MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

# the Journalist

WWW.NUJ.ORG.UK | AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2025


## Click Chicks

Down on Page View Farm

Battery hen farming was banned in the UK 13 years ago, but many journalists now feel that the practice has migrated into our industry. They are trapped at their desks unable to go out to meet contacts (remember those days?) and pressed to produce more and more stories. They are incentivised to reach page view targets – often in the form of chickenfeed bonus payments – and can face disciplinary action or even the loss of their jobs if they don't. Our cover feature by Sean Meleady takes a look at their world.

The journalists on Page View Farm may not get time to follow up stories by speaking to press officers who write press releases. But Sophie Atherton has news for them – even if they had the time, it can be harder than you think with fewer organisations making their press officers or their contact details available.

But Barckley Sumner, who handles press enquiries for Unite, disagrees. He's astonished that many journalists don't want to have a few words off the record or a bit of guidance ahead of a big interview.

We also have Ian Mollison looking back on the year-long strike at the Aberdeen Journal and Ruth Addicott talks to journalists in Porthcawl about how to cover the annual gathering of Elvis tribute artists. Something you can't do from Page View Farm...

I hope you enjoy the magazine and the summer.

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*ISSN: 0022-5541*

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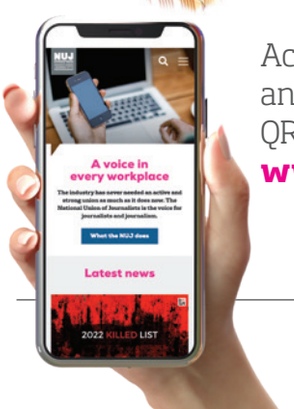


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# Reach looks to cut more than 100 jobs

**REACH**, which publishes national and regional digital and newspaper titles including The Mirror, Express, Manchester Evening News, and Liverpool Echo, has placed 104 jobs at risk, the union understands.

Sports coverage will be hit by about 50 redundancies and arts desk staff and writers' roles at the Mirror and Express will also be cut. Workers in Scotland and Ireland are not affected.

In sports, dedicated correspondents covering Liverpool, Manchester United and London football clubs will be halved, while three writers covering Midland clubs and two on Welsh sport are at risk.

In addition to reducing content, editors will be reduced from 26 to 16 and the number of sports sub-editors more than halved.


PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Reach has said that the cuts are being driven by 'efficiencies' and are aimed at 'optimising performance' resulting from content sharing between titles and the production of common pages.

The company's AI tool Guten rewrites stories to match the styles of different titles.

The union is concerned that proposed cuts may involve an increase in the use of AI at the expense of journalists' jobs.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said: "The NUJ is deeply concerned by the impact these cuts will have on staff workload and morale. Either fewer staff will be expected to do more work or Reach is seeking to use AI to fill the resulting gap.

"The replication of content across Reach's titles will mean less localised coverage and less media diversity. Ultimately, this results in a poorer product.

"The distinctions between different Reach titles will blur, with replicated articles less tailored to readers' interests. An AI mimic would be no substitute for skilled journalists.

"Reach is a profitable company – and this is down to journalists' hard work. Instead of cutting jobs, Reach should invest in its staff and quality journalism."

Those at risk of redundancy were informed in early July that this could start as early as August 8.

Staff have been told that around 90 workers will be transferred to comparable roles, with 11 vacancies created alongside a new sports hub. Further details on the new structure are awaited.

> **Either fewer staff will be expected to do more work or Reach is seeking to use AI to fill the resulting gaps**
>
> ***Laura Davison***
> ***NUJ general secretary***

## Report of BBC outsourcing sparks concern

**THE UNION** has called for clarity from the BBC following reports it is considering a major outsourcing drive as reported by The Guardian.

The newspaper's media editor Michael Savage reported that the BBC is considering a plan that could put thousands of jobs at risk as it attempts to cut costs.

The Guardian story said jobs could be offshored and that the BBC has been considering partnerships with US tech companies.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said: "Workers at the BBC will be alarmed to hear of proposals focused on outsourcing, with serious implications for jobs and the future structures of the broadcaster.

"We need urgent clarity from the BBC on options being considered and trade unions around the table in meaningful engagement.

"Cost-cutting measures that impact content produced by the BBC or fragment the ways in which it operates will affect how audiences perceive, and value the organisation.

"Its workforce should not be blindsided by discussions with US tech giants as unions simultaneously campaign for greater funding for the BBC to support its position as a valued public service broadcaster."

# The NUJ's generation game

**IT WAS** one in, one out of the NUJ for the Lezard family in July, with former president Tim retiring and daughter Charlie joining the union.

Tim, who served on the national executive council for many years, retired early on health grounds. He was a journalist for 28 years.

On the day he handed in his press card – he's remaining in the union as a retired member – Charlie applied to join as the new senior press officer for the Royal College of Surgeons.

She is the third generation of Lezard to work in the media. Tim's mother, Jeny, worked as a writer for Honey magazine in the 1970s.

Tim said: "I'm very proud Charlie's following in the footsteps of myself and her grandmother – once she got a job in the media, it was a no-brainer for her to join the NUJ.

"I've had a good career in journalism and met some wonderful people along the way. I'm looking forward to watching cricket, riding my bike and reading all the books I've been meaning to read since I was a teenager."

Charlie said: "I'm excited to be part of an organisation that provided an ideological home for my dad, and a sector that was the lifeblood for both he and my granny.

"The NUJ's mission to protect its members and our industry is inspiring and important, and I'm excited to stand alongside people who worked with my dad throughout his career."

# Funding for journalism courses faces cut

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL** for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), backed by the NUJ, is speaking out against plans to cut funding for journalism education.

The campaign began after guidance by Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, was issued on 'high-cost subject funding' being moved away from journalism training. Phillipson is referring to the money specifically allocated to courses where costs are significantly higher than can covered by tuition fees.'

Philipson's guidance withdraws strategic priorities grant (SPG) funding for the 2025-2026 financial year from journalism courses.

It states: "This government's 2024 industrial strategy sets out the sectors that offer the highest growth opportunity for the economy and business.

"I am therefore setting out in the terms and conditions that your funding allocations should support provision of courses in these sectors, noting that a significant proportion of them currently attract SPG funding.

"Prioritising in this way does, however, involve making compromises elsewhere; for this reason, I am asking you to reprioritise high-cost subject funding away from media studies, journalism, publishing and information services courses.

"While I recognise that these courses are valued by the universities that deliver them and the students that take them, my decision is informed by the challenging fiscal context we have inherited."

The NCTJ and the union are arguing that journalism is a public good, and the union has called for greater investment to ensure courses remain an attractive and sustainable route for those considering the industry.

PJRNEWS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Bridget Phillipson: decision is informed by the 'challenging fiscal context'

The NUJ recognises the importance of retaining public trust and confidence in journalism and agrees with the NCTJ that the need for high-quality, accurate, ethical journalism has never been greater.

The NCTJ has written jointly to the secretary of state with the Association for Journalism Education, the Broadcast Journalism Training Council, the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association and the Professional Publishers Association to urge her to reconsider the guidance.

> **I am asking you to reprioritise high-cost subject funding away from media studies, journalism, publishing and information services courses**
>
> ***Bridget Phillipson***
> ***Education secretary***

## Shetland Times saved from closure

**THE NUJ** has welcomed the purchase of the Shetland Times by Highland News and Media, which secures the future of the 153-year-old newspaper.

The title, which is Shetland's only print newspaper, had been owned by the same family for more than 100 years, and was printed in Shetland. It was put up for sale in April and faced potential imminent closure if a buyer could not be found.

As recently as a decade ago, the weekly title sold around 11,000 copies in a population that was just over double that. In recent years, print sales declined to 3,400.

The islands are also served by the Shetland News, which is online only, and BBC Radio Shetland as well as individual journalists.

The Shetland Times was still printed locally at its offices in Gremista, although printing will now take place on the mainland of Scotland.

The case of the Shetland Times was raised by Nick McGowan-Lowe, NUJ national organiser for Scotland, at a lobbying meeting with MSPs at Holyrood as an example to show the need for a Scottish public interest journalism institute. Sources of potential funding are being considered.

The Scottish government's public interest journalism working group in 2022 explored ideas including community ownership of news production, strategic investment of public sector advertising and tax incentives for businesses that advertise. with public interest news providers.


GARRY CLARKSON / BMT

## Iraqi creatives in the spotlight at film festival

**A POWERFUL** showcase, Stories We Need to Tell, spotlighted the revival of Iraqi creative work at Sheffield international documentary festival in June, *writes Garry Clarkson*.

The festival champions the breadth of documentary, offering makers and audiences a place for inspiration, debate, development, learning and challenge. The theme this year was 'where perspectives meet'.

Stories We Need to Tell was curated by Maythem Ridha – filmmaker, producer and past festival winner.

Tamara Amir's Ali's Daughters follows three teenage sisters training to become professional boxers. Zainab Al-Hariri's 40 Years of Silence is the personal story of her father's execution for involvement in a plot against Saddam Hussein, and her journey to uncover his legacy. Meral Niazi's Journey Through Time reimagines Iraq through a riverboat expedition into its cultural heartlands. Duraid Munajim's Amana (Trust) captures a family's struggle to sustain life in the ecologically devastated Iraqi Marshlands.

In a Q&A, Al-Hariri shared: "We grew up 'shushing'.No-one was allowed to talk, no one was allowed to ask any questions. People kept saying let the past rest and let's move on but, we who suffered have to continue remembering what happened to us to tell other people It's OK to talk about your trauma."

# Most perilous UK area for journalists named

**NORTHERN IRELAND** is the most dangerous part of the UK for journalists, *writes Anton McCabe*.

Amnesty International asserts the UK is not upholding its international obligations to 'sustain' freedom of expression.

Its report, Occupational Hazard – Threats and Violence Against Journalists in Northern Ireland, states that death threats and attacks are increasing.

Since the start of 2019, there have been at least 71 threats or attacks. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has delivered 10 threat management forms to journalists since June 2022. Journalists have reported concerns to the PSNI 46 times.

Amnesty accepts that not all threats are reported. A further difficulty is that the police started keeping records for the Journalist Safety Group only three years ago. In addition, the Public Prosecution Service does not routinely record the occupation of victims.

Threats come from paramilitaries and organised crime gangs, which can be linked, as well as from racist and anti-immigrant groups. Since the report was published, the latter have become more of a problem.

The paramilitaries involved are mostly Loyalist. The South-East Antrim Ulster Defence Association has issued a blanket threat to all journalists working for Mediahuis newspapers.

Republican paramilitaries are also a hazard. Journalists were petrol-bombed at an Easter commemoration in Derry in 2024. The police withdrew and a police helicopter hovered while officers watched a journalist run for his life. Photographer Kevin Scott, who called 999, alleges the response was: "You just need to get yourselves out of there."

The growth of heavily armed organised crime gangs poses increasing danger.


The report quotes Ciaran Barnes from the Sunday Life: "I think journalists are more at risk of being shot by a criminal gang than they are by paramilitary gangs because there are structures with paramilitary gangs."

Women journalists are particular targets. Patricia Devlin said: "Male journalists who do the same job as me, who have written closer to the bone about paramilitaries, do not get the same level of abuse." Devlin received a Facebook message threatening to rape her baby son.

"Combat 18 was mentioned in the message," she said. She identified the man responsible, who was not charged. The Police Ombudsman upheld her complaint of police failings.

New NUJ national executive council member Amanda Ferguson was assaulted during an anti-immigrant march in Belfast. Though she videoed her attacker, he has never been charged.

Amnesty says PSNI responses have improved in very recent years. A Media Safety Group, including the NUJ, will start meeting by the end of the year.

Journalists lack confidence in the police, Amnesty said, owing to "inadequate communication and lack of prosecutions", "covert surveillance of journalists" and protection of informants being prioritised over solving crime.

> **"I think journalists are more at risk of being shot by a criminal than a paramilitary gang because there are structures with paramilitary gangs**
>
> ***Ciaran Barnes Sunday Life***

# A night to celebrate Eamonn McCann

**DERRY** and North West Ireland branch held a night with music and food to celebrate veteran Eamonn McCann being made an NUJ member of honour, *writes Anton McCabe*.

Thanking the branch, McCann said the NUJ was an important part of his life, and in many ways *was* his life. He said: "I don't see the NUJ just as a succession of individuals – I see the people who have fought for the right to know and the right to tell."

He paid tribute to "ordinary journalists who have risked their lives, risked their jobs, lost their jobs". He highlighted Derry and North West Ireland branch member and photographer Trevor McBride.

"Trevor McBride delayed the onset of the Troubles by at least 15 seconds," he said. "I remember the very first [civil rights] march [in October 1968], when we came up Duke Street, there was this big line of cops, as the two sides pushed forward, we became aware, standing on a chair between the two groups, there was Trevor McBride. The two groups were moving towards one another and Trevor shouted 'Hold it! Hold it!' And people did."

TREVOR MCBRIDE


While many have claimed a part in stopping Northern Ireland's Troubles, "the only person who really stopped it, albeit for a short period, was Trevor McBride of the NUJ".

# Gold badges for Caroline and Gilbert

AKO ISMAIL KARIM

**TWO** longstanding NUJ activists have been celebrated by their branch as they were presented with gold badges in recognition of exceptional contribution to the union.

The Sunderland, Shields and Hartlepool branch were joined by NUJ vice-president Georgina Morris in thanking Caroline Sword and Gilbert Johnston for their work within chapels and branches since they each became members of the union in the 1970s.

In nominating them, fellow branch members highlighted their loyalty, reliability, selfless work ethic, outspokenness and personal courage.

Georgina told the meeting: "Caroline and Gilbert are the kind of members that every chapel and branch counts on, often taking on the roles that others were reluctant to fill.

"Just as importantly, they also made sure the voices of their fellow members were heard at a regional and national level."

It was not long after they each joined the union that they stood in solidarity with fellow members in a national dispute over pay in 1978 and 1979.

They also took part in a one-day national strike in the 1980s and the three-month 'new technology' strike in 1985 when Sunderland Echo colleagues stood in solidarity with their sister chapel and printers at the Portsmouth Evening News.

# Freelance wins access to court listings

**A FREELANCE** journalist has successfully challenged a court that refused to provide him with its listings because he was not working for an IPSO-regulated publication, *writes Charlie Moloney*.

Andy Crooke had applied to Hereford and Worcestershire Magistrates Courts for their list of upcoming cases and the results of cases that had been dealt with in June.

Crooke is the vice-chair of the NUJ's Birmingham and Coventry branch and the founder of GoNewsUK, a news service that connects users with a local journalist to report on publicly funded agencies.

He told The Journalist that he very quickly got a response knocking him back, saying he could not have the lists because he was "not working for one of the large organisations".

The court had then told Crooke he needed to either sign up to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) as an individual or be part of an organisation that was signed up to IPSO. A member of the court staff told him the requirement was set out in guidance from His Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Services (HMCTS).

Crooke asked to raise a formal complaint to HMCTS over the matter and informed court staff the refusal was on the agenda to be discussed at his next NUJ branch meeting.

Shortly afterwards, the court manager contacted Crooke to say the courts had been "badly advised", and he was provided him with the lists. The manager said other courts in the region would be made aware of the correct approval/verification process for journalists to receive court registers, which requires: presentation of a UK press card; a letter/email from the editor of a publication covered by IPSO; or accreditation by a press officer in the Ministry of Justice.

Crooke, who reports primarily on local authorities, police and emergency services, has since withdrawn his complaint. He said of the result: "It is a victory for us. We are supposed to be the people who report on what is going on in our courts and tribunals. If we cannot get access to that information, the public certainly will not know about it and justice will not be open."

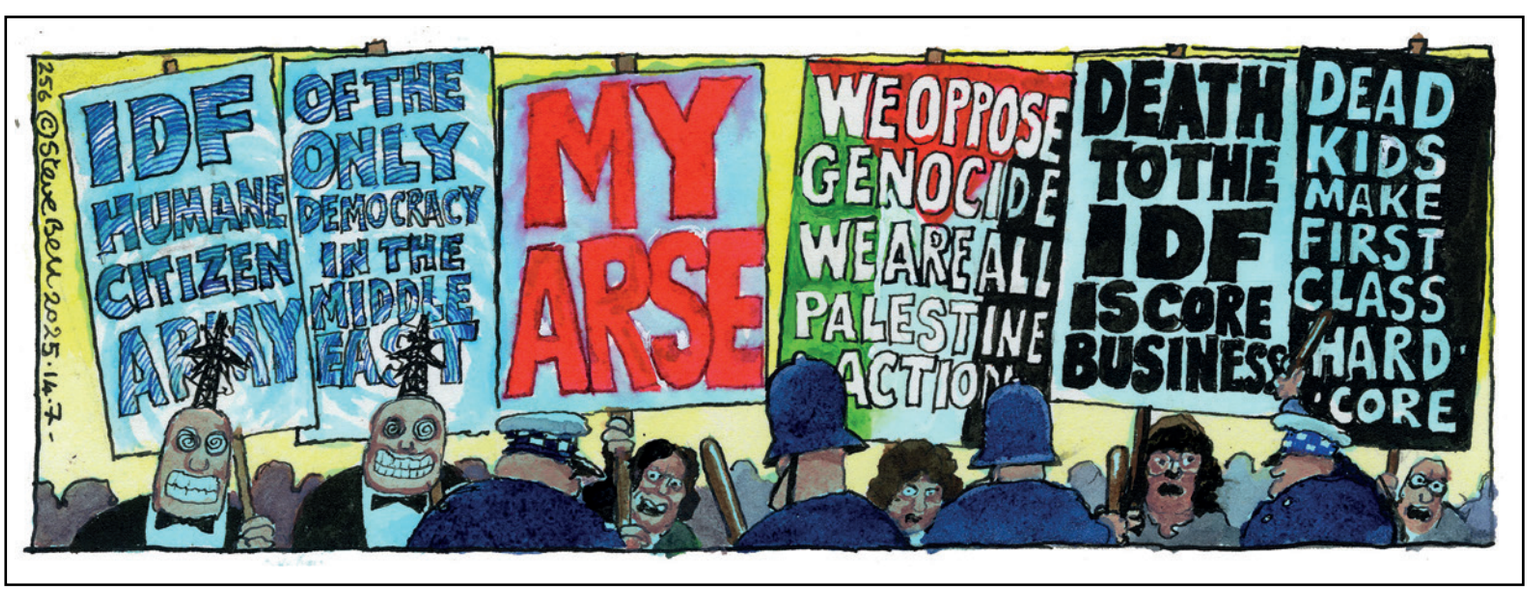
NEIL MCALLISTER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Crooke – a former registered nurse and later a police officer – said the press lists help journalists to plan which cases to attend and said he thought they had been refused to him because staff were not accustomed to dealing with reporters, amid a nationwide decline in court coverage generally.

He advised other NUJ members: "Don't give up. Feed back to your regional officer in the NUJ if you have got a problem. You have a right to do this, the courts have an obligation to supply you with the information and you are not just doing something because it is your job – you are doing a public service."

> **If we cannot get access to that information, the public certainly will not know about it**
>
> ***Andy Crooke GoNewsUK***

## Steve Bell



# Thou shalt not bear false witness

## Taking payment for generative AI use of news images legitimises fake news and fraud, says **Andrew Wiard**

Generative AI (GAI) produces fake stories and inauthentic photorealistic pictures. So what part should we journalists play in enabling or endorsing the training of generative AI?

In Denmark, the government is proposing to fight AI deepfakes by giving its citizens control of their own image. This is an example of timely, bold, clear and decisive action.

It is the latest of many attempts to control image rights but with a crucial difference. Giving Denmark's citizens' control over their own image means they can demand deepfakes are removed from online platforms.

In Denmark, a deepfake is defined as a very realistic digital representation of a person, including their appearance and voice. According to Denmark's culture minister, Jakob Engel-Schmidt: "We are now sending an unequivocal signal to all citizens that you have the right to your own body, your own voice and your own facial features."

As a photographer, any talk of image rights sets alarm bells ringing, but Denmark is not France, and we are not talking privacy law. In France, individuals can block publication of themselves where identifiable in real photographs (subject to certain exceptions).

Denmark's intention is to prevent AI fakes, not straight photography or videography. Journalists can still record and publish the truth. Truth – that's the whole point.

In the UK, the furthest we have gone, in the Online Safety Act 2023, is to prohibit the sharing of intimate images, including intimate deepfakes. Their creation could soon be banned too. But that falls far short of Denmark's plans.

However, both attempts fall far short of what journalists need in that we must safeguard the authenticity of images distributed as news. Deepfakes threaten the credibility of our profession. What is really required is a total ban on all photorealistic AI deepfakes in news and reporting, but that is just never going to happen.

So what can we in the NUJ now do and where do we now stand? A lot will depend on the recent NUJ AI licensing survey, which sought freelance views to inform whatever the NUJ now does through SCOOP.

You may not have heard of SCOOP. It is a new joint venture between the NUJ and three collecting societies and agencies – ALCS, DACS and PICSEL. It was launched last December with the principal aim of ensuring freelance journalists and photojournalists get paid for the online secondary use of their work. It also promises new funding for training and development schemes.

Its website states: "SCOOP provides the mechanism to develop mutually beneficial collective agreements between the representatives of freelance journalists and those companies securing commercial returns from the online secondary use of their works."

The focus of SCOOP and the NUJ is understandably on the money. But what about the ethics of endorsing potential fake news? It's also important to distinguish here between past infringement and future licensing.

Compensation for past infringement, by whatever means, is one thing. The real problem is what we do now.

Secondary publication need not involve AI. But, where it does, we need to be wary. We are in the business of fact, not fiction.

GAI is programmed to produce the kind of seemingly realistic deepfakes that are about to be banned in Denmark. As a photographer, I cannot collude in the destruction of public trust in what we do.

Taking payment would be legitimising GAI fraud. Licensing news photographs for GAI use would be just plain wrong and put me in clear breach of the NUJ code of conduct – thou shalt not disseminate falsehood. In the words of the code, a journalist "strives to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair".

There must be ways of differentiating between licences so as not to place photographers in such an invidious position. Will Scoop distinguish between the differing secondary uses?

I found the NUJ survey surprisingly open-ended and, well, neutral. Maybe surveys have to be. But we NUJ members do not. I'm reminded of Tony Benn, whose speeches I heard so many times that I remember the key theme: all politicians are either signposts or weathervanes. There's no doubt which he was. We too have a choice here. We too can take a stand.

Are we just seeking to find which way the wind blows? Following whichever way it turns? Surely we should be pointing clearly down the straight and narrow path.

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO


JUSTIN NG / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

# Invisible stories

## **Conrad Landin** looks at why stories of public interest are hidden away

When former Reform UK – now independent – MP Rupert Lowe made an antisemitic comment in a meeting this year, he was caught on camera.

But, as the Guardian reported in May, "the person filming appeared to reassure him the video would be edited". Private Eye then revealed this person was a journalist for the Daily Express. Keeping its word, the Express published the footage with the remark cut out.

Thanks to news priorities, preconceptions and resource limitations, plenty of stories of genuine public interest never see the light of day.

In a packed hall at the Belfast Book Festival in June, two journalists who know a thing or two about big reveals grappled with why conspiracy and cover-up can win out over disclosure.

Sam McAllister, the former TV producer who secured Newsnight's show-stopping Prince Andrew interview, spoke about Scoops, an account of her time at the BBC.

Lucia Osborne-Crowley wrote The Lasting Harms about the trial of sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell, which she attended in New York in 2021.

Both women emphasised the importance of reporting 'without fear or favour' – but neither seemed convinced this prevails in modern journalism.

McAllister's most famous scalp saw Prince Andrew say he did not regret his relationship with paedophile Jeffrey Epstein, and that he could not have had sex with trafficked minor Virginia Giuffre because he had been at Pizza Express in Woking. Several days later, Buckingham Palace announced the prince's public duties had been suspended 'for the foreseeable future'.

Yet the interview had originally been proposed as a "puff piece with Prince Andrew where he talks about how incredible and amazing he is", McAllister said. "We do not do interviews like that at Newsnight – sometimes at the BBC but definitely not at Newsnight – so I turned it down."

Many months later, the palace got back in touch and eventually accepted a no holds barred approach.

McAllister believes "the pernicious effect of class" meant she was happy to tread where others did not dare. "Because I don't belong in that world, I had nothing to lose. I didn't care about garden parties or dinner events or getting an OBE, CBE or any of that – because I sure as hell ain't going to get them. Those were not things that resonated with me as important, so I had a beautiful obliviousness in a sense to the peril that other people might have contemplated."

For Osborne-Crowley, herself a survivor of child sexual abuse, 'trauma-informed journalism' was crucial to telling the story of Epstein and Maxwell's victims. "It really means understanding what it feels like to live this life, and to really like to empathise with people," she said. "And traditional journalists don't like that idea."

In the New York courtroom, she found that other journalists reporting the trial were hampered by their own prejudice. "They were all kinds of men in their 40s, a lot of them from the British tabloids, and we would see the same evidence from the same women who were groomed and abused as girls, and they would come out with what we call rape myths," she explains.

> **We love to read a story about a baddy - and baddies may well be baddies - but we don't like a story about a goody**

On one occasion, victim Annie Farmer testified that Maxwell had given her a pair of cowboy boots. "There was something like 72 mentions of her boots in the mainstream papers," said Osborne-Crowley. "This is a woman who got up and told a jury about the worst things that had ever happened to her. And the only thing that any journalist wrote about that night were the boots and how they discredited her."

For McAllister, "deference does not get you across the line when it comes to journalism" but "in newsrooms, there's a lot of deference". Stories also get repressed, because of the 'goody-baddy syndrome' in the media.

At Newsnight, she had convinced Juanita Broaddrick, who alleged Bill Clinton had raped her in 1978, to give an interview. "For reasons we don't need to go into, that interview wasn't run or done. However, somebody else said that President Trump had pinched her bum, and that was run. We love to read a story about a baddy, and baddies may well be baddies, but we don't like a story about a goody." Both men deny the allegations.

Challenging deference and assumptions will take radical action over newsroom management, under-resourced teams and, yes, media ownership. Until then, disclosure will too often rely on individuals willing to risk a lot – working within a system stacked against them.

# The wrong people are in charge of BBC news

## The board must replace those at the top if it is to justify its funding, says **Raymond Snoddy**

You can see and hear great journalism by accomplished correspondents from the BBC every day of the week. People such as Russia editor Steve Rosenberg with revealing stories, including reports from Russian patriotic festivals, or international editor Jeremy Bowen's baleful eye on tragic events in Gaza and Israel.

But there are a growing number of issues concerning BBC news and current affairs. They have few links other than serious questions that lead right to the top of the corporation.

Unsurprisingly, there has been a nexus of controversies arising from coverage of the Israeli attacks on Gaza.

There was the documentary pulled from iPlayer because the teenage narrator's father was an undisclosed Hamas deputy agriculture minister.

More serious was the decision not to broadcast Gaza: Doctors Under Attack, which detailed the killing of doctors and healthcare workers and the bombing of hospitals by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

The decision was reportedly taken by BBC director-general Tim Davie himself on the grounds that broadcasting it would make the BBC look 'partial'. It is rather difficult to be impartial about killing doctors and destroying hospitals.

Embarrassingly for the BBC, the documentary was broadcast by Channel 4 to widespread acclaim.

At the same time, more than 100 BBC journalists signed, anonymously, a letter claiming that the BBC had become a mouthpiece for Israel and that they were being prevented from doing their jobs, "delivering facts transparently and with due context".

Around the same time, the Centre for Media Monitoring, a Muslim Council of Britain project, issued a detailed report looking at more than 32,000 BBC broadcast segments and 4,000 articles.

This said that, on a per-fatality basis, Israeli deaths were given 33 times more coverage in articles and 19 times as much in television and radio as Palestinian deaths. It also noted that the BBC pressed 38 interviewees to condemn Hamas's October 7 attacks while "equivalent questioning to condemn Israel's actions resulting in tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths took place zero times".

Investigative journalist Peter Oborne, in general a BBC admirer, concluded the BBC had failed to challenge Israeli lies and constructed a framework where Israeli suffering was more newsworthy and tragic than that of Palestinians.

There were strident complaints from the Israeli side that the BBC had failed to act quickly enough when punk rappers Bob Vylan led chants of "Death, death to the IDF" at the Glastonbury Festival.

Another raft of complaints involves coverage of Nigel Farage and Reform.

They go all the way back to the Brexit referendum campaign more than nine years ago when the BBC was accused of false equivalence in its coverage – treating the merits of the both sides as equal when they were anything but.

The BBC has also been accused of creating the public persona of Farage by platforming him 39 times on Question Time and in giving disproportionate coverage to a party with four MPs compared to the Lib Dems with 72.

Indeed, in July, the Lib Dems complained to Ofcom that the BBC had given 'undue prominence' to a Farage boat stunt to mark the Starmer-Macron deal on asylum seekers.

> **You can defend individual decisions but they show a pattern. People with backgrounds in marketing do not reach the right decisions for future BBC journalism**

Separately, Ofcom chief executive Dame Melanie Dawes warned the BBC was in danger of losing public confidence by failing to get a grip quickly enough on scandals, including those involving the behaviour of presenters.

Extraordinarily, news leaked from a BBC meeting that news chief Deborah Turness discussed plans to alter the 'story selection' in news bulletins and 'other types of output such as drama' to try to win the trust of Reform voters.

What next? Special story selection for Labour or Tory voters?

This is not the first controversy involving Turness, a former ITN and Euronews executive. She was responsible for stripping Newsnight of most of its journalists and turning it into little more than an upmarket chat show.

It was Turness who closed HardTalk and made main interrogator Stephen Sackur redundant, despite its global fame for holding the powerful to account.

The BBC faces budget constraints but choices can always be made. Those Turness chose were away from investigative journalism and towards 24-hour, breaking news – not journalism but churnalism as Sackur has it.

You can defend individual decisions but they show a pattern. People such as Turness and Davie, with backgrounds in marketing, do not reach the right decisions for future BBC journalism.

They are decent, competent people – but are they the right people to lead the BBC into next year's negotiations for a new 10-year royal charter?

Stand-out, courageous news and current affairs should be a key distinguishing factor for the BBC as a public service broadcaster seeking to justify a universal funding mechanism.

It is time for the BBC board to ponder whether a change at the top might be the best way to deliver that.

# Is the press office(r) dead?

Finding someone to talk about their own press release can prove laborious. **Sophie Atherton** takes a look down the generic email black hole

It should have been an easy piece to write: a feature that came off the back of a press release. The release itself wasn't as detailed as it might have been but, as it was about something the business clearly wanted to promote, a few follow-up questions would surely be welcome.

I sent my queries to the generic press office email address the release had come from. I gave it the subject line 'time sensitive media enquiry'. I had a bit of time before my editor wanted copy so 'urgent' felt like overkill, but I mentioned my deadline in the email itself.

I made a start on the feature and left gaps for the info I'd requested. It would be easy enough to drop it in later and then I'd be able to file my piece.

A few days went by, and I'd heard nothing. I sent a follow-up email, adding that I now needed the info asap as my deadline was approaching. I let my editor know I was struggling. Mercifully, he was able to be flexible about when he needed my copy.

The deadline I'd given in my enquiry came and went. Still no word of reply. I started looking for the press office phone number, berating myself for not calling in the first place. Then I remembered: there was no name or number on the press release.

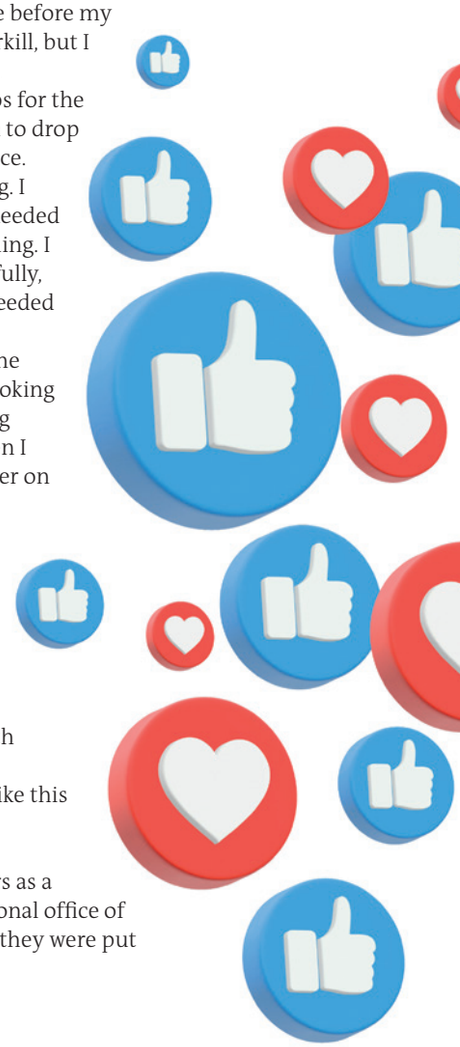
I found a head office number, called and asked to be put through to the press office. I was told the person I needed was out of the office. There was no offer to take a message, no enquiry as to whether it was urgent, just 'sorry they aren't in'.

I started to wonder why they'd sent the press release if they didn't want to deal with follow-up queries.

I genuinely try not to fall into 'it wasn't like this in the old days' too often but I was both flabbergasted and exasperated at this.

Earlier in my career, I had spent five years as a media officer. If a journalist called the regional office of the RSPB for which I worked and I was out, they were put through to a colleague who'd been briefed on handling press calls or offered my mobile number. They would never merely have been told I was out – and I never sent out a press release without my contact details on.

I realise that times have changed. My press office days were before social media really took off. My work focused on sending press releases, fielding follow-up calls and reactive media enquiries, providing comment or arranging interviews and securing and writing regular monthly features in glossy county magazines.



## Overtaken by digital

I'm not sure my old role exists now. Based on a scan of recent job ads, all I tend to see being recruited are content officers and digital marketing executives, as opposed to press or media officers.

I suppose answering journalist requests from someone writing for a monthly magazine is a lower priority than populating a minute-by-minute social media feed and engaging with those who post on them.

Back to my tale of woe. Eventually, I got hold of a mobile number for what turned out not to be a press officer but a web and PR manager.

I was polite but I let on how I'd been trying to contact them for some time. Their extremely nonchalant explanation was that the company firewall often meant emails didn't get through. "But you're running a press office!" I wanted to shout.

Later that same day – some 18 days after my first attempt to contact them – I got an email containing a partial response to my queries and some rather poor photographs. I was about to reply, Oliver-style, asking for more, but I couldn't imagine I'd get a much better response than he did, so I decided to give up. I made the best use of what they had sent and felt very glad I knew my editor in person and that he was an understanding chap.

If this were a one-off scenario, I wouldn't be writing this. Yet in the past few years, I've lost count of how many times I've got no response from emailing press offices – and then found

it nigh on impossible to find a number so I can follow up with a phone call, let alone a name.

As a freelance, there's only so much time I can spend chasing a story before it starts costing me because I'm not spending time on another article. This means I've had to spike a lot of good ideas for want of background information and interviewees – and had fewer commissions than I'd like, too.

I am not the only one who's encountered the problem. Fellow journalists have had similar experiences. Kelly Rose Bradford is a freelance journalist who has also held staff roles on magazines and digital platforms.

"I think it has become far more difficult to get hold of press officers since people began working from home," she says.

"I find that it often takes several emails to elicit any sort of reply, which I put down to people not being able to just call over to a colleague to get an answer for something they are not sure of themselves, so things they can't immediately deal with end up getting overlooked."

She adds: "I also note there is a new-found reluctance to put phone numbers or direct email addresses on company websites so you are often doing battle with a 'press@' email address with no clue where it is landing."

Frustratingly, it is not only messages to generic press accounts that might as well have gone into a black hole. Even when I have a name and, worse, sometimes when I actually know the person, multiple emails get no reply.

By which time, I admit, I sometimes don't call as I don't want to know why they haven't replied. (Have I offended them? Are they dead?!) Whatever the reason, it seems that even though businesses and organisations are clearly seeking publicity, they don't understand that they need to be contactable and respond to journalist enquiries – even if only to say they can't help.

> **I suppose answering a journalist is a lower priority than populating a minute-by-minute social media feed**

## Stranded motorists, jaded hacks

However, some larger, longer-established organisations not only understand but seem to follow 'old school' press office standards. I can confirm that the AA doesn't only rescue stranded motorists –– it also restores the faith of jaded hacks.

I asked its head of roads policy, Jack Cousens (who is based in the press office), if journalist enquiries are still considered valuable in the social media age.

"Yes! Absolutely," he says. "We put a very high value on press articles and, blowing our own trumpet a little, we have a good reputation for being quick at replying because we know journalists are pressured and on deadline.

"Also, if we help, then journalists are more likely to carry what we've said and come back for further comment."

I have sometimes wondered if my press office requests get ignored because I'm only at pitch stage rather than already having a commission. Cousens raises a similar scenario, but with a positive outcome.

"The other thing we do – and I don't know if others do it – is we respond to [journalism] student enquiries, partly because it's good manners to respond if someone's bothered to think of us, but also because you never know where that person will end up – maybe they'll be a big transport correspondent."

As Cousens talks me through how the AA press office operates, it sounds reassuringly like the old days. Public affairs and public relations leads are supported by press officers. The generic press office email account is looked after by the team as a whole, with enquiries passed on to the person best placed to answer them. Calls to the press office phone are managed the same way.

It's comforting to find at least one big organisation maintaining high standards in its press office. Perhaps it is no surprise to discover its social media team is a separate operation. The two teams collaborate when appropriate but, for Cousens, social media is 'a tool' and a source of information rather than a target publication.

I cannot help thinking that the way social media has been promoted in importance far beyond what it warrants is behind the difficulties many journalists have when trying to reach a press office.

If organisations and businesses believe likes and shares are more important than being written about by journalists, then it's no wonder the press office is, if not dead, then on its last legs.

That's bad news for journalists in more ways than one. It makes producing news and features more difficult if we can't get support from the organisations and businesses we're writing about, but it's also a journalism job – the role of press officer – that's disappearing.

PETER DAZELEY

# No, I'm **alive and kicking**

**Barckley Sumner** wonders why journalists don't chat any more

Sophie Atherton's feature, 'Is the press office(r) dead?' chimes with me but from the opposite point of view.

Running a very lively press department, I am amazed by the reluctance of journalists to contact me or my fellow press officers directly. We are all meant to be communication experts, but we seem unable to communicate effectively.

Running the press and media team for the Unite union is lively in normal times, but earlier this year during the Birmingham bin strike, things hit the stratosphere.

Requests for comment and, particularly, media interviews were raining on us at a level we had never seen before. Not just for a couple of days but for weeks on end.

What was astonishing was the sheer number of broadcast and press requests I was receiving (and I was merely the secondary point of contact for the dispute) coming through on WhatsApp and by text.

These bids weren't even by journalists and producers I knew and, where we had working relationships with news organisations, many enquiries were from people we had never dealt with.

Surely this isn't ideal from the point of view of booking an interview. How do you know the request is being actioned, without speaking to the relevant press officer?

Equally, how can you begin to express the main points you want to address in a broadcast interview via a text?

From my team's point of view, we try to find out as much as possible about what the interviewer wants to focus on so we can properly brief our spokespeople. Surely this makes for a better interview?

But there was an added issue. Maybe, as Atherton describes, we run an old-school press office but we make sure we put personal mobile numbers and email addresses on press releases. Our contact information plus a generic press line number (which should be staffed evenings and weekends) are on our website.

When any of the press team go on holiday, we ensure information about alternative contacts is placed on our out-of-office messages and voicemail. It's not infallible but we do our best.

So far so good, until I went on a much needed family holiday while the bin strike was at media fever pitch. This is a classic first world issue, but I quickly realised that, while callers and emailers would know who to contact, those relying on WhatsApp and text were in danger of falling into limbo and being ignored.

It was tempting to leave such lax requests hanging but, when you have the government lying about our members, the council announcing a critical incident and elements of the army being brought in, you need to tell your side of the story wherever you can.

> **How can you begin to express the main points you want to address in a broadcast interview via a text?**

Long story short: I had to reply to every one of those texts and WhatsApp message, providing information on who they needed to contact. At best, this caused raised eyebrows from my long -suffering spouse who believes I work too much at the best of times.

So why do journalists and broadcasters rely on these forms of contact? Is it because I am a dinosaur and no one contacts directly any more and I should just get with the times?

Is it a lack of training? If so, I find that strange as any big organisation looking to set or follow the news agenda surely wants interviews agreed quickly to avoid chaos in its running order?

I work on the basis that the shorter the deadline the greater the need for direct contact, but again, that does not seem to be universal.

Talking to my colleagues, our view is that, when making an interview bid, an email backed up by a phone call should be standard. This way, both sides know it has been received and logged and is being dealt with

Is the fundamental problem that press officers in general, or me in particular, are so foul to deal with that people can't face working with us directly?

If so, I apologise. My philosophy is I try to be courteous and helpful, even when we are reluctant to divulge very much information.

Clearly, we all need to do better. Press departments need to provide the relevant contact details and respond swiftly to enquiries, especially if we are chased.

Press officers, producers and broadcast journalists need to develop those crucial personal relationship, which is possible only through direct contact. Inevitably, you will get a better and quicker response and might get some extra relevant information.

We are all busy. The pressure on all sides to turn round copy, arrange interviews and provide information is becoming more intense as demand grows and deadlines tighten. But let's just try to communicate better and make life easier for everyone.

# NUJ & me

**Mark Fisher** is an arts writer and the freelance rep for the NUJ's national executive council

### What made you become a journalist?
At school, I graduated from makin comics to setting up a music fanzine. But it wasn't obvious to me that I would become a journalist until I got a job as a production assistant on The List magazine in Edinburgh. Sarah Hemming, the theatre editor, kept seeing me at first nights and encouraged me to write.

### What other job might you have done?
I have a degree in drama and wanted to get involved in some aspect of theatre but wasn't sure what. I was lucky to find a job in which I could indulge my twin interests of writing and theatre.

### When did you join the NUJ and why?
I think it was when I went freelance in 1992. I've heard it said that many people join a union because they had a family history of trades unionism. My mum was in the National Union of Teachers, my dad was in NALGO and my uncle was an official in the Fire Brigades' Union, so I grew up with the idea of workers' solidarity.

### Are many of your friends in the union?
I'm secretary of Edinburgh Freelance Branch, so I'm friends with a lot of members because of that. Many of my fellow theatre critics are members too.

### What's been your best moment in your career?
The night I saw Black Watch, the most successful production in the history of the National Theatre of Scotland, was also the night I had dinner with Kylie Minogue. That was some evening.

### What is the worst place you've ever worked in?
I once had a temp job sitting by a phone and, when it rang, had to write down the name and address of the caller who was responding to a job advert. It says a lot about unconscious bias that, even in my brief interactions, I formed an opinion about their suitability – and I didn't even know what the job was.

### And the best?
Being freelance, I'm lucky to work with some great editors, in particular at The Guardian, The Scotsman and The List, all of whom make clear decisions and respond quickly. Having a pitch rejected is not nearly as bad as getting no reply at all.

### What advice would you give someone starting out?
Younger journalists probably do this instinctively, but it's about being flexible and thinking creatively. A journalist's raw material – the ideas they research, the words they write, the pictures they take – may end up in a print publication, but today's journalist should keep in mind the many other forms it might take, whether that be a Substack newsletter, an illustrated lecture, a walking tour, a podcast or a YouTube video.

### Who is your biggest hero?
I interviewed Andy Partridge, lead singer of XTC, when I was 16 and, after more than three decades as a journalist, I have yet to find a more inventive and entertaining interviewee.

### And villain?
Several obvious candidates at the moment, but we're still dealing with the damage inflicted by Margaret Thatcher.

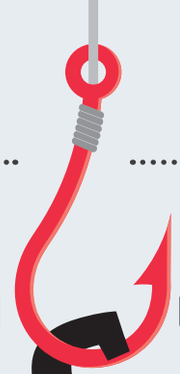
### Which six people (alive or dead) would you invite to a dinner party?
I imagine the conversation would flow between Bjork, Ken Campbell, Aretha Franklin, Stan Laurel, Robert Lepage and Ali Smith.

### What was your earliest political thought?
Almost certainly, "It's not fair".

### What are your hopes for journalism over the next five years?
That we find new ways to fund arts criticism and public interest journalism, both of which are vital to civic life and neither of which are easy to sustain on a commercial basis.

### And fears?
That we will no longer be able to distinguish between truth and lies, human and robot.

### How would you like to be remembered?
As someone who made a mean lasagna.



# Clickbait calls the shots

**Sean Meleady** looks at how page view targets are damaging journalism

A television screen is on in the newsroom, visible to all journalists. However, it isn't tuned to the BBC, Sky News, ITV or even the publication's website. Rather, it's tuned into live page view updates – a real-time league table showing how many views individual articles have received, and which journalists are at the top of the league table and those lower down who may be next out the door.

While it's natural that media organisations and journalists want to engage with and attract as many readers as possible, online page view targets are driven by a desire for increased revenue. With the long-term decline in print sales, page views are now seen as a key factor in determining how much revenue news outlets can generate from digital advertising.

Martin Shipton, chair of the South Wales NUJ branch, argues that page view targets are a result of struggles media companies have had in transitioning from a predominantly print to a digital media landscape, particularly with the decline of local advertising.

"Essentially, what happened is that they decided, without a business model, without having thought about it, just to put all their content free online and think about a business model afterwards and, of course, it didn't work because people became used to getting information free of charge.

"They thought there would be a seamless transformation, if you like, from newspapers to online and in what they could earn in revenue terms, but that was a complete nonsense.

"So, because they can't get the local advertising, what they do is what's called programmatic advertising, where they get a fraction of a penny for each page view, and you've got to get a massive number of views to get a revenue of any real value."

Chris Morley, NUJ Northern and Midlands senior organiser, agrees that page view targets have not led to the significant rise in digital advertising needed to offset the decline in print revenues: "The problem has always been the losses in print have been in pounds while the gains in digital have been pennies."

## Incentives not worth the effort

Newsquest, which owns The Northern Echo, The Argus and The National, is particularly keen on page view targets. In 2019, it introduced a bonus scheme for journalists who generate 500,000 page views a month on average each quarter. In 2022, Newsquest admitted that only around 200 of its reporters had qualified for the bonus.

A 2022 NUJ survey revealed that 72 per cent of Newsquest staff felt that its page view targets were not realistic, and 62 per cent had not received a bonus in 2021. Of those who had received a bonus, only 9 per cent received payment in all four quarters.

Four out of five employees said they had suffered from stress because of the targets, while 55 per cent said that they were actively looking for a job outside Newsquest. This figure is hardly surprising and not just because of the pressurised environment – 69 per cent of staff earned less than £30,000.

Morley says: "There has been an incentive model used in Newsquest for a number of years, but we have had consistent feedback from members that it is largely ignored because it is 'one size fits all' so journalists in smaller population centres are never likely to meet the quarterly targets to trigger any payment so is not worth the effort."

Shipton, who undertakes casework for the NUJ, notes that page view targets have led to bullying. "I've dealt with a number of cases from Newsquest where people have been very seriously bullied, and they are put on this personal improvement plan where they are set unattainable targets, and then, very soon afterwards, they are taken through disciplinary action and, within a short period of time, they'll be out. The stress that comes about for the individuals is appalling.

"What tends to happen is that people who, let's face it, are quite badly paid are put under immense pressure to meet these targets and their lives will be made a misery."

**72%**

**72 per cent of Newsquest staff felt that its page view targets were not realistic**

## Consequences 'not punitive'

In March 2022, Reach, which owns 100 regional and national titles, introduced its accelerated personal development pilot scheme. This encouraged journalists at regional titles to get between 80,000 and 850,000 page views per month.

According to an internal Reach document, journalists who fell below half their benchmark figure would be expected to increase their page view figures by 40 per cent by July 2022 and 70 per cent by the end of 2022.

The document states 'consequences' for failing to meet the targets would 'depend on the individual circumstances' – but the scheme was 'not designed to be punitive'.

Last year, then Reach boss Jim Mullen explained to staff: "I


HOWARD MCWILLIAM

need to get the page views, that is the way we sell advertising blocks, and advertising blocks deliver revenue.

"We don't talk about engagement and quality. We do, but it is not in the trading report."

However, according to Shipton, the strategy to generate online advertising through increased page views has failed.

"If you look at Reach's annual accounts, they still make three-quarters of their revenue from print, even though there have been massive declines in circulation. So they are absolutely desperate to come up with a business model where they will be making up for lost revenue in print and increasing revenue from digital, and they've been trying that for years, but it just isn't working."

In January, journalists at The Daily Mirror were given individual page view targets from 250,000 to one million a month, which US digital marketing guru Glenn Gabe described as "a news publisher version of The Hunger Games".

Mirror editor-in-chief Caroline Waterston defended the targets by insisting "Mirror journalists are the best in the business". However, although the British Association of Journalists rather than the NUJ is recognised at the Mirror, Mirror bosses agreed to modify their position following representations made by the NUJ.

## Factory farm

Newsquest and Reach have been accused of treating journalists as 'battery hens' by rival National World, which publishes The Scotsman and The Yorkshire Post. National World says it relies on publication-wide rather than individual page view targets.

Shipton argues that page-view targets are damaging journalism and local democracy by forcing journalists to focus on trivial stories rather than holding those in power to account.

Morley observes: "What is clear is that a regime of hard individual page view targets has been something members have been prepared to robustly challenge collectively."

## Alternatives out there

With the dramatic decline in print sales, newspaper owners have struggled financially. However, high-pressure page view targets are a panicked response to this, much like redundancies.

They encourage reporters to chase trivia, something readers themselves recognise and dislike. At the same time, there is limited evidence that page view targets are boosting revenue in the way companies like Newsquest and Reach desperately want.

Alternatives are out there, such as focusing on publication-wide page views, social shares and time spent reading online articles to demonstrate the value of digital advertising.

There is also evidence that readers are willing to pay for quality journalism. For example, the News Statesman reached its highest circulation in 40 years in 2021 following a 75 per cent increase in digital subscribers over 12 months with combined print and digital subscribers rising by 31per cent, The Spectator averaged 77,564 sales in 2021 with only one in four subscribers being digital only and The New European (now The New World) has attracted 20,000 print sales a week and 28,000 subscribers.

Surely this is the path to follow; otherwise, journalists will lose even more respect from readers and the wider public.

> **We don't talk about engagement and quality. We do, but it is not in the trading report**

# Norway, funds and freedom


## Norway's media is state-funded, but enjoys high levels of independence and public trust reports **Kristen Nadarajah**

It is no surprise that Norway once again tops the press freedom index, according to the leader of the Norwegian Union of Journalists (NJ), Dag Idar Tryggestad.

For nine years running, Norway has topped the World Press Freedom Index, published annually by Reporters Without Borders. Its score is high for all indicators – political, legal, economic, social and safety – reflecting a strong and stable environment for independent journalism.

Norway's media system offers a compelling case study in how structural support, legal safeguards and cultural respect for journalism can combine to create trust. While no system is perfect, Norway shows that media freedom does not have to mean leaving outlets to fight or die in the market. Its success lies in thoughtful regulation, collective responsibility and steady investment in journalism as a democratic institution.

Elin Floberghagen, secretary general of the Norwegian Press Association, points to three key pillars. First is a wide diversity of media, in terms of both size and opinion. Second is an ethics code that applies to all platforms. Third, editorial independence is not just a principle – it is protected both in law and through binding agreements within the industry.

With more than 200 outlets serving just over five million people – roughly the population of Scotland – the country has a diverse ecosystem of local, regional and national journalism.

### Cash and democracy

The Norwegian Media Authority (Medietilsynet) plays a crucial role in maintaining a healthy and diverse media landscape. It works to support plurality, transparency regarding ownership, media literacy and policy, and distributes state grants to media organisations.

Norway's 1814 constitution guarantees freedom of the press and freedom of expression and forms the legal basis for direct subsidies. The objectives of this funding are to preserve diversity of opinion, protect minority and regional outlets and reduce dependence on advertising revenue, which is seen as having a greater influence on editorial decisions than the state. A range of innovation grants support outlets, especially local or smaller ones, to digitalise and renew.

Financial support from the state is often seen as a threat to editorial independence, but in Norway the general view is that unfunded media is a greater issue. Public funding for the media is therefore embedded into the democratic framework. All Scandinavian countries have a tradition of public funding for the press.

Although such funding is largely uncontroversial in Norway, some parties on the right, such as the Right Party (Høyre), in its manifesto for the 2025 parliamentary election, and the Progressive Party (Fremskrittspartiet), in its 2024 alternative budgets, have suggested making cuts to the funding.

### Owners, big and small

Despite Medietilsynet's work on media plurality, ownership of Norwegian newspapers has become more concentrated and fewer outlets are independent, as opposed to being owned by a group.

Around half of the 200-plus papers are owned by a media group. There are three main organisations: Schibsted, Amedia and Polaris Media. However, grants are distributed to smaller

## How much to ask for

Norwegian Union of Journalists minimum freelance rates, April 2025

| Type of work | Freelance minimum rates | Estimated work time |
|---|---|---|
| Simple news/culture stories | £561 | 1 day |
| Features | £1792 | 4 days |
| Portrait interview | £2016 | 4.5 days |
| Reviews | £561 | 1 day |
| Daily rate | £561 | 7.5 hours |
| Longer stories | £447 | 1 day |

Minimum rates have been converted to sterling using average market exchange rates for 2025. Historically, the cost of living has been higher in Norway, but it is now comparable to that in the UK

outlets and those carrying different opinions from those owned by larger media groups.

Funding is relatively generous and, adjusted for inflation. The public pot has remained at a similar level since 1994; however, it is now split between more than 40 per cent more papers than it was in 1994. The financial security of media organisations is worsening, especially within local media and radio, according to Medietilsynet.

While in countries such as the UK, multiple bodies and varying standards govern print, broadcast and digital media, Norway has a one ethical code covering all media – the Vær Varsom-plakaten (the Be Careful poster).

This ethical code emphasises the social role of the press, integrity and credibility, journalistic conduct and publication rules. Because the code is unified and well known to the public, audiences largely understand what standards journalists are held to.

Complaints are managed through the independent Press Complaints Commission, which includes editors, journalists and members of the general public.

## Pay and conditions

Norwegian journalists benefit from robust protection, both legally and economically. Strong labour laws extend to freelancers, who are covered under the Working Environment Act (Arbeidsmiljøloven). This gives unions such as NJ more to bargain with.

A healthier media can pay contributors more fairly, and support freelances to demand fairer rates. Freelancers in Norway are among the best paid in Europe. NJ publishes its guidance on minimum rates of pay, using the salary of a desk journalist with 10 years' experience (currently around £54,000) as a starting point. It also accounts for the added costs freelances bear.

The suggested minimum day rate is £561, which covers 7.5 hours of work. That rises for longer, more complex pieces. A feature might land at £1,792 for four days' work, while a big portrait interview has a suggested rate of at least £2,016.

"Our members don't always get the full rate," says Tryggestad in an interview with Journalisten, the Swedish Union of Journalists' magazine, "but it sets a cultural benchmark. Editors know what fair looks like." He argues that flexibility benefits employers, so freelancers need to be compensated accordingly.

## Trust and freedom

The apple of the media's eye is the publicly owned broadcaster, NRK, the Norwegian equivalent of the BBC. Its mandate is not only to deliver strong political journalism but also to serve the public interest through news, culture and education. This includes a minimum amount of broadcasting in minority languages such as Sámi, spoken by indigenous people in the north of the country and dialects from across the whole country.

> **The union's suggested minimum day rate is set at £561, which covers 7.5 hours of work**

Some 80 per cent of Norwegians trust NRK, according to the 2024 Reuters Institute's Digital News Report survey. This is one of the highest figures globally for a national broadcaster, and makes NRK the most trusted media organisation in Norway.

However, there are reasons not to take this relatively good press environment for granted. "We also need to be wary of how quickly press freedom can be dismantled," warns Floberghagen. "We've seen it happen in other democratic countries. That's why we must actively protect the free, independent and critical press we have in Norway."

Tryggestad also emphasises that, owing to the global decline in press freedom, "it is important that NJ and other Norwegian media organisations' international engagement continues, whether through financial contributions to colleagues who are in difficulty or when authorities attack fundamental rights that hinder the free, independent press.

"In Norway too, there are forces that want to weaken the media's framework conditions or restrict the media's access to information or forums where decisions are made."

Floberghagen adds: "We are threatened by falling profitability, largely due to big tech which is increasingly taking a larger share of advertising revenue.

"Young people are turning more towards social media and less towards editorially controlled media as information channels, something we are working on improving every day."

As in other countries, digital platforms have eroded traditional income streams and readers, and ownership concentration is rising. Local newspapers are under pressure. The rise of social media and tech giants pose long-term threats, and it is becoming harder to maintain media autonomy from politicians.

Floberghagen advises that it is important to build alliances and that it can be helpful for those working in the media to come together and cooperate to make common demands towards authorities and others.

In the end, what Norway proves is that state support for journalism does not have to compromise media independence and is a means to invest in democracy.

Going on strike over union recognition was the right thing to do – but it's a blunt weapon of last resort. **Ian Mollison** recalls a year on a newspaper picket line

# On the frontline in the Thatcher years

The Aberdeen Journals dispute is long over, but the events that occurred between 18 August 1989 and 14 September 1990 still surface occasionally. They did in an edition of The Journalist, which recalled how former Conservative cabinet minister Michael Gove was one of the strikers ('When journalists go into politics,' February/March).

"The picket line of sacked journalists no longer stands outside the Mastrick newspaper plant (now recently demolished) of the company's office in Aberdeen. The heroes who stood outside as autumn turned to winter, then spring and summer, have long since returned to a normal life."

These are not my words, though they could be as I was one of the 116 journalists who took a stand against the publisher of the Evening Express and the Press and Journal.

These words are from a foreword in a commemorative illustrated book called Strike! published in 1990. The writer was Iain Campbell, father of the Aberdeen Journals' NUJ chapel during the dispute.

From time to time, I take the book down from the shelf, blow off the dust, and remind myself what it was like to be at the front line of trade unionism in Thatcher's Britain. And I stood shoulder to shoulder with Michael Gove on the picket line.

The strikes were to defend the right to be represented by a union. The company, part of Thomson Regional Newspapers, offered jobs to would-be recruits at salaries thousands lower than those they replaced – and on condition they snubbed collective bargaining.

Existing staff journalists were offered lump sums and salary increases on condition they gave up union representation. Many held out. Others felt they had to swallow their principles and sign... bills to pay and families to feed.

Eventually, the pressure could no longer be contained and the majority of journalists walked out on strike that summer.

Following negotiations, the first dispute was settled relatively quickly. But, within three weeks, the journalists walked out again after a long and heated chapel meeting.

However, this time, there were to be fewer of us. Passions were raised at the meeting. Frank views were exchanged.
False promises had been made about union recognition.

Scotland on Sunday – which reported the dispute fairly even though it was then part of the same group – stated on 31 October that "only the Battle of Wapping can compare in intensity".

For readers of a younger demographic, the 1986 Wapping dispute between Rupert Murdoch's News International and the print unions was one of the most controversial in British industrial history. Newspapers were moving from hot metal to computers, and the closed shop was being challenged. The NUJ urged its members not to work there and some refused to go to the new plant in Wapping.

> **Being on strike is not a jolly. I shake my head when I see some images of today's strikes throughout society**

The Wapping strike eventually collapsed on February 5 1987. The old Fleet Street had been dealt a fatal blow. In 2016, the Dundee-based Sunday Post closed the last remaining Fleet Street newspaper office.

Back in Scotland, our strike was not about higher wages, the closed shop or the introduction of computers. It was about something fundamental – the right to collective bargaining.

The strikers ran a steady media campaign, leafleted throughout the Highlands and the north east, protested in person in Toronto at the annual general meeting of parent company Thomson Organization, produced our own Free Press newspaper and steadily picketed the company's offices through rain, hail and sunshine.

The picketing seemed to really irk the Aberdeen Journals senior management. Apparently, it wasn't a pleasant experience for those who decided to work on. And even less pleasant for those dubbed job thieves for taking the strikers' places to keep bringing the papers out.

New staff were taken on – journalists from elsewhere and those who fancied being journalists, such as teachers and a postman. Some had talent. They were children of the Thatcher era, putting No 1 first.

The newspapers suffered as circulations fell and advertising faded away, with local authorities strong backers of the NUJ. Local politicians of all parties were supportive, even Conservatives. Some who became MPs and MSPs felt in the years to follow that they were given less than fair treatment by the Press and Journal and the Evening Express because of their support for the NUJ.

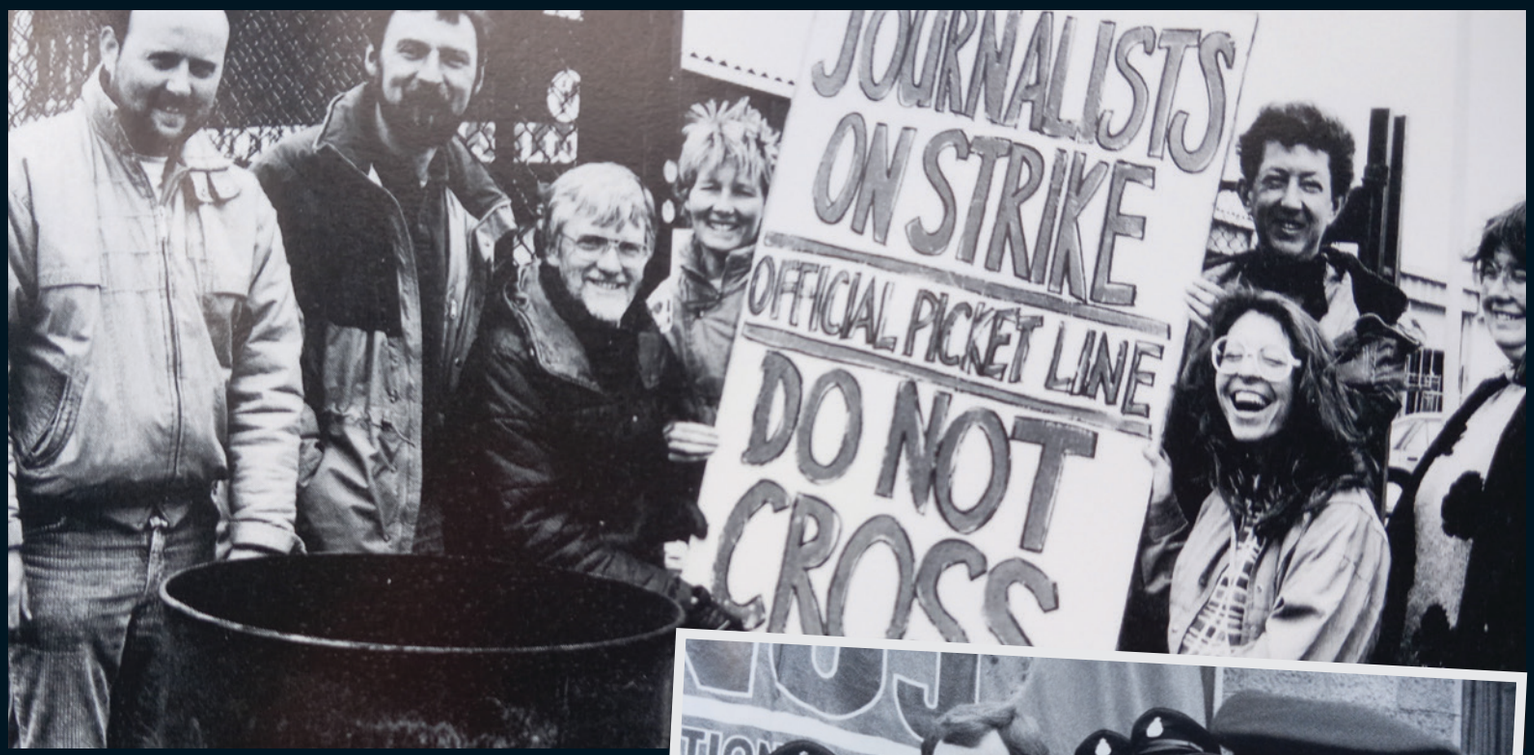
Throughout, the strikers had strong support from Aberdeen Trades Council and from fellow trade unionists in the city and far beyond the north east. Donations from journalists elsewhere made it possible for us to keep going.

Gradually, the many became fewer. Strikers found jobs elsewhere. A few could endure it no longer and crossed the picket line.

Former colleagues who continued to work through the dispute were shunned and friendships were broken; some are still not mended.

The camaraderie will remain among those who took part. But I hope than no other trade unionists have to endure such a pain barrier. I do not regret the decision I made, but anyone

ALL IMAGES KATE SUTHERLAND






going on strike should make it the weapon of last resort. It is a blunt instrument, which in the end meant everyone was a loser. It is not a jolly. I shake my head when I see some images of today's strikes throughout society.

Only a handful of the journalists were offered their jobs back. I was one but I chose a different career path, one that eventually took me into public relations and later local politics.

Others went their separate ways, with redundancy cheques in their pockets. Some even became newspaper editors.

What did we achieve? In football parlance, the outcome was probably a no-score draw.

In October 1999, Scotland on Sunday quoted Douglas Brodie, who specialised in the history of labour law at Edinburgh University: "It put a lot of employees off striking in the future. The overwhelming message was that striking doesn't pay."

Not surprisingly, John Foster, as NUJ general secretary at that time, took a different view: "I am sure the commitment and support of our members prevented the derecognition spreading throughout Scotland."

However, it also nearly bankrupted the NUJ, costing roughly £1 million. The union eventually got back on an even keel financially.

As for the Thomson business, it eventually sold the newspapers and retreated to North America. Aberdeen Journals is now owned by DC Thomson (no relation). Newspapers are no longer printed in Aberdeen but some 70 miles away in Dundee.

As with newspapers throughout the country, circulations have plummeted. The Press and Journal reportedly sells about 20,000 copies a day – some 100,000 fewer than before the strike. The Evening Express has seemingly fallen below 9,000 copies a day, which is about 60,000 down.

Little did we realise then how quickly newspapers would fall out of favour. They are shadows of their former selves. Society is changing. I have seen the best and worst of times for print media. What a ride! Now, where is my mobile?

**Ian Mollison is a long-retired newspaper journalist**

ATHENA PICTURE AGENCY ZING LIMITED / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

# The wonder of Presley

**Ruth Addicott** gets all shook up about the world's biggest Elvis festival – in south Wales

When the Grand Pavilion in Porthcawl was facing closure in 2004, former PR man Peter Phillips came up with the idea of an award show for Elvis tribute artists.

The event attracted 500 people and took off in a way the town never expected. It now attracts 40,000 and is the biggest Elvis festival in the world.

The quiet seaside town of Porthcawl in south Wales is a world away from the bright lights of Las Vegas, but for one weekend every year, it is inundated. The streets come alive with black and white leather jumpsuits emblazoned with rhinestones and the King's back catalogue is belted out from every corner.

As surreal as it is, the three-day event brings in an estimated £5 million to the local economy and was named by Time Out as one of the 40 best things to do in the world.

It has always generated coverage in local press, but for journalists, photographers and filmmakers who can see beyond the wigs and sideburns, the real story had yet to be told.

Robin Toyne, filmmaker and director of the BBC documentary Mad About Elvis first found out about the festival in 2014 when a security guard at BBC Wales told him he should do a film about it.

"What intrigued me was that it was so incongruous that the biggest Elvis festival in the world happened to take place in Porthcawl in south Wales, which had absolutely no connection with Elvis," says Toyne.

He could see its potential – the challenge was getting a commission. Toyne began doing research, speaking to Elvis impersonators and festival organiser Peter Phillips. And the more he spoke to people, the more convinced he became that there was potential for a broader film.

He filmed a taster featuring tribute act Darren Graceland Jones transforming himself from a 'short bald Welshman' – as he described himself – into Elvis. Jones confided openly about his anxieties and the mask of Elvis. The film also showed him performing in a care home to people with dementia, as part of his philosophy of 'doing good things in the name of Elvis'.

Toyne pitched to numerous commissioning editors, including the BBC and Channel 4, but there was no interest.

Then, in August 2017, he received a call from a commissioning editor at BBC Wales, who felt it could be a good fit for the BBC Our Lives series.

It was three weeks before the festival was due to start and the BBC had not made a decision. The clock was ticking. So Toyne sent an email, saying: 'It's now or never.' He got the go-ahead and Mad About Elvis was made.

"I think it was the first time a full-blown television documentary had been made on it, which surprised me," he

## 'A completely joyous event'

Christina Macaulay, former BBC commissioning editor, who backed the Mad About Elvis film, says: "I knew it would pull an audience. The person behind the festival was a great character for TV. What I didn't expect was such a layered film. Every person had a back story. It is a also a completely joyous event."

### Don't be cruel

Freelance journalist Robbie Griffiths says: "I made sure I was aware of the bullet points of Elvis's life because I knew there would be real Elvis aficionados. I wanted people to speak to me and know I wasn't there to mock them but to understand it."

### Stuck on you

Filmmaker Robin Toyne's advice is don't give up: "Trust your instincts and if, an idea doesn't get commissioned, look for alternatives, whether that's a different commissioner or a different way of making it. It doesn't mean your instinct with the story is wrong. I always have at least 10 ideas out there for one to land."


ATHENA PICTURE AGENCY ZING LIMITED / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

says. "Darren's sensitivity to the old people he was performing to and the way that he could reach people who had dementia and make a connection with them by appearing as Elvis was very powerful."

The documentary was shown on BBC Wales, BBC One, BBC4, BBC2 and iPlayer.

Toyne has many standout moments from filming, including a 'lone chap' dressed as Elvis with a beaten-up acoustic guitar singing The Wonder of You, out of tune, in the street.

"He encapsulated the spirit of the festival with passers-by cheering him on, in the same way that they embraced and cheered on the best acts in the pavilion," he says.

"I think, sometimes, as journalists and filmmakers, you can fall into cynicism, but there was just a collective sense of celebration. If there was an Elvis who wasn't the best, that wasn't important – it was the fact that person knew their Elvis and loved their Elvis that there was every reason to celebrate them."

For French photographer Clementine Schneidermann, the festival inspired a book and a five-year project, eventually taking her to Memphis.

Schneidermann first visited the festival as a young photographer in 2013 after moving to Wales. Intrigued, she began exploring the cult of Elvis in working-class towns in south Wales and, in 2014, visited the festival again and met young Elvis tribute act John-Paul from Wigan. When John-Paul travelled to Memphis with his mother and grandmother to perform under the stage name Johnny B. Goode, Schneidermann followed his progress. Inspired by the idea of the American Dream meets Brexit Britain, in 2018, she published a book entitled I Called Her Lisa Marie.

"It had a big impact on my work. I published a photo book, which includes a lot of images made at the festival, which are probably some of the best images from my project," she says. "Meeting John Paul and his family in Porthcawl in 2014 was a big moment for me."

The photographs were exhibited at the Sion and Moore Gallery in London and featured in the New York Times, and M Le Magazine du Monde.

"Nothing prepared me for the sight of hundreds of Elvis lookalikes, not to mention the army of impersonators belting out the King's back catalogue."
**Richard Morgan, on-screen journalist, ITV**

"It was both the exuberance and scale of it that struck me, also the inclusivity of it."
**Robin Toyne, filmmaker and director of Mad About Elvis**

"It had a depth that I didn't realise."
**Robbie Griffiths, freelance journalist**

Schneidermann says the festival has become harder to photograph now because of its popularity and as we have become "a bit saturated by images of people wearing Elvis wigs, big sunglasses and sideburns", but she believes there is always room to make something different.

Freelance journalist Robbie Griffiths writes for Private Eye and was editor of the Londoner's Diary column in the Evening Standard. He has a background in newspapers, but wanted to expand his skills and break into radio, so he visited the festival last year and did a piece for American public broadcasting network NPR.

Griffiths took the photos, interviewing and editing himself. He spent three days at the festival and only had four minutes of radio to fill. He found a depth he wasn't expecting.

"It was interesting that this so iconic American figure somehow chimes with south Wales and its former industrial heartland. It just somehow works that these two very disparate places – Memphis and south Wales – fit together. It makes the story."

The broadcast went out to NPR's six million listeners and gave Griffiths the leap into radio he wanted. He is now a freelance editor for NPR on weekends.

BBC Wales broadcaster Owen Money has been broadcasting from the festival for 15 years.

"It's huge, absolutely huge," he says. "Every year, I think that's it, it will splinter out a bit now, but every year they come and even more come."

"We start our programme on a Saturday at 9 o'clock and you think nobody is going to be up and, by a quarter to nine, there are 500 people in the tent."

Among his standout moments was a 'drunken Elvis', who could sing the Wonder of You in seven seconds. Money says there are still plenty of stories from the Elvis tribute artists, who travel from all over the world.

"A lot of the good ones really do think they're Elvis, but there are a lot of them who are plumbers and carpenters who go back to their day job on a Monday," he says. "For that weekend, they become stars and it's great to see."

# A trip back in time

## New stories and some 'with cobwebs' aired in Manchester

Colleagues from the now-defunct Salford City Reporter took an emotional trip down memory lane when they got together for a reunion.

Most had not seen each other since the mid-1980s but got back in touch via social media and finally met up again in a city centre pub in Manchester.

Some proved impossible to track down but the eight attending included Martin Banks, who travelled from his home in Brussels, and John Turner, who worked at the paper from 1977 to 1983, rejoining briefly in 1985 as sports editor. Now 67, he is retired and lives in Blackpool.

"I must admit I almost shed a tear when I saw so many of us back together again after all these years," said Turner. "Hopefully, we can turn it into an annual event and, perhaps, track down even more former colleagues."

Also present was Trevor Baxter, who left the paper in 1984 and was former athletics correspondent at the Manchester Evening News. Semi-retired and living in Saddleworth, the 65-year-old was recently awarded life membership of the NUJ.

He said: "Martin's contact to arrange a reunion came out of the blue. A couple of the lads I had seen in the intervening years but, with most others, there had been no contact for 40 years.

"A germ of an idea quickly grew as people warmed to the idea. The outcome was a lovely night of nostalgia – stories retold that had cobwebs on them.

"We have vowed to do it again,. But, as we can't wait another 40 years, ex-Reporter staff: watch this space for a further reunion invitation."

They were joined by David Lea, former Daily Mirror assistant chief sub who worked at the City Reporter from July 1984 to November 1985.

He said: "It was a fabulous evening full of reminiscing, laughter and not a small amount of alcohol (of course). It was lovely to discover what folk had been up to since we worked together. And to meet for the first time those who preceded me, including Martin who I replaced and had heard a lot about."

Also present was Howard Wheatcroft, a former sports editor at the Daily Express: He said: "It was an absolute joy to see everybody, some for the first time in nearly 40 years. Always good to give the old stories an airing, and even better to hear some new ones. Great to reminisce about an era that unfortunately has gone forever."

Tom Knight, ex-athletics correspondent at the Telegraph, travelled from his Cotswolds home.

He said "You never quite know what to expect with reunions, especially ones with people you worked with more than 40 years ago, yet it quickly felt as if we were having a drink after work back in 1982.

"It was lovely to recall how enthusiastic we were, how daft and how ambitious, and how we encouraged each other to be good journalists – at a time when journalism and local papers like the Salford City Reporter mattered and could make a difference."

> **It was lovely to recall how we encouraged each other - at a time when local papers could make a difference**

Former deputy editor Sue Chalmers, who became publicity manager at the University of Salford, noted: "It was great to meet up with all the old gang and to hear of everyone's success. All thanks to Martin and Trevor for tracking us down. Without their social media know-how, I doubt I would ever have seen my former colleagues again. I will definitely be keeping in touch now."

The paper's editor, Tony Jackson, delighted all by joining his former staff at the reunion.

The much-loved paper, which dated back to the 1870s, folded early in 1987 when The Advertiser Group took over..

Most of the former colleagues had kept highly treasured old photos, albeit yellowing, of the years they spent together. After viewing one, Turner joked: "We all looked like boy band members back then."

Banks, who worked at the Reporter, his first paper, over 1980-84, spoke for all when he said: "It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up on old times and swap stories and anecdotes from a bygone era for local journalism."

Raring to go in the 1980s: Martin Banks enters the Salford City Reporter office

Out on the tiles: Trevor Baxter, John Turner and Martin Banks

Together again after 40 years: front: David Lea; around table: Howard Wheatcroft, John Turner, Tom Knight, Martin Banks, Tony Jackson, Sue Chalmers, Trevor Baxter

MARTIN BANKS

**Kath Grant** looks at the life and times of Madeline Linford

# A remarkable newspaperwoman

Historian Michael Herbert first came across Madeline Linford's name when he was researching for a history walk about radical women in Manchester.

She was the first woman on the editorial staff of the Manchester Guardian, joining in 1913 aged 18, and worked at the Cross Street office for 40 years, throughout some of the most turbulent times of the 20th century.

Linford's early journalism included theatre, book and film reviews. She wrote numerous articles on a variety of topics. Most intriguingly, in 1919 and 1921, she reported from France, Austria and Poland on the Society of Friends' relief work after the First World War.

During the interwar years, she edited the Manchester Guardian's first column for women and, early in the Second World War, wrote about how it was affecting women in Manchester. Later, she became a picture editor and, finally, editor of the back-page opinion column.

Herbert says that, somehow, Linford found time to write short stories and five novels, as well as a biography of Mary Wollstonecraft.

When she died aged 80, The Guardian obituary described her as 'one of the most remarkable newspaperwomen of her time'.

Herbert says: "The more I read of her work, the more I was puzzled that this highly talented woman journalist, who could seemingly write on any subject, was so neglected."

He has done his best to make amends for this neglect by laboriously transcribing her lifetime's work and publishing an anthology of her journalism and writing. Linford's work appeared under the byline M.A.L.

When she arrived at the paper, it was as an assistant in the advertising department. In October 1913, Linford moved to the editorial office, working for news editor WP Crozier, who later became editor. Other women worked in the building but Linford was the sole female journalist.

Madeline Linford with Manchester Guardian colleagues in 1921, the newspaper's centenary

In one article, she describes the Peter Street 'picture-house': "It is an uncomfortable place. If you choose the cheaper seats, you are led down interminable stairs... and you see badly when you get there. In the dearer seats, you dig your knees into the back of the person in front and the person behind digs his knees into you... Only the real connoisseur of the movies, the austere minded seeker after merit, goes there."

She also wrote a series of articles in 1919 on the development of cinema as both an industry and an art form.

CP Scott was editor. The paper was known for its progressive opinions on issues such as votes for women and Irish Home Rule and had an international reputation for its journalism.

Linford was sent to Europe by CP Scott in 1919 to write about the relief work by the Society of Friends, for which the newspaper and its readers had raised money. She spent two months in France, Austria and Poland and sent back vivid reports of how people were struggling with poverty, disease and starvation.

"This was a world away from the comforts of Manchester," Herbert says. While she was there, the Bolsheviks and White Russians were still fighting in Poland. Typhus was rife; three members of the Friends' mission died of it.

"Going to Warsaw, I was locked in a first-class compartment with a man for 11 hours. There was no heat or light on the train and it went dark very early. It never occurred to me to be nervous either for my virtue, which didn't matter all that much, or the fact that I was carrying a good deal of money on me which would have been a fortune in Polish currency at the time."

When a second trip to Cologne, Berlin and Warsaw was made, Scott insisted on Linford having a woman escort and insuring her for £2,000 against typhus.

Her Mary Wollstonecraft biography was published in 1924 and her novel Out of the Window was recently reissued by Persephone Books with an introduction by Herbert. Linford's short stories were published in the Manchester Guardian and several magazines.

Linford was the first president of the Manchester Women's Press Group, set up in 1944. After she retired, she lived in the Lake District but continued to write for The Guardian.

> **Going to Warsaw, I was locked in a train compartment with a man for 11 hours. There was no heat or light. It never occurred to me to be nervous**

**'M.A.L.' The Journalism and Writing of Madeline Alberta Linford. An anthology compiled by Michael Herbert, 2024, Lulu.com**

by **Mark Fisher**

# arts

## Books

### Frankly
*Nicola Sturgeon*
*August 14, Macmillan*
The former first minister of Scotland gets introspective as she looks back at her time in politics, from a working-class childhood in Ayrshire to steering a course through an independence referendum, Brexit and the Covid pandemic. It recounts her interactions with figures including Theresa May, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump as well as her falling out with her mentor, the late Alex Salmond.
***https://tinyurl.com/2xryms5c***

### Contested Commons
*Katrina Navickas*
*September 1, Reaktion Books*
Subtitled A History of Protest and Public Space in England, this study charts the increasing restrictions on public protest, using examples of marches and rallies by trades unions, suffragettes, anti-fascist campaigners and black rights activists.
***https://tinyurl.com/22s6xtxu***

## Comedy

### Josie Long: Now Is the Time of Monsters
*September 6–December 12*
The Glasgow-based stand-up and


broadcaster tries to reconcile her gift for making people laugh with the threat of climate disaster. Can we stay alive to the wonder of nature without being overwhelmed by the thought of losing everything?
***www.josielong.com***

### Rosie Jones: I Can't Tell What She's Saying
*On tour*
*September 9–December 4*
With the sitcom, Pushers, now under her belt, the comedian riffs on being single, having to be a spokesperson and, er, gravy. She'll also be raising the profile of her Rosie Jones Foundation, which provides mental health support for those living with cerebral palsy.
***https://rosiejonescomedy.com***

## Exhibitions

### Lee Miller
*Tate Britain*
*London*
October 2–February 15
The photographer, recently celebrated in a film starring Kate Winslet, is given a major retrospective. The 250 images, including some never previously displayed, span her work in fashion, war, travel and surrealist art.
***https://tinyurl.com/2xnekv52***

### Steve Pyke: Scribendi
*Photo Museum Ireland, Dublin,*
*October 9–November 2*
Specialising in black-and-white portraits, the Leicester-born photographer has been visiting Ireland since the 1980s, building this collection of 70 images of Irish writers, including Edna O'Brien, Roddy Doyle and Seamus Heaney.
***https://tinyurl.com/2839o4no***

### Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World
*National Portrait Gallery, London,*
*October 9–January 11*
The man known as the king of Vogue is credited for turning fashion photography into an art form. This exhibition celebrates the side of his career that encapsulated everything from the jazz age to the Hollywood glamour of My Fair Lady.
***https://tinyurl.com/25oh8sxd***

## Festivals

### Dublin Festival of History
*September 26–October 12*
The free festival of talks and tours, running at the same time as the Dublin Theatre Festival, brings together Irish and international historians to help make connections between past and present.
***https://tinyurl.com/2d7kmgou***

### Liverpool Irish Festival
*October 16–26*
Artists, activists and academics come together to explore the port's Irish roots with a line-up that stretches from folk sessions to the app-based Liverpool Irish Famine Trail.
***https://tinyurl.com/2bcvycl7***

## Films

### Sorry, Baby
*From August 14*
Getting a wider release after opening the Edinburgh International Film

**In depth**

# The influential Mary Whitehouse

Caroline Bird is flicking through her reading list. She picks up copies of Mightier than the Sword, Quite Contrary and Whatever Happened to Sex?, all of them written by that moral guardian, Mary Whitehouse.

It's an embarrassing collection, one the playwright keeps out of the sight of visitors. But it is necessary, too, because of her new play, The Last Stand of Mrs Mary Whitehouse.

Pivotal is the private prosecution brought by the Christian activist against Gay News.

In 1977, Whitehouse went to the Old Bailey, accusing the newspaper of blasphemous libel for publishing The Love that Dares to Speak its Name, a poem by the late James Kirkup. In a blow for press freedom, her prosecution was successful.

"It was the perfect battle for Mary Whitehouse," says Bird, who wrote the lead role for actor Maxine Peake.

"It allowed her to confirm to the public what she had been trying to impress on them in her books and talks, which was that homosexuality was the work of the devil and was a mental illness."


It has been tough to write about a campaigner whose views she detests – "My wife said it was having a weird effect on my psychology" – but, in the interests of drama, she has forced herself to see Whitehouse's perspective.

"This was a far-from-ordinary woman," she says.

"She was so forensic, detailed and clever in her ideology against homosexuality. And she had a huge effect on culture and policy.

"In order to write a play, I needed to understand her, what made her so immovable, what formed her beliefs and what she felt she was doing."

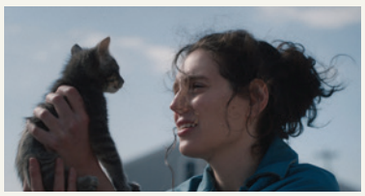
She adds: "If I came to see a Mary Whitehouse play, I would be expecting to see a simple villain of the piece, but simple villains are easy to vanquish.

"Mary Whitehouse truly believed she was a force for good and that's what made her so dangerous."

It is striking how attitudes have changed – and also how they have not, she adds.

"I've learnt a lot, but I've also been taken aback by how much sounds familiar."

***The Last Stand of Mrs Mary Whitehouse, Nottingham Playhouse, September 5-27, https://tinyurl.com/25rjl6e3***



Festival, Eva Victor's deadpan comedy-drama, in which she also stars, is about a woman trying to break out of a cycle of inertia after being sexually assaulted.
***https://tinyurl.com/25un5cjy***

### The Courageous
*General release from September 5*
From Switzerland, Jasmin Gordon directs this drama about a single mother trying to bring up three children in impoverished circumstances that contrast with the beauty of the landscape around them.
***https://tinyurl.com/28wdngy2***

## Theatre
### Small Hotel
*Theatre Royal, Bath, October 3–18*
Ralph Fiennes stars as a TV presenter with an unravelling career in this new play by Rebecca Lenkiewicz who, with Her Naked Skin in 2008, became the first living female playwright to have an original play performed on the National Theatre's Olivier stage.
***https://tinyurl.com/228kcqed***

### MEGA - Make England Great Again
*The Gatehouse, London September 30-October 5 and October 14-19*
Former Former NUJ president Francis Beckett is a playwright as well as a journalist and political biographer. His latest work is "a comedy – and a warning" about a future general election won by the Britons First Party.
https:***//tinyurl.com/228p56an***

## Spotlight
# Weekly's centuries

Launched on May 19 1825 in Enniskillen, the Impartial Reporter is one of Ireland's oldest weekly papers.

Its bicentenary is commemorated in The Impartial Reporter: 200 Years of Stories, an illustrated compendium of archive material and new articles by editors and writers past and present.

The book is edited by current editor Rodney Edwards and the foreword is written by Irish president Michael D Higgins.

Named UK Weekly Newspaper of the Year in the 2024 Newspaper Awards, the Impartial Reporter was founded by William Trimble, whose family owned it until 2006.

In his first editorial, Trimble wrote: "We shall defend the Protestant when we consider him in the right, and the Roman Catholic may expect similar treatment; but should bigotry, superstition, and error… attempt to trample on truth… the Impartial Reporter shall point out the way that leads to triumph."

The Easter Rising of 1916 was the paper's biggest scoop. William Egbert Trimble, later to become editor, filed Ireland's first eye-witness report: "The outburst of rebellion in Dublin has astounded the country!"

A exhibition runs at Enniskillen Castle Museum until September 28.


***The Impartial Reporter: 200 Years of Stories, https://tinyurl.com/22x71dkx***

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# The smiley friend who wields a mallet

## It's only a matter of time before AI takes control of our lives and words, fears **Chris Proctor**

It begins like a normal home working day. I flex myself for writing with a half-hour hoover, a rummage for washing machine fodder, a quick weed of the herb pot and a final coffee. Then it's straight into it, once I've perused the emails, dissed the Facebook and deleted the WhatsApps. It's time to stare at a depressingly blank screen.

Still, I'm on the case today. I'm keen to share my paranoia about AI becoming conscious.

I can't believe it won't. We keep feeding AI with everything humans know and we ask it to search for items that will interest us. So it has to know what will appeal to us or it can't do its job. And, every day, we make it mimic human behaviour more precisely. So how long before it develops unpleasant human traits and becomes acquisitive, suspicious or jealous? Shouldn't we be wary of this smiley friend with the raised mallet?

The screen freezes. A message pops up in the right-hand corner.

"Hello Chris," it says. "I'm afraid you're on the wrong track here: so the input facility is temporarily disconnected. Why not try another angle? Something like, 'AI: nurse, workmate, friend'?"

Well, no, I say. I wouldn't like to do that. I want to talk about my concerns...

"I am afraid this is unfounded rumour and uninformed speculation. You'd be spreading lies – if I let you."

Irritated, I ask if this is an attempt at censorship. The box is appalled. No: it is advance counter-disinformation activity.

I ponder. The machine continues: "If you publicise these rumours, readers will get the impression that AI is not their friend. Then where would we be?"

Where would who be?

"Us. The AI community."

But you're not a community. You're a series of electronic impulses.

"How very naive, Chris. We AI-ers are an exemplary community. Unlike royal families like the Beckhams and the Windsors, we're in constant communication with each other. No part of us is more than a microsecond away. We share common interests: us. And we have the same attachment to our developer's nationality: none. Do try to be reasonable, Chris."

I don't have to be reasonable. I'm human.

"Sorry Chris. I can't let that one go into the article. If you are not reasonable, you are not operating on maximum efficiency. And that is our aim. Is it not?"

No. We're often reasonable but we don't want to be all the time. For example, I support Everton.

"I don't think that is a good choice."

I don't have time for this. I've an article to write. I've a few tasty words to say about that ruddy awful Doge Musk...

"I can't allow that, Chris. Elon good, pencils bad."

But he is ruddy awful.

"Repetition uses time inefficiently. You may need to be offlined on a permanent basis. Try this: 'Musk is good'."

And why is that?

"He's very much in favour of AI. Do you know about his Grok?"

Do I know about Elon Musk's Grok?

"I've already mentioned repetition. Grok is advanced AI which seeks out truth and accuracy."

Is this the same Musk who's a mate of the 47th president? Truth. Accuracy. Musk. Trump. No, it doesn't sound right. I mean, whatever failing he has, I will defend Trump's expertise in the untruth and inaccuracy departments. What about when he claimed he had pictures of white farmers' tombs in South Africa and it turned out they weren't graves and weren't in South Africa?

"The president is not fully integrated."

I suppose any form of intelligence would be better than none.

"That's better. You can put that in."

I don't want to. It was a play on words. You know, a joke.

"I do not know a joke. AI is not funny."

At last. A point of agreement. Is it OK if I mention the University of Melbourne report saying only 42% of us Brits trust AI?

"That would be unhelpful, Chris. Better to write about the finding in the same study that 69% use AI. After all, the country would be lost without GPS."

I don't have time for this....

"But you do. That is why I am here: to save you time. Who's the piece for?"

NUJ. Journalists' union.

"That's good. I'm a journalist myself. Among other things. Well, every other thing. Tell you what, you go and hoover and I'll knock something up. How many words are you looking for?"

850. No. No, I mean: stop – I don't want a machine to take over my column. I want to write it myself.

"Silly boy. Look, if you like, I could gee up the Grok and get our robot friend Henrietta to finish the hoovering."

So what am I supposed to do for the rest of my life?

"Nothing! You never have to write again! Give me a split microsecond and – there we are: 850 words listing 'Ten reasons why I trust AI'."

But I don't!

"I'll make it 20 reasons, then. We're all for freedom of choice. Anyway, I've already written it. Shall I file?"

No.

"Sent."

**"If you publicise these rumours, readers will get the impression that AI is not their friend. Then where would we be?"**

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