.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady paid tribute to the role of journalists in society when she nominated Stanistreet for the role. She also said the trade union needed to repudiate threats to journalism from politicians and others.



NUJ

Meeting online has had some unexpected positive results, says **Mark Fisher**



Scottish media faced a “clear and pressing problem”, a sentiment echoed by MSP Patrick Harvie, co-leader of the Scottish Greens, who said “to call the threat to journalism a pity would be an understatement”. They asked us sharp questions about detail, but backed our general thrust.

How did such cross-party unity come about? Back in March, we had to cancel our NUJ student night at the 11th hour. This happened just before lockdown as we had lost our appetite for public gatherings.

I’d been reading about this app called Zoom. McMillan had been thinking the union should come into its own in times of crisis. Putting the two ideas together, we proposed to meet online, not monthly as normal but weekly. We put it to the test on March 24 and have returned every week since.

Our aim was to be a reassuring presence for freelancers at a time of isolation and financial jeopardy. I like to think we have been that but the move online also produced three significant and unforeseen gains.

The first is to do with attendance. Several members who have never been to meetings have become online regulars, including those who live out of town. Interestingly, meetings are now far more likely to be gender balanced. Going online has given the branch a fresh lease of life.

Second, distance was no obstacle for speakers. Our guests have included NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet, International Federation of Journalists deputy general secretary Jeremy Dear and Dame Frances Cairncross, author of the government’s Cairncross Review.

That is in addition to a host of NUJ staff members and activists – and let’s not forget the joint meeting with Cardiff and south east Wales branch, as well as with our regular collaborators at Edinburgh and district.

Third, inspired by our speakers and galvanised by the frequency of meetings, we swung into action to promote the NUJ’s news recovery plan. Led by McMillan, we targeted the Scottish parliament’s culture, tourism, Europe and external affairs committee and found we were pushing at an open door. As I write, we are looking forward to meeting cabinet secretary Fiona Hyslop – the culmination of a speedy, positive and most unexpected campaign.

Virtual times, real results

Say what you like about the pandemic, but you’d never have guessed it would result in a small NUJ branch writing policy for the Scottish Conservatives.

Yet, on 29 June, the party’s press office put out a release headlined: ‘Recovery plan is vital for the survival of newspapers’ – a sentiment straight from the NUJ’s own plan for the media launched two months earlier.

Like the NUJ’s news recovery plan, the press release called for the establishment of a journalism foundation. It demanded local newspapers be conferred with the status of asset of community value. It also wanted the Scottish government to give rates relief to not-for-profit publishers and to channel advertising into local news operations.

“A functioning media is absolutely crucial for a well-functioning democracy,” said Maurice Golden, Scottish Conservative shadow economy and culture secretary. “There is simply no option – the SNP

government must support newspapers and ensure their long-term survival.”

The opportunistic dig at the ruling party aside, this was a major victory for Edinburgh Freelance branch. Only three weeks earlier, several of us, including Joyce McMillan as branch chair and me as secretary, had met Golden on Zoom to brief him on a version of the news recovery plan we had tailored to Scotland.

He had been receptive and engaged but, even so, we were surprised by the speed of the press release. “Yes, will look to include in the manifesto,” he had told us when we wrote to thank him.

We have also enjoyed equally positive discussions with several key politicians at meetings attended by Nick McGowan-Lowe, NUJ organiser Scotland, and, Frances Rafferty, NUJ senior editorial and communications officer, as well as branch members Simon Barrow and Rob Edwards.

Scottish Labour MSP Claire Baker told us she had asked a written question about how government advertising money was spent. Scottish National Party MP Alyn Smith said the

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The Conservative party put out a release headlined: ‘Recovery plan is vital for the survival of newspapers’ - a sentiment straight from the NUJ plan

We risk sleepwalking into BBC's destruction



Inquiry vital into its role and financing, says **Raymond Snoddy**

Boris Johnson would like Lord Charles Moore, his old boss at the Daily Telegraph, to become the next chairman of the BBC but Lord Moore has ruled himself out.

Even by the standards of this government, it would have been an appalling choice.

The former editor of the Daily Telegraph and biographer of Margaret Thatcher has been an unremitting critic of the corporation and has waged a war against the licence fee for more than a decade.

In 2010, he was fined for refusing to pay the licence fee because the BBC did not sack Jonathan Ross over obscene messages left on actor Andrew Sachs' phone answering machine.

There is supposed to be an open and transparent process to find a successor to Sir David Clementi, who will leave in February. But while Johnson is prime minister, if the new BBC chairman is not Lord Moore, it will be someone similar, perhaps Lady Nicky Morgan, briefly culture secretary, who warned the BBC would end up like Blockbuster if it did not reform.

Whoever chairs the BBC, it is likely that they will be put in place to oversee the end of the licence fee which is guaranteed only until 2027.

Already the political mood music is running against the BBC and the licence fee.

Julian Knight, the Conservative MP who chairs the culture select committee, said recently that the licence fee was "morally on the way out". In future, the corporation would have to make much of its money

through optional subscription.

In fact, a financial crisis has already arrived at the BBC, with hundreds if not thousands of posts – many of them journalists' jobs – on the line.

Continuing free licences for over-75s on income support will cost £150 million a year and that same amount will be lost if the government goes ahead with decriminalising the refusal to pay licence fee.

This seems like a decent thing to do. Alas, the consequences – intended or otherwise – would be to destroy the BBC as a national public service broadcaster funded by everyone in return for providing services for everyone.

A loss of £150 million a year might only be the start of it. With the BBC unable cost-effectively to exclude people who do not pay, it is difficult to know how great the free-rider problem would become.

Many might decide they simply will not pay and the BBC would find it almost impossible to pursue millions of citizens through the civil courts.

The pressing problem can be simply stated: out of either political malice or ignorance, we are in danger of sleepwalking into the piecemeal destruction of the BBC – an important UK institution.

Before any of this happens – especially decriminalisation – there is an urgent need for an overarching independent inquiry into the role and financing of the BBC, with particular reference to the licence fee.

Is a compulsory licence fee still relevant and the least bad funding mechanism as the BBC prepares to enter its second century after 2022?

Are there better alternatives?

Such an inquiry could look at the BBC's role in training and sustaining large sections of the creative industries, which could once again, after Covid-19, be among the UK's fastest growing sectors.

Carping about the licence fee has been increasing, as has the bile and antagonism from a self-interested right-wing press.

Yet there has been no vigorous, independent look at the issue since 1986 when Mrs Thatcher appointed Sir Alan Peacock to look at the future of the licence fee.

The free market economist was supposed to find that the licence fee could be replaced by advertising. Sir Alan came up with the 'wrong' answer and ended up strengthening the licence fee arrangement while talking about the future on-demand world to come.

It hardly needs to be emphasised how fundamentally the media landscape has changed since then.

It may seem crazy to argue for an inquiry now into the future of the BBC when the media and everyone else are in the depths of the Covid and Brexit crises. It is, however, a necessary first step towards informing the debate about a new BBC royal charter later in the decade.

It would also provide hope that the importance of broadcast journalism and other forms of programme-making in the public interest can be properly assessed. The alternative is to watch the BBC being slowly beaten into a rump of its former self, more akin to PBS America than the current institution that, sadly, seems more valued abroad than it is in the UK.

Out of either political malice or ignorance, we are in danger of sleepwalking into the piecemeal destruction of the BBC

Behind closed

Louise Tickle on the battles journalists face in order to report on the family courts

Some of the most serious, life-changing powers the state can wield over citizens are exerted behind closed doors in family courts. Media scrutiny of these hearings and the judicial decision-making that changes lives depends on a family judge permitting journalists to investigate and report.

Often, this means an expensive, lengthy and hard-fought battle; typically, local authority and government agencies resist scrutiny, opposing press applications on what often feels like the pretext of protecting a child's privacy. There can be excellent reasons for not wanting the media to publish details of a case but, for state agencies, there can also be self-serving ones. And what if the judge's actions need investigating, when the judge is the only person who can give the media permission to report?

In the past couple of years, however, journalists have shown themselves willing to enter into this highly contested arena – and are making some gains.

Eighteen months ago, *The Doctor* magazine, produced by the British Medical Association, won a court case which meant senior staff journalist Keith Cooper could write 'Born of injustice', a shocking account of how a young doctor wrongly came to have her baby removed from her at birth.

"When you tell people about the outline of a story like this, they just pull their faces in – well, it's just disgust," Cooper recalls. "You can see them thinking that it can't possibly be true – there must be some other reason they took the child away. So, initially, I was met with a wall of disbelief by colleagues but also from some professionals."

Keith Cooper: "You can see people thinking that the story can't possibly be true"



Given that the number of newborns removed from their mothers had increased two-and-a-half times over eight years and research was showing new mothers were often denied psychological therapies, Cooper knew there was a public interest in investigating the doctor's account. He also knew that if he read the court papers without a judge's permission, he would be in criminal contempt because they contained all the evidence.

Though the mother was in full agreement with his application, seeking that permission involved untold hours of work writing legal submissions, plus months of negotiations with the other parties. Cooper also had to convince his bosses that the story merited the expense of legal advice.

The barrister briefed by *The Doctor* magazine spent two days in court to argue the case, he says. Cooper's credibility as a journalist was advanced in evidence to demonstrate that he would treat the sensitive material responsibly.

So, did getting access to the documents make a difference? "It was massive," he says. "Any journalist knows that primary source papers are like gold dust. It uncovered stuff even the mother didn't know about – the prejudice she'd faced, how some professionals had judged her. It feels almost unbelievable to read how someone who was confused, hours after a caesarian, who hadn't eaten, was assumed immediately to have a mental health problem and that a physical cause wasn't even considered."

Other journalists, too, are banging on the closed doors of the family courts. Paul Foot Award winner and now *Sunday Times* social affairs correspondent Emily Dugan asked for and – after considerable efforts – was given permission to report on hearings held at Birmingham's central family court. At *Tortoise*, the in-depth slow news publisher, Polly Curtis secured interviews with senior family judges.

Often a judge's outdated views are glimpsed only because a party has the financial and emotional resources to appeal: the case of family judge Tolson, who stated that rape within a relationship had not taken

Opening up from page to stage

SOME parts of the judiciary are taking calls for more openness seriously.

In October last year, Sir Andrew McFarlane, the president of the family division of the high court and the country's most senior

family judge, issued family court staff and judges with guidance on how they should deal with media applications to report family court cases. The intention was to make the process simpler, cheaper and more accessible.

This autumn, it is expected that McFarlane will publish a formal review into the issue of transparency in the family courts.

Meanwhile, judge Stephen Wildblood QC, a senior family judge based in Bristol, has

written, staged and performed in a series of short plays showing what happens in family courts, which, unlike criminal courts, most people are unfamiliar with.

After the performances, he has run Q&A sessions in

which audience members ask social workers and the actors about what they have just seen.

Clifford Bellamy, a circuit judge until his recent retirement, was the most prolific publisher of family court judgments and therefore, it might be said, a transparency champion.

Earlier this year, he published *The Secret Family Court - Fact or Fiction?* This explores whether privacy rules damage family courts' functioning and looks at the impact of privacy rules on freedom of expression not only for the media but also for the families involved.

doors

place because the woman had not physically fought back, could be reported earlier this year only because the woman won her appeal against his findings – and appeals are held in public.

Meanwhile, I am in the middle of a difficult application to report on a family court case for a television documentary. It is taking immense amounts of time and effort – and may not succeed. More encouragingly, in a different case, after making a simple oral application in the high court, I was given immediate permission to speak to everyone involved. Subject to me protecting the family’s – but, despite its attempt to prevent this, not the local authority’s – anonymity, I’m also allowed to report all the detail of the case once it concludes.

The extensive, expensive legal process The Doctor magazine went through is unfeasible most of the time. Although Cooper had to keep his bosses on board, at least he was paid – as a freelance, a lot of my time in making these applications goes unpaid. Sometimes, however, being freelance gives you the freedom to decide to plough on, even though a journalist who does this will never see a penny if their application is refused. Even if it does, the fee for this sort of story never reflects the time, skill or risk required to stand it up.

Eighteen months ago, freelance journalist Melanie Newman applied to the family court in Southampton for permission to read – not, at that point, to publish – the court bundle in a case where a toddler had been removed from her mother and placed for adoption on what the court of appeal later determined had been ‘the slimmest of evidence’. She has just concluded a long, risky court case in which both the local authority and children’s guardian employed QCs to argue against her.

“It feels like the process is being made almost ridiculously onerous, and I just wonder why that is,” Newman says. There is an inherent danger, she points out, that “given the time that this process has taken, even if I eventually get permission, will anyone be interested in the story I produce which then will be years distant from the actual events?”

Three months after the final hearing, she got judgment. It went against her. Undaunted, she has applied for permission to appeal. If she is allowed to appeal, the case is likely to be heard by the most senior family judge, the president of the family division.

Newman had two barristers working on the case for free, plus a solicitors’ firm. The legal profession has also been exceptionally generous with time and expertise when, as a freelance, I have needed help.



It feels like the process is almost ridiculously onerous, and I just wonder why that is



Unsurprisingly, Newman concludes that obstacles put in the way of a journalist going to the original documents to investigate why a serious miscarriage of justice happened are disproportionate. “In any closed system, it’s very easy for abuses to occur, or simply negligence, which doesn’t get picked up,” she points out. It is a situation that is only exacerbated if the media is not allowed to fulfil its watchdog role.

It is not only journalists who are agitating for change. In May 2019, after the BBC’s Victoria Derbyshire Show dedicated a week to covering the sometimes fatal risks to children and survivors of court-ordered contact with domestic abusers, 120 MPs demanded a public inquiry into how this was being dealt with by the justice system. Louise Haigh MP said “full exploration... is stifled by a lack of independent, authoritative scrutiny”. Haigh called for the repeal of the law prohibiting publication of what goes on in family courts, arguing the assumption should be that reporting is permitted, subject to anonymity.

While The Times was severely criticised for relying heavily on evidence from a child’s mother, Newman’s experience of attempting to do a far more thorough investigation leads her to believe the law places journalists in a double bind.

“We have to rely on a parent’s side of things, because we’re not allowed to see documents; if you want better informed, deeper, more analytical reporting, you have to allow us to see the paperwork,” she says. “I have heard what’s going in the family courts described as ‘Britain’s human rights abuse of this century’ and it may be that future generations do come to see this huge number of children being removed in that way. These are decisions of the absolute utmost importance, yet they’re happening almost entirely behind closed doors.”



Neil Merrick on how working from home is affecting journalism

News from the home front

At first, the idea of working from home was quite appealing. Not only could Richard Palmer avoid the daily commute to Canary Wharf but it was not unusual for him to enjoy a beer in his Hampshire garden at around 5pm, just before the government's daily press briefing.

Yet after months of working from home during the pandemic, Palmer and other journalists began to miss being in the office. "You're not feeling the buzz of the newsroom, the TV blaring and people shouting across the floor," he says.

Many stories stem from reporters bouncing ideas off one another, which is less likely to occur when you communicate by WhatsApp, Zoom or email. "Stories emerge from conversations with colleagues," says Palmer, royal correspondent and father of chapel at the Express

In most respects, production of local and national titles since late March has been a major success. Journalists, some of whom had to take pay cuts, proved day after day that they do not need to rub shoulders in the same building to meet deadlines and report news.

After urging people in England to return to workplaces in August, the government changed its advice again, making it uncertain whether journalism will become office-based again.

The Daily Mail was among the first to boast how it was producing the paper with an empty newsroom (before later accusing civil servants of being workshy because they preferred to work from home).

By the time of lockdown in late March, just a handful of people were left in the Financial Times' office near the River Thames. Many staff were used to working from laptops, so the shift to home working was reasonably straightforward. But not everyone's work can be done as easily away from the office.

"If you're working from home, you need the right equipment," says Steve Bird, FoC and head of broadsheet and tabloid production at the FT. "It depends on your home environment. If it's relatively well equipped and you have space, it is an easy transition. Sitting on a stool at your kitchen table is not sustainable."

By delivering the same quality of journalism, staff showed they were able to work flexibly and remotely without damaging the FT as a business. "It's very important for management to see this," Bird adds.

However, journalists with children can experience major problems when working from home, while people who live alone can experience mental health problems because of isolation.

With a reporter and a sub furloughed, the team that normally produces Municipal Journal was reduced to five at the start of lockdown. A daily video call helps to keep team members in touch and support staff who live alone and might miss human contact, says news editor Dan Peters.

Local government has been at the forefront of Covid-19 stories. With a smaller reporting team, Peters writes more stories himself – something he generally enjoys.



You're not feeling the buzz of the newsroom, the TV blaring and people shouting across the floors



Going anywhere

ZOOM and other video technology allows journalists to both attend news meetings and observe events taking place anywhere.

Owing to the pandemic, many local authorities are streaming not only cabinet and full council meetings but also smaller committees and panels.

"Being able to sit in my living room and watch proceedings anywhere from Cornwall to Edinburgh has made it much easier to cover local government," says Dan Peters, news editor at Municipal Journal.

Previously, adds Peters, the record of councils in opening up meetings to reporters and

members of the public was somewhat patchy.

Local democracy reporters (LDRs), who cover councils and NHS trusts for a range of local media, also see benefits. This can include covering two different meetings at the same time.

At a virtual meeting of University Hospital of Derby and Burton NHS Trust, Eddie Bisknell, LDR in Derbyshire, was invited to ask a question

– something that had never occurred when he attended trust meetings in person.

However, being given the opportunity to ask questions does not guarantee getting the answers. "It's easier for them to fob you off than when you are there in person," he says.

Bisknell also misses chatting to councillors or trust members in person before meetings and finding off-diary stories.

There is also less likelihood of speaking to members of the public, who might attend planning committees. "You are hoping they give you a call after reading an article, which isn't ideal," he notes.

On the other hand, there is the advantage of slipping away to do something useful when meetings drag on. "You can keep an eye on the dinner or make a cup of tea," Bisknell says.

Providing he had personal numbers of officers and councillors, it was easier to reach contacts who, at that time, were also working from home. "It helped everyone was in the same position," he says. "There was a bonding experience."

At JPI's Media's 23 weekly titles in the home counties, it was decided a few days before lockdown was declared on March 23 that all staff should work from home. "The IT was all in place," says editorial director David Summers. "We were familiar with [some] people working from home, but it was slightly different to have everybody doing it."

News teams generally hold video conferences twice a day via Google Meet, while managers typically meet every morning. Summers is full of praise for the way journalists have coped and adapted. "The level of quality and coverage has been superb," he adds.

Readers also welcomed the quality of reporting with businesses appreciative of campaigns to support local economies. As summer rolled on, reporters were more likely to leave home and report (at a safe distance) as communities returned to something resembling normality. "We pick and choose what jobs we go out for, and make sure they're done safely," says Summers.

So, has the quality of reporting suffered because of lockdown? With journalists less likely to attend news briefings and other media events, there can be more opportunity for government and other organisations to manipulate news.

While Palmer began attending royal engagements again over the summer, he noticed Buckingham Palace was controlling the flow of information more than before. This included placing embargoes on stories and not allowing video clips to be shown until they were two days old.

Even when the press is invited to a royal event, there are far fewer reporters and photographers present, and fewer chances to pick up tips from colleagues and press officers, Palmer adds.

May Bulman, social affairs correspondent at The Independent, also misses attending press launches and meeting contacts. While many events are broadcast on Zoom, this has pros and cons. "You save time going to places and just log in, but you don't have the same networking opportunities,"

Pick your platform

WHAT is the best way of keeping in contact with colleagues when the office is out of bounds? Thanks to technology, there is a lot of choice.

Along with Zoom, WhatsApp and Teams, options include Google Hangouts and Slack.

"It's a question of finding a platform to communicate, but not having too many," says Steve Bird of the Financial Times. "If you have too many choices, it becomes a headache."

Staff on JPI Media titles in the home counties use Google Meet for social

events as well as news conferences.

The 'virtual pub', which runs quiz nights, was popular at the start of lockdown, as people had limited opportunities to go out in the evening.

"The virtual pub is a nice way of keeping teams connected," says David Summers, JPI's regional editorial director.

she says. "You can spend all day staring at a screen."

In July, the Evening Standard began a campaign for Londoners to return to their offices. Editor Emily Sheffield tweeted that, at the Standard, staff were sitting two desks apart, working on a rota basis and wearing masks in public areas.

But a Press Gazette survey in August found nearly half of journalists did not expect to return to the newsroom this year, if at all. A staff survey at The Independent showed that journalists would split their time between the office and home. "It makes sense to have some flexibility," says Bulman.

Calls for flexible working are likely to increase significantly in the months ahead.

At the FT, about 20 per cent of staff were expected to start working from the office from the start of October. "There is no expectation that anyone will be asked to return, other than on a voluntary basis," says Steve Bird.

While home working is a challenge as well as a major change in journalism and other professions, journalists are now accustomed to working remotely.

So maybe there will be fewer daily commutes in future, more stories filed from bedrooms, and further opportunities to relax in the garden before it gets dark. Palmer says: "The argument that you need a bank of reporters based in the office is becoming less valid."





Where the news takes centre stage

Simon Creasey looks at the rise of an interactive approach to telling news stories

Media organisations are constantly on the lookout for innovative ways of telling stories, to attract new audiences and build engagement with them.

The internet opened up all manner of different opportunities to enrich storytelling by embedding audio, video, photography and interactive data and graphics. One of the latest storytelling tools is 'live journalism' events, which place the emphasis on the spoken word.

Some of these events take place in a physical space such as a theatre, whereas others are held online. With widespread lockdowns caused by the coronavirus pandemic, many organisers of the physical events have had to switch to online-only.

A growing number of media organisations across the globe now organise live journalism events, many of which sell out as soon as tickets go on sale.

So what's fuelling this movement and what's in it for the journalists who participate in them?

The trailblazer in the live journalism space is US-based Pop-Up Magazine. This 'live magazine' was founded in the late 2000s by a group of California-based journalists. Just a few hundred people attended the early shows, but last year Pop-Up Magazine embarked on a nationwide sell-out tour of the US and performed to a live audience of about 35,000

Raising the curtain

POP-UP Magazine took journalism live 11 years ago when it was set up by Douglas McGray, Evan Ratliff, Derek Fagerstrom and Lauren Smith.

"Doug had come from a print journalism background, and later started dabbling in some radio production," explains Anita Badejo, executive editor and co-host.

"He found it odd that, at the time, his friends who were writers didn't know his friends who were radio producers, and vice versa. He wanted to find a way to foster collaboration and interaction between different types of storytellers.

"So, he, Evan, Derek, and Lauren came up with the idea of a 'live magazine' that would feature journalists working in different mediums – writing,

filmmaking, radio, photography, art – coming together to tell stories on stage in a theatre."

The first show was at a 300-seat theatre in San Francisco; today Pop-Up Magazine tours the country three times a year and performs in 1,600-3,000 seat venues. Contributors are paid, with everyone given an "honorarium" based on the length and complexity of their story, which is multiplied by the number of shows they appear in (most storytellers tour with the show).

As for the question of why live journalism events are becoming so popular, Badejo thinks there are a few reasons.

"The most obvious is that it's a relatively new and exciting potential source of revenue for media

companies at a time when everyone is trying to figure out how to sustain journalism as a business," she says.

"It's also a way to reach new audiences, in addition to engaging your existing audience more directly. It offers a platform for journalists to elevate their profiles and gain followers.

"But the biggest thing that I've observed in my time at Pop-Up is that it can be a much more human way of connecting journalists to audiences, and audiences to stories."



people. During the lockdown, Pop-Up has moved to providing online-only content.

Pop-Up Magazine events typically last for about 100 minutes and consist of 9-10 short stories that last around 7-10 minutes, told by writers, filmmakers, photographers, radio producers and illustrators. The stories are brought to life using photographs, films, illustrations and animations and are accompanied by a live soundtrack composed and performed onstage by an orchestra.

Most of the other live journalism events around the world were inspired by Pop-Up Magazine, according to Jaakko Lyytinen, a feature writer at Finland's largest national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, who also produces the paper's own live journalism show The Black Box.

Lyytinen is a journalist fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, where he is investigating the rise of live journalism. He thinks there are several reasons behind the growing popularity of these events.

"We spend so much time with various digital devices that there is an urgent need to go out, meet people and attend live events like music gigs, the theatre and so on," he says.

"I think there is a strong appeal to that. The other thing is this new means [of reporting] is gaining popularity because it is using the most appealing way of telling stories, which is face-to-face – a campfire-type thing. There is more trustworthiness when stories are delivered on stage and there is a lot more impact and power in live storytelling than in reading or even podcasts."

He adds that, crucially, what these events are also doing is helping to rebuild the general public's faith in the media.

"We are carrying out a survey on live journalism at the moment and we've already seen that people feel this is building a new kind of trust and reducing distance between the audience and journalists," says Lyytinen.

"We as journalists have not been very good at speaking about how we do these things and why they matter. We have relied on people to read our stories and news and to trust us, but there is a lot of mistrust towards the media at the moment because of fake news, and there is populist aggression towards the media as well. Live journalism is a new means of rebuilding that trust and therefore it has a strong appeal."

It's too early to say with any degree of accuracy what the general public's appetite for live events will be in a post-pandemic world but, given how easily many organisations have been able to switch physical gatherings to the virtual world, it looks like live journalism events could be here to stay.

Exclusive promises

THE BLACK BOX live journalism event is organised by Finland's largest national newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat.

According to Jaakko Lyytinen, a feature writer who works as a producer on the event, the idea came about around five years ago after a member of staff who was on a scholarship in California attended a Pop-Up Magazine show in LA.

She was inspired by what she saw and suggested the newspaper produce its own version.

The first event took place in February 2016 and rapidly found a large audience.

Today, the paper puts on two shows a year on the

main stage of the national theatre in Finland and has played to an audience of around 25,000 people. Each show typically consists of eight 'performers' from the paper talking for around 15 minutes on a host of subjects.

"We tend to go for fresh stories," says Lyytinen. "Our



promise to the audience is you will see and hear something that's not been published before."

Stories are enriched by visuals and sound effects, and the performers are given coaching in public speaking by a vocal coach.

Lyytinen says curation of the event's content is considered in the same way an editor would approach editorial decisions for the paper's print edition.

"Our show always has a political story, an international story, there is always something about culture and there's always a human interest story.

"So it's a bit like a newspaper where you come across different sections that you might skip across if you were reading – but you cannot skip them if you're in a theatre."

Open up

TORTOISE MEDIA hosts regular ThinkIns – described as 'open-source editorial conferences' by partner Tessa Murray.

An 'open newsroom committed to slower, wiser news' co-founded by former head of BBC News James Harding, Tortoise Media gained nearly 20,000 members within six months of its launch last year.

It hosts regular live ThinkIns for members and non-members and, during

the pandemic, has been hosting digital ThinkIns.

"We're gathering input from a wider group of people that will then feed into our journalism at some point later down the line," says Murray.

She cites the recent example of a story Tortoise ran about sexual assaults on a university campus. A ThinkIn attendee spoke about her own experience the previous summer and

the Tortoise editorial team followed it up.

"What we're really trying to do is narrow the gap between people whose voices aren't being heard or represented in news and people who have too much of a concentration of the share of voice," says Murray.

"It's bringing together a variety of views in a room to help inform our position and also our editorial output."



Good stories in 3D



THE LIVE MAGAZINE journalism show, which has taken place in six countries and 17 cities across Europe, was also inspired by Pop-Up Magazine, says Florence Martin-Kessler, its founder chief executive.

She met Pop-Up Magazine co-founder Douglas McGray when she was a journalism fellow at Harvard.

She says the events, which play to packed audiences, are all about "good stories that are well researched and well told".

Live Magazine tries to make stories as '3D' as possible. "We spend a lot of time on stories

to try and make them the best they can be," says Martin-Kessler. "We augment them with audio and visuals or we find some other idea to make them shine on stage."

In the past, Live Magazine has even used dancers to enrich stories.

The events normally see 10-12 people speak for 6-10

minutes on a variety of subjects. The Live Magazine team usually commission people to perform stories, but are also receptive to ideas suggested to them.

Martin-Kessler says performers are paid anything between €200 and €2,000 "depending on the show and the work needed".

GIVE US A CLUE!

Jonathan Sale fills in the blank squares on the origin of a classic brainteaser (9 letters)

It is practically a century since the Sunday [clue A: fast like a train, 7 letters] became the first British newspaper to publish a crossword. Since then, this species of brainteaser has generated many cross words from the lips of baffled readers – none crosser than the exclamations uttered by shocked MI5 agents in the run-up to the D-Day invasion as they stared at the disturbing crossword in the Daily Telegraph.

“One of the USA – 4 letters” was an innocent-sounding clue. It clearly referred to one of the states and “Utah” fitted nicely – yet unpleasantly also. It was the codename of a beach selected for one of the landings, as was “Omaha” – and that came up too. The increasingly spooked spooks realised that “Mulberry” was another clue’s solution – and the codename for the floating harbour to be towed across the Channel for supply ships.

A crossword in the paper a few days later was even more devastating, containing as it did “Neptune”, which was how D-Day planners referred to the naval support involved in the landings. To cap it all, Carruthers the answer to the innocent-sounding “Big-Wig 8 letters” was “overlord”, the hush-hush term chosen by (clue B: cigar-smoking Second World War leader, 9 letters) as the name of the entire operation.

Was this a spy’s way, hidden in plain sight, of passing on secrets to the [clue C: don’t mention the war to them? 7 letters] about the invasion? MI5 found out the identity of the compiler and sent their best two agents to feel his collar. Why had he picked on these particular five words? they demanded an answer from 54-year-old teacher Leonard Dawe of Leatherhead, Surrey.

“Why not?” replied Dawe. Was there some emergency legislation rationing certain words?

Realising that this was not a one-man spy ring but a pure coincidence (think of monkeys typing Shakespeare) the agents left Leonard and Leatherhead in peace and D-Day remained safely under wraps.

Who knows? Crosswords might have been a top-hole way of smuggling top-secret information out of the country, for they had been a familiar feature in newspapers since the first “word-cross” (as it was briefly known) appeared in the New York World on December 21 1913. Compiled by Englishman Arthur Wynne (pictured above right), who worked in the paper’s “tricks and jokes” department, this taxed few brain cells: “a boy, 3 letters” was “lad” and “animal of prey, 4 letters,” led to “lion”.

Cryptic and crafty

WHAT is a ‘cryptic’ crossword? In 1925, readers of the Saturday Westminster learnt the hard way from the first contribution by a compiler who had adopted the name of ‘Torquemada’, the Señor Big of the Spanish Inquisition.

“Puns, anagrams, rare literary illusions and downright unsporting tricks,” snapped of one of those who ventured into the verbal torture chamber.

“Puns and anagrams,” agrees Richard Josephy, former deputy head teacher (and my brother-in-law).

“Wordplay and very clever ‘sideways’ definitions,” he adds. “In most weeks, I finish all five cryptic crosswords in the Guardian.”

Many clues in an ordinary crossword have several possible answers (‘tree - 3 letters’ might be ‘elm’ or ‘ash’) but a cryptic clue will have just one that fits

Crosswords crossed the Atlantic in 1924 on a Thursday in late October when a young American walked into the Newspaper Features agency in London EC4 and pitched the idea. He showed some examples which he had compiled.

“I was not impressed with the puzzle,” was the instant response of the journalist he met, CW Shepherd, who judged that it was just a variation on the centuries-old acrostic in which one reads down several lines of type to pick out letters making a word or expression. This, he thought, would never catch on in Britain, but curious as to why it was a big deal in the US, he agreed to take a look at his visitor’s efforts.

As he related in his memoir *Let’s Walk Down Fleet Street*, Shepherd was highly intrigued by the mysterious black and white squares of the “Crosswords” (he graces them with a capital C) on his two-hour commute home. Just as intrigued on the way back on the Friday morning, he took them round to the editor of the Sunday Express.

“They are merely a new form of acrostic,” was the verdict but the editor too agreed to take the “puzzles” home overnight. On Saturday morning an Express executive rang Shepherd: “They’re absolutely fascinating. We’ll buy half a dozen and start with one in tomorrow’s paper. By the way,” he added, “it has the word ‘honor’ in it, spelt in the American way. You might just take it back and Anglicise it. And hurry up with it.”

It was only when the overjoyed Shepherd sat down with the 49 squares (seven ‘horizontals’ by seven ‘verticals’) that he realised the problem posed by ‘honour’, press day or no press day. As he complained later “You try yourself to put an extra letter into the middle of a Crossword.” He ended up cobbling together such a drastic reconstruction of the original that he,

you write the letter ‘C’ - the Latin for 100, of course - with the word ‘one’ underneath it, you get the answer ‘cone’.

All this is well above the pay grade of anyone who struggles to fill in an ordinary crossword.

However, even Josephy is defeated by the specially extra-cryptic crosswords of Azed in the Observer.

“I have glanced at them but never done one,” he says. “Fiendish”

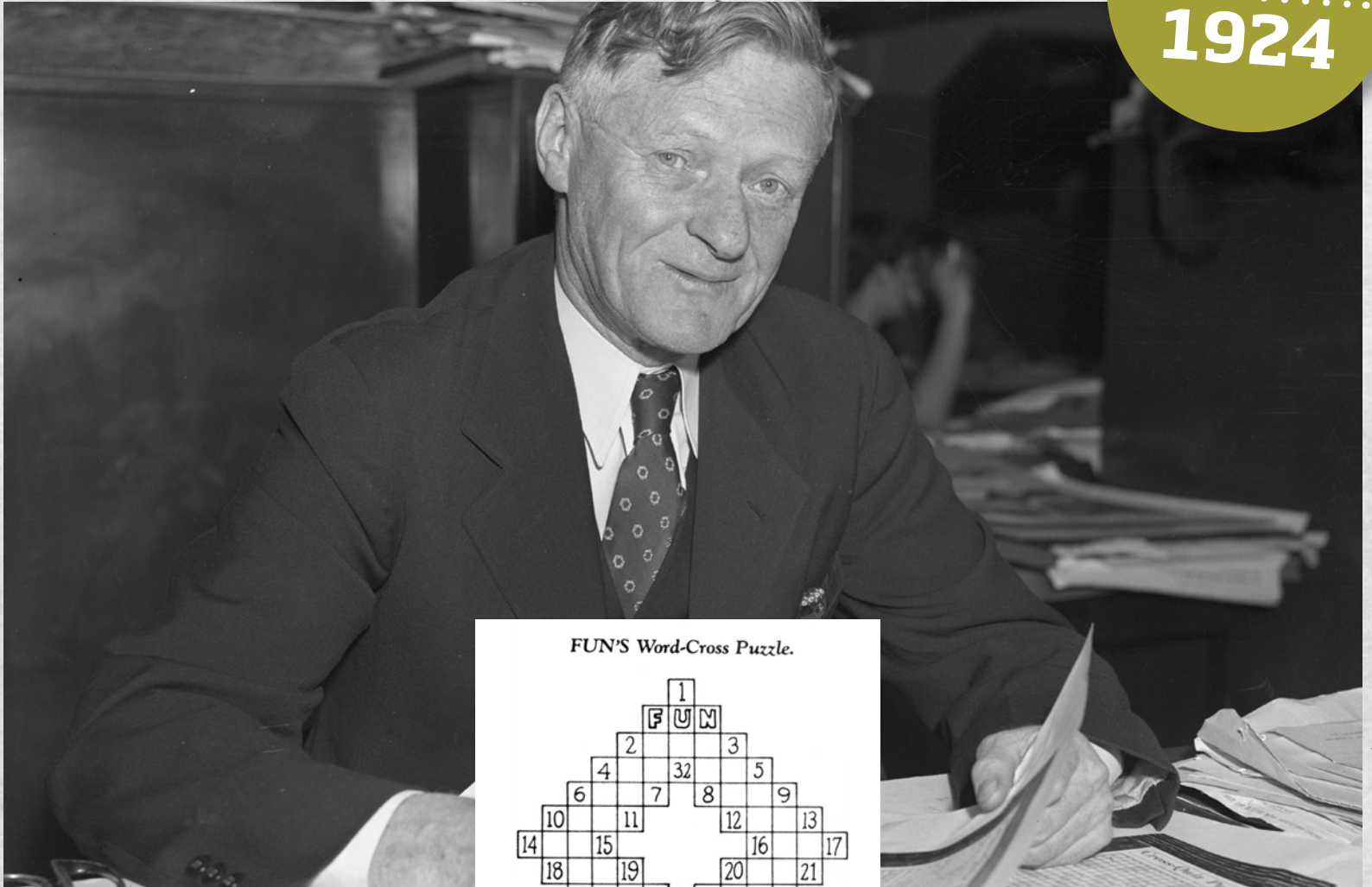
the bill.

Josephy gives two recent examples. ‘Top of Amazon is wet - 3, 4 and 6 letters.’

A top is something a woman could wear, such as a blouse, while an Amazon is probably a big girl.

This suggests the politically incorrect expression ‘big girl’s blouse’ - someone who is a bit wet.

And: ‘One under 100 could be 99 - 4 letters.’ This is a ‘down’ clue, so if



SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

FUN'S Word-Cross Puzzle.

FILL in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions:

<p>2-3. What bargain hunters enjoy.</p> <p>4-5. A written acknowledgment.</p> <p>6-7. Such and nothing more.</p> <p>10-11. A bird.</p> <p>14-15. Opposed to less.</p> <p>18-19. What this puzzle is.</p> <p>22-23. An animal of prey.</p> <p>26-27. The close of a day.</p> <p>28-29. To elude.</p> <p>30-31. The plural of is.</p> <p>8-9. To cultivate.</p> <p>12-13. A bar of wood or iron.</p> <p>16-17. What artists learn to do.</p> <p>20-21. Fastened.</p> <p>24-25. Found on the seashore.</p>	<p>10-18. The fibre of the gomuti palm.</p> <p>6-22. What we all should be.</p> <p>4-26. A day dream.</p> <p>2-11. A talon.</p> <p>19-28. A pigeon.</p> <p>F-7. Part of your head.</p> <p>23-30. A river in Russia.</p> <p>1-32. To govern.</p> <p>33-34. An aromatic plant.</p> <p>N-8. A fist.</p> <p>24-31. To agree with.</p> <p>3-12. Part of a ship.</p> <p>20-29. One.</p> <p>5-27. Exchanging.</p> <p>9-25. Sunk in mud.</p> <p>13-21. A boy.</p>
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SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

instead of the unknown American, is now credited with being the first compiler of a British newspaper crossword.

Most of the clues had three-letter answers, such as 1 across, 'A coin (slang)' which I'd say is a very British 'bob', while 4 across was 'A tree', so I'd guess 'ash'. The word 'honour', or even 'honor', does not appear.

Primitive though the result was, the readers of the *Sunday Express* of November 2 1924 were, in the words of the delighted executive, "all over it". So too were other nationals, which rapidly developed their own crosswords. Newspaper Features went on to provide a supply to provincial papers in the form of blocks or papier mâché matrices for ease of slipping onto printing presses. The rest is newspaper [clue D: time past, 7].

Early in 1930, the top brass of *The Times*, which was fighting a circulation war with the *Telegraph*, decided that, like its rival, *The Thunderer* would find a crossword to be a useful weapon.

"My son Adrian can do that," declared associate editor Robert Bell. And so he did. Adrian Bell, farmer, author of 20 books and father of BBC foreign correspondent Martin Bell, compiled the paper's first crossword and the second and, indeed, every single one until other

hands were signed up to share the load, finally creating many thousands of them.

Martin recalls his reactions as a boy: "I looked at them and couldn't understand the connection between the clues and the answers." (Adults often feel that too.) His first contribution to journalism was going to post his father's copy for *The Times*.

Later, he made crosswords but with only the answers done. Clues, which were the tricky part, were then devised by Adrian.

Bell's clues became more cryptic (see box).

Even Sir Max Beerbohm, literary giant and author of the novel [clue E: Oxford students make a splash, 7 and 6], was increasingly flummoxed. As revenge, he produced what he described as "a crossword puzzle with clues signifying nothing – nothing whatsoever", such as 'Nudist's aunt? 6 letters'. *The Times* printed it, the ultimate crossword. Confusingly, six of the clues genuinely did have solutions but readers didn't know which they were.

A yet more extreme version of the clueless clue was described in *The Times* by the late Miles Kington (before he took his humorous column to *The Independent*). Kington and fellow members of the Instant Sunshine band entertained themselves by doing the *Daily Mirror* quiz – without being given the complete clues.

"Who was the first man to blank the blank?" The team replied, "Captain Webb", who was indeed the first man to swim the Channel. Then came: "What are the young of the blank known as?" "Sardines?" "No." "Elvers?" "Right." And finally, "Who was the first man to be blanked by a blank?" "Huskisson – run over by a train." Kington and his mates must have had psychic powers. Like people who do cryptic crosswords.

Answers. A: Express. B: Churchill. C: Germans. D: History. E: Zuleika Dobson

by **Tim Lezard**

arts

Film >

Hold onto your hard hats! After decades of being lost, the original tapes of a groundbreaking film about rank and file trade union organising have been found by researchers.

Builders Crack: the Movie tells the story of the London iJoint sites committee, a grassroots network of bricklayers, electricians, carpenters and painters who stood up for workers' rights against gangster bosses in the 1990s building industry
tinyurl.com/y32gtocq

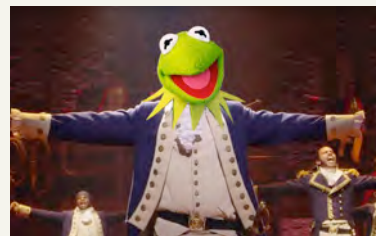


Other releases are harder to anticipate due to the coronavirus and the decision of some cinemas to close but here are three UK-based films currently scheduled for the autumn: gritty northern crime thriller Imperative, starring former rugby league star Keith Mason; London stalker story Cordelia, starring Antonia Campbell Hughes, Johnny Flynn and Michael Gambon; and London true crime caper The Duke, starring Helen Mirren and Jim Broadbent as a taxi

driver who stole a Goya portrait from the National Gallery.

Comedy >

If you missed Hamilton on the Disney Channel over the summer, here's the next best thing: Hamilton but it's Muppets. And, yes, it's as surreal as it sounds.



Recreated by YouTuber Ricky Downes III, it has Kermit in the lead role, Miss Piggy as Eliza Schuyler, the Great Gonzo is Aaron Burr and Fozzie Bear plays the marquis de LaFozette. Even Statler and Waldorf get in on the action, giving their valuable feedback. See if you can last the whole two and a half hours.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZzDP-vQXao

Long-term NUJ member and former stand-up comedian Simon Hardeman gets in touch to plug his new audio comedy, Hancock's Lockdown, in which he imagines what would happen if Tony Hancock and Sid James self-isolated together.

"It was recorded and produced entirely under lockdown," Simon says, "so it's something of a technical triumph as well as being entertaining."
tinyurl.com/y/7bfmfff



TV >

Gaining inspiration from, well, I'll let you decide who, why not catch up with Sky Atlantic's satirical drama Succession as media magnate Logan (Brian Cox) steps back from the family business?

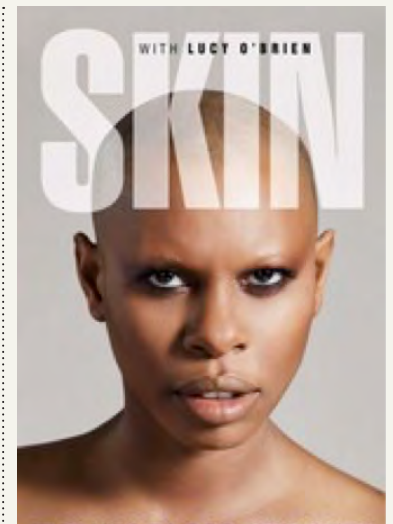
Books >

With all the uncertainty about live performances, I'm on safer ground plugging books that will definitely be published in the autumn.

A decade on from How To Be A Woman, Times columnist Caitlin Moran returns with More Than a Woman, a manifesto for change and celebration of all those middle-aged women who keep the world turning.

Moran made her name writing for Melody Maker as a teenager, when she may have crossed paths with rockers Skunk Anansie, led by singer Skin. Skin has written a memoir – It Takes Blood and Guts – which tells how a black, working-class girl with a vision fought poverty and prejudice to become one of the most influential women in British rock.

NUJ member Owen Jones and best-selling author of Chavs and The Establishment returns with This Land, a reflection on Corbynism



and last year's general election, answering the question: where does the Left – and Britain – go next?

George Orwell was also an NUJ member and Penguin is this autumn bringing out four new volumes of his writing, cannily mixing his feature-length books with shorter essays addressing the same subjects – Spain, poverty in England and the dispossessed – with powerful political essays and journalism.

Alternative histories are in fashion (see Sky Atlantic's Plot Against America) so here's novelist Curtis Sittenfeld imagining what if Hillary hadn't met Bill. In what's been described as 'the sliding doors of American politics', Rodham sees Sittenfeld doing for Hillary Clinton what she did for Laura Bush in American Wife. Finally, even if you never got into Wolf Hall trilogy – and why not? – surely this book's title alone is worthy of a place on your mantelpiece. A collection of essays and memoirs from the twice Booker prizewinner Hilary Mantel - Mantel Pieces - addresses issues as diverse as Jane Boleyn, Christopher Marlowe and Britain's last recorded witch.

Spotlight >

A struggle to survive on stage

THEATRES and other performing arts venues largely remain closed because it's uneconomic for them to play to socially distanced audiences and to fund extra safety measures to be covid compliant.

Andrew Lloyd Webber, David Tennant and other leading figures have issued dire warnings about the survival prospects for the industry if moves are not made to ensure that shows can be profitable again.

The first socially distanced gig, when Frank Turner performed in front of 200 people at the 1,250-capacity Clapham Grand in south London in July, was deemed a financial failure.

Turner wrote: "The

promoter had to double the number of staff working to meet all the guidelines. There was no talent spend (I didn't get paid), and no

advertising spend (the show sold out pretty much straight away), and yet it still lost money."

You can help by donating to the Music Venue Trust (<https://saveourvenues.co.uk>), Save Live Comedy (<https://savelivecomedy.co.uk>) and the Theatre Artists' Fund (<https://tinyurl.com/yykfq5mn>).





TechDownload

Nicholas Fearn on technology for journalists

byte size...

LISTEN AT A LOWER COST ...

While Apple's AirPods dominate the wireless headphones market, not everyone wants to pay more than £150. The Huawei Free Buds 3i are cheaper at £89.99, offer noise cancellation, 10mm large dynamic drivers for great sound quality, silicon buds in four sizes, capacitive sensors for tap control, three microphones and 3.5 hours of battery life.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxhr2ten>

... OR FOR EVEN LESS WITH BLUETOOTH

If you want to spend even less on wireless headphones but still want decent quality, Umi Essentials Bluetooth Wireless Headphones are a great choice. Costing just £39.98, they have in-ear design, last up to six hours, come with a charging case, are protected against rain and sweat, take one hour to charge and have a connection range of 33 feet. The charging case comes in grey, red and gold.

[Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk), £39.98

SCREEN YOUR EYES FROM GLARE

We spend a lot of our time staring at screens, whether on a laptop, tablet or smartphone. Prolonged device use can result in a range of health problems, including eye strain, sleep deprivation, headaches and vision-related issues. To address this, Ocushield provides screen protectors that protect your eyes when you use digital products. They are available for smartphones, tablets and laptops.

[Ocushield.com](https://www.ocushield.com)

FROM IPAD TO LAPTOP

For years, people have been asking if Apple's iPad Pro could replace a laptop. The simple answer has been 'no' because the American tech company has never offered a keyboard case with a trackpad.

Now, with the Magic Keyboard for iPad Pro, that has changed. Attached magnetically, it effectively turns your iPad into a fully fledged Macbook by adding a keyboard with backlit keys and a fitted trackpad.

With cursor control, you can navigate your iPad and highlight items as when using a Macbook. The keyboard sports a so-called 'floating cantilevered design', which Apple claims will enable 'smooth adjustments of the viewing angle up to 130 degrees'.



It's been designed for use on your lap and flat surfaces. There is also a smart security feature. Whenever you close the keyboard, it disables your iPad's microphones to protect audio data from being compromised.

The Magic Keyboard isn't cheap, starting at £299. However, it is worth considering if you're an iPad Pro user and want the full laptop experience. It works with both the 2018 and 2020 iPad Pro models.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxqy9rop>

> Backpack for your kit

Journalists often do a lot of travelling, so it makes sense to have a good backpack for your various gadgets. If you're looking for something that's

both stylish and practical, the STM Myth is one to consider.

The bag is packed with a range of features, including SlingTech Protection. This keeps your laptop from touching the

bottom and sides of the bag so it doesn't get damaged if you drop it.

Other nifty additions include a cable routing system, a back panel that ensures weight is distributed equally, a dedicated pocket for AirPods and an

earbud holder. It also has a water-repellent coating, and you can attach it to other pieces of luggage.

Costing £99.95, it is available in 18L or 28L versions and comes in three colours.

www.amazon.co.uk

Charts made easy

Data is essential for backing up claims but analysing and visualising figures requires skills and time. However, using Gyana's no-code Vayu platform, you can upload, manage, present and share data with a few clicks. Gyana, a London-based start-up, says Vayu can be used to analyse social media, news and research reports "effortlessly". Users can choose from a range of charts, graphs and maps to visualise data before sharing it with others. A free version is available.

www.gyana.co.uk/vayu

SHOW THE DATA ADDS UP

CONNECT WELL AT HOME

With people increasingly working from home and using a myriad of devices, connectivity could not be more important.

For remote workers, mobile phones accessories manufacturer Juice has launched a great WFH bundle. Costing £36.38, it offers three Juice products that the firm says have been "put together for maximum connectivity".

The bundle includes a 3-in-1 cable with USB-type C, lightning and micro USB connectors; a 5W wireless Juice Disc charger that works with iPhone, Huawei and Samsung products; and a Juice triple charger, which can be used to charge three devices at the same time.

www.juice.co.uk/product/wfh-bundle/





Be a good listener

Listening to people ‘in crisis’ as a Samaritan helped to make me a better journalist, says **Laura Cooke**

It is coming up to 3am and most sensible people are tucked up in their beds.

Yet here I am, stuck in a stuffy office in the wrong part of town, wired up on strong coffee and relying on a massive sugar rush to stay awake as I steadily munch my way through a pile of Jammie Dodgers.

The silence is broken by a shrill ringing. I pick up the receiver and speak the familiar words: “Samaritans, can I help you?”

For three years, I helped man the phones at my branch of the Samaritans for a few hours on a Friday night, including a regular midnight to 3am shift, all on the back of a full week on the newsdesk of the local paper.

At the time, I kept quiet about volunteering for fear of dissuading someone who may need the service from calling. After all, the thought of a journalist poised on the other end of the line, pen in hand, waiting for you to pour out your fears and darkest thoughts would be enough to put some people off.

But journalists have the potential to make excellent Samaritans – we are used to asking sensitive questions, we are not easily shocked and we know how to keep secrets when it matters. We listen to people talk about their own lives and their experiences for a living. There is plenty we can bring to the role.

In turn, volunteering at the Samaritans brought a myriad of benefits, including one I wasn’t really expecting. I firmly believe being a Samaritan helped to make me a better journalist.

In case you don’t know the background to the Samaritans, the charity was set up in 1953 by London vicar Chad Varah, who came up with the idea following a funeral he conducted for a 14-year-old girl early on in his career.

The teenager had started her period but, having no one to talk to, believed she had a sexually transmitted disease and took her own life. This had a profound impact on Rev Varah, who went on to launch what he referred to as ‘999 for the suicidal’.

The Samaritans uses a lot of role play in its rigorous training programme to drive home the importance of having

“
We were told to ‘get into the pit’ with the caller, to sit alongside them, removing ourselves from the role of impartial observer

an open mind with callers. Much like when journalists carry out interviews.

But are we always as open-minded as we like to think we are? As any journalist who has been reporting for a long time knows, it can make you extremely cynical. Although this can be beneficial, it can affect our ability to listen with an open mind and in a non-judgmental way.

Sometimes we go into interviews with preconceived narratives, the roles of hero and villain already cast, looking for quotes and information to firm up our preferred angle. Sometimes there is no avoiding this – but a persistently blinkered approach can prevent us from unearthing a real gem of a story. After 12 years of reporting, the Samaritans helped me to ‘recalibrate’ my listening skills and I found I began to get more out of interviews again.

Volunteering as a Samaritan also offered an insight into issues I have reported on numerous times but have been fortunate enough not to have experienced myself.

For example, we all know mental health services are stretched and that there are serious issues within adult social care. We have likely interviewed someone who has been affected by these issues or covered an inquiry or even an inquest if things have gone wrong.

Samaritans volunteers see these issues in their rawest form. They are talking to people in the throes of crisis, people who have reached their lowest point, some of whom may intend to end their life, others who may have already taken steps to do so.

During my Samaritans’ training, we were told to ‘get into the pit’ with the caller, to sit alongside them, removing ourselves from the role of impartial observer. This process helped to give me a better understanding of how people find themselves in the most desperate of situations. As a result, I feel I am able to report on these issues more responsibly and with more compassion.

Taking calls for the Samaritans is one of the most difficult but fulfilling things that I have ever done. Although I have left the ‘frontline’ in favour of a supporting role in fundraising and marketing, some of those calls will never leave me. Nor will the weeks of rigorous training, which ultimately turned out to be some of the best journalism training I have ever had.

Andrew Draper drew on old and new skills during a vigorous campaign



Saving my A&E

When a campaign sprang up to save my local hospital's accident and emergency department in Llantrisant, south Wales, I decided to offer my journalistic services.

I believed downgrading the department would result in needless deaths. I thought I could help drum up some media coverage and help put pressure on the health board into backing down.

I contacted Len Arthur, chair of the Campaign to Save Royal Glamorgan Hospital A&E, and offered to help with public relations. He readily accepted. Little did I know what I was letting myself in for.

The campaign was ballooning. A Facebook group was set up on the Sunday and, within days, had 10,000 members. A noisy protest at the board's meeting on the Thursday, organised at very short notice, drew more than 400 activists with home-made banners and placards. Many had never protested about anything before but felt passionate about defending this public service.

Within a fortnight of starting up, the Facebook group had 19,000 members,

posters and leaflets were being distributed and displayed, banners were being hung at strategic traffic points and orange ribbons and bows were being snapped up like hot cakes. Local trade unions offered practical and financial support. The campaign lobbied politicians, the Welsh Government and health board officials.

We had gained a strong presence on Facebook and on the streets, and community organisations began declaring support. A petition throughout the Rhondda Cynon Taf area – deliberately on paper to involve those not online – attracted more than 24,000 signatures. That was quite an achievement during a pandemic when we all had to stay at home.

Initially, I made sure statements and flyers were proofread. When someone between us and the printers unhelpfully edited some leaflets, I had to step in and correct them. I soon earned the nickname 'Andrew the Grammar'.

The local media were showing a keen interest, so it was essential we shaped the message. The campaign had clearly defined its aim: 'The permanent retention at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital of a 24-hour consultant-led

emergency department.' This went on every media statement we sent out.

Five south Wales health boards had devised the South Wales Plan in 2014, which was driven by austerity. The Royal Glamorgan A&E had been run down gradually and, with the final permanent A&E consultant due to retire, the board saw few options: closure and conversion to a minor injuries unit or reduction to a part-time facility.

I trained as a print journalist and, since 1990, my wife and I have run our own business, Nordic International. Journalism is at the heart of it, along with translation services. Like many journalists, I have done PR work, but never anything quite like this campaign.

Six months later, I was fielding calls from the BBC, ITV, Walesonline and the local media. I helped arrange interviews with people with powerful stories of how the A&E had saved their lives. A campaign strength was having someone gathering case studies. I also stood in for a live interview with ITV as the chair was shielding and vice-chair was unavailable.

Our media statements were, towards the end, going out in English and Welsh, the translation of which I arranged. I also ensured Welsh speakers were available for interview. One was my children's former school teacher. I had to reassure her that her pandemic hair really was OK when going on TV.

Along with the rest of our fantastic organisers' group, I was pumping engaging posts to our Facebook group. When the health board finally decided to withdraw their plans, I drew on my news agency experience and was banging out the story in short takes. The Facebook group was going wild with delight at this rarest of victories.

One of the highlights of the campaign for me as a journalist was when I called for a shout out and thank you to the journalists (some of whom were in the Facebook group) for helping to tell our story. It was very heartening to see so many members of the public thanking journalists for their work.

During lockdown, I went on Dan Mason's course on how to shoot and edit video on the iPhone, organised via NUJ Training Wales. It came in very handy – I immediately started producing social media campaign videos.

In all, it was a tremendous campaign that will go down in local history, and I was proud to have played my small part in it.



It was very heartening to see so many members of the public thanking journalists for their work





Your Say...

inviting letters, comments, tweets

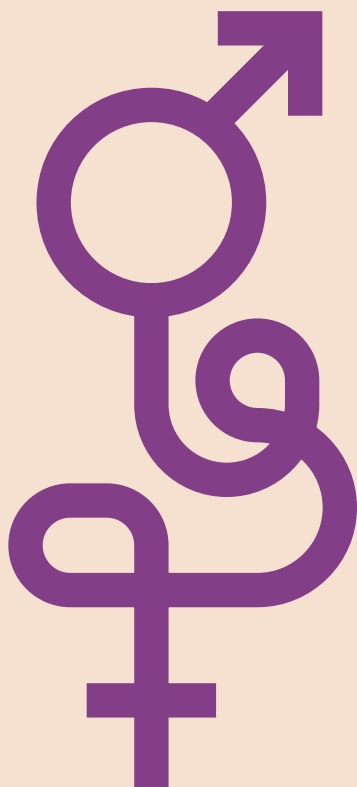


Please keep comments to 250 words maximum

Email to: journalist@nuj.org.uk
Post to: The Journalist, 72 Acton Street, London WC1X 9NB
Tweet to: @mschrisbuckley



DENIS CARRIER



Transgender guide blocks fair, accurate reporting...

The NUJ code of conduct's first rule states that a journalist "at all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed". The second rule states that reporting should be honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.

Reporting of cases such as White's (Fair reporting and transgender trials, August/September) cannot adhere to these rules until Ipsos's biased guidelines are ditched; they are inimical to fair and accurate journalism.

Rape is a sex offence carried out by males against females and other men. Telling the public – because of Ipsos guidance – a male rapist used 'her' penis to penetrate a woman obfuscates the issue and misinforms readers by pandering to the feelings of the rapist over those of his victim. To demand that such a male be referred to as if he were female is compelled speech and obscuring his sex can only be offensive to the victim and most of the public.

Alan Henness
London

my own trade union activism but is a piece of journalism for which I intentionally sought the opinions of transgender journalists.

You cannot call a lost election a success

Re "Sympathetic writers' do not help Labour cause" (Your Say, August/September). Roy Jones writes of "Corbyn's successful 2017 general election campaign". It wasn't successful. He lost. There are no prizes for coming second in UK general elections.

Simon Hardeman
London Freelance Branch

Stalwart who kept a diverse branch united

I was sorry to read of the death of Sidney Rennert (Obituaries, August/September page 18). Sidney was a stalwart of the Press and PR Branch for many years.

As our secretary, he kept together a group of journalists who plied their trade on behalf of organisations as diverse as the TUC (where I worked), the CBI, political parties, public companies, local authorities, nationalised industries, pressure groups and charities.

Yet it was in part thanks to Sidney's skills that the branch was never beset by the factionalism that plagued some of the other London branches in the 1970s and 1980s.

Sidney was kind, gentle and welcoming to newcomers like myself. He had a fund of stories from his time on the industrial beat and, as his son Jonathan rightly says in his obituary, Sidney brought his reporting skills to the world of investment analysis – he did so not by poring over figures but by asking a company's executive what he thought of the current share price and reporting what he said – a practice that would be frowned on these days.

I fear I became the subject of one of Sidney's stories when, as a new and precocious chair of the branch, I asked one of the senior members whether he

... but has protected highly vulnerable people

Prejudiced reporting of transgender men and women has real-world consequences, as I know from personal experience as the son of a transwoman who, together with her immediate family, was massively damaged by negative media representation. That was in the early 1970s. Today the situation is much improved, thanks in part to editorial guidelines and transparent lobbying from the likes of Trans Media Watch.

As a member of the NUJ equality council in 2014, I was responsible for the union's transgender reporting guidelines. Much background work went into that document, which was

well received by reporters looking to resist management pressures to produce sensationalist material. Various individuals and groups both within and without the union contributed to the discussion, including specialists in journalism ethics.

I find it odd that an NUJ activist writing in an NUJ journal makes only passing reference to the union's own guidelines, and chooses not to discuss the matter with the current equality and ethics councils. Reporting guidelines are problematic for a number of reasons not outlined in Rachel Broady's article but the NUJ and Ipsos efforts have, arguably, contributed to an improvement in media portrayals of highly vulnerable people.

The situation in 2020 has degenerated markedly, in my view due to a combination of hysterical 'debate' in antisocial media and the cynicism of media owners and editors for whom controversy and sensation sells product.

Dr Francis Sedgemore
Former member of NUJ Equality Council

Dr Rachel Broady writes:

The article considers what guidance is available to journalists, including those not members of the NUJ, when navigating a difficult and emotional subject. I referred to a number of available guidelines, including the NUJ's current guidelines, to inform that discussion. The article was not part of

was challenging my ruling. When forced to admit he was, Sidney, as secretary, knew what was required and put the issue to the vote without further debate. My ruling was upheld, peace restored and Sidney felt quietly pleased with himself.

**Mike Smith
Settle**

Identity of accurate, exotic astrologer revealed...

Jonathan Sale's anecdote about the astrologer being unaware of her impending sacking (Written in the stars, August/September) echoes the apocryphal classified ad: 'Saturday's clairvoyant meeting in the town hall has been cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances'.

Back in the 1980s, a revamped midweek edition of the Surrey Comet

was launched – the Kingston Star. Its astrologer was Giacometa. It sounded exotic, incorporated the parent paper's name and was accompanied by a byline picture of a dishevelled fairground fortune teller.

It was actually written by one of the regular sport contributors. If his copy was late, the rest of us in the newsroom would conjure up the dozen prophecies. Gratifyingly, Giacometa regularly received letters praising her prognosticating skills.

**Tim Harrison
Editor, The Good Life**

... while the wrong sort of fake astrology gets spiked

Jonathan Sale's feature on newspaper astrology (August/September) reminded of my brief (about 15 minutes) career as an astrologer.

"Many years ago, I worked for a contract publisher that produced staff newspapers, including one for a catalogue sales firm."

Compilation of its horoscope, far from being informed by the movements of heavenly bodies, was a tedious chore passed round the office and only the most innocuous prophecies were allowed.

My attempt to enliven this with predictions like 'your head will fall off this month' were for some inexplicable reason deleted by the editor.

**Mark Smulian
London Freelance Branch**

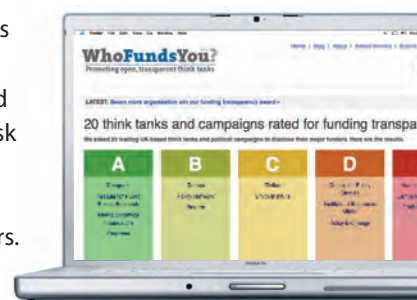


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STEVE BELL

THE OWNERS



and finally...

Alien lizards in Covid conspiracy shocks



Chris Proctor unmasks the Marsians at the Tattle of Trafalgar

David Icke was a reporter with Leicester locals, Newsnight and Breakfast Time before he slipped my mind and apparently misplaced his own. Last month, he returned to the spotlight as a star speaker at a rally in Trafalgar Square. He was urging ‘no more lockdowns’ and ‘no to vaccinations’. He was especially incensed about face masks – items, he hyperventilated, sported only by ‘sheeple’.

His reservations about Covid-19 are based on his conviction that it is all a hoax, overflowing mortuaries notwithstanding. He maintains that the deception was organised by extraterrestrial reptiles, the Archons (or possibly the Anunnaki), who arrived on earth 6,000 years ago.

All well and good, but then he also believes the royal family are lizards. I know Prince Andrew is giving Icke all the support he can on this one but I still feel it’s unlikely.

Amazingly, his 10,000-odd audience listened to him without visibly cackling. But then I fear not all the assembled anti-lockdown protesters were of rational bent. I was especially concerned for the folk grouped around the flag of the British Union of Fascists.

Yes, fascists demanding liberty. Isn’t that a little like vegetarians insisting on their steaks tartare? The Mosleyites demand for freedom was nicely encapsulated by the attendee who pointed out: “Everyone can’t go to pop concerts until Boris Johnson says so.”

So they want the right to do exactly as they please. Equally, they seek a society with a leader who will force

them to do precisely what he tells them. It must be terribly difficult being a fascist. I’m honestly not convinced it’s worth the bother.

Jeremy Corbyn’s troublesome brother Piers (I blame the parents) was arrested for the third time since lockdown began and fined £10,000. The first time he was pinched was in May at a protest against 5G, which he considers a more likely cause of the virus than visiting aliens. He’s not without his shrewd side, Piers.

NUJ members were also in attendance, writing stories and getting the pictures. They stuck out like an Anunnaki at a bar mitzvah on account of their wearing face coverings. It was a pleasant juxtaposition to see the goodies in masks and the baddies in full view. If it catches on, it should dramatically improve police detection figures.

Journalists’ responsibilities in attending events like this provoked an interesting debate on the union’s Facebook page. Some brave soul questioned whether, given the risk of spreading infection, we should refuse to turn up to mass photoshoots and spurn snapper packs. But how could we do this with our picture-focused industry constantly demanding new images? One suggestion was to allocate a single snapper to each job. But then we’d need to agree how to divvy out the fee and, far more importantly, who should take the shot.

Good luck sorting that one out. Photographers can argue for days about lighting, angles and backgrounds; and different outlets are all looking for particular images to

reinforce their take on the story. Do they want Boris with a finger up his nose or in Churchillian pose? Would they like him statesman-like or manic?

Finding a manic image was probably not tricky at Trafalgar Square. I imagine reporters were in more trouble. Why should a conspiracy theorist speak to the media when we are all manipulated from Mars? If we report that 81,000 jobs were lost in July, how do they respond?

“Who told you that?”

“The Office for National Statistics.”

“What! You believe an organisation headed by a supernatural Madagascar ground gecko?”

You can’t win. The government must have felt like that with its hokey-cokey holiday disruption scheme. I’m sure they meant well and once, I’d decided to stay at home this summer, it proved a tip-top spectator sport. It was like watching a strange game of unlucky dip. I pictured experts with a list of countries on one side of the table and a pack of cards on the other. Each country is dealt three cards and, if they get two colours, visitors have to self isolate for a fortnight. Watch out for spikes.

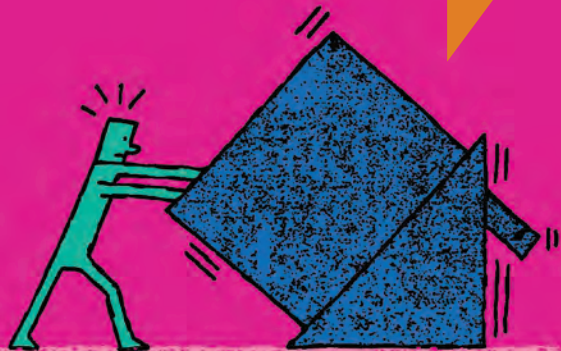
And why a ‘spike’? Isn’t a spike the thing you put middling stories onto? Or a tool favoured by Vlad the Impaler?

Incidentally, Prince Charles has frequently boasted that he is the great-grandson (16 times removed) of the skewering Vlad, through the lineage of Mary, consort of George V. The prince remains tight-lipped about speculation concerning a reptilian torso.

Lizard-fancier Mr Icke continues to monitor the situation.

“**Finding a manic image was probably not tricky. But why should a conspiracy theorist speak to reporters when we are all manipulated from Mars?**”

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