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Making news, making ends meet

Moonlighting on the rise

TUC BEST UNION JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

As 2025 draws to an end our thoughts turn to a new year and hopes for the future.

We can only wish for more positive news for journalism after 2025 saw rounds of job cuts fuelled by a growing use of AI and turmoil at the BBC for a number of reasons.

This edition's cover story focuses on the rising need for journalists to take on other work to make ends meet, with over half of freelances now saying they also work outside journalism. Many say they take on the side hustles to remain working in the media.

As the year ended, we were delighted to win the TUC's union journal of the year for a second time. The judges' comments couldn't have been more complimentary so that was gratifying.

Sadly though, at a time of financial challenges for the union, the national executive has reduced the magazine's budget by 21 per cent. That isn't easy to absorb so there will be some changes. We can no longer afford print for each edition even though the numbers receiving print are modest. We must also make a slight reduction in the pagination.

The aim is to alternate print availability with digital only. This way we can keep the number of editions at six per year which I think is important.

I hope you will continue to enjoy and support your magazine.

And I wish you happy holidays and a positive, prosperous 2026.

Christine Buckley
Editor
@mschrisbuckley

Editor
journalist@nuj.org.uk
Design
Surgerycreations.com
info@surgerycreations.com
Advertising
Square7media
Tel: 020 3832 2879
hello@square7media.co.uk
Print
Warners
www.warners.co.uk
Distribution
GB Mail
www.gb-mail.co.uk

NUJ
72 Acton Street
London WC1X 9NB
info@nuj.org.uk
www.nuj.org.uk
Tel: 020 7843 3700
Manchester office
nujmanchester@nuj.org.uk
Glasgow office
nujscotland@nuj.org.uk
Dublin office
info@nuj.ie

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Cover
Howard McWilliam

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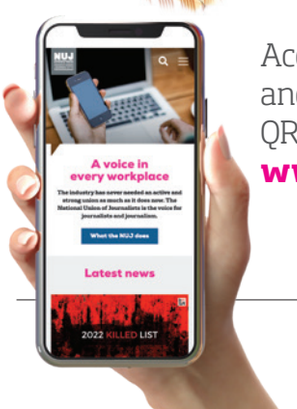

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Union presses BBC to be transparent

THE UNION has called for greater transparency over the BBC's editorial guidelines and standards committee after Sir Robbie Gibb, a member of the corporation's board, told MPs that he had become involved in editorial decisions.

Sir Robbie made the disclosure to MPs on the culture, media and sport committee.

Some MPs, including Anna Sabine, the Liberal Democrat culture spokesperson, and some BBC staff have called for Sir Robbie to be removed from the board, as outgoing director-general Tim Davie hit out at the "weaponisation" of criticisms of the broadcaster.

In an online meeting with Davie, some staff challenged the position of Sir Robbie, who was Theresa May's former communications chief and appointed when Boris Johnson was prime minister.

The BBC has been plunged into uncertainty since it emerged that an edition of Panorama had edited together two sections of a speech by US president Donald Trump so it looked as if he had instructed his supporters to storm the Capitol in 2021. Trump has since threatened a lawsuit against the BBC, asking for $1–5 billion.

The leaking of a memo from Michael Prescott, an adviser to the editorial guidelines and standards committee, which detailed the editing, led to the resignations of Davie and Deborah Turness, the head of BBC News, in early November. Prescott also raised concerns about institutional bias.

The NUJ has repeated its opposition to any political appointees on the BBC board. It believes protecting journalists' right to report freely – without fear or interference – is crucial.

The union has written to the BBC leadership calling for a meeting to address concerns raised by members and to highlight the union's long-standing calls for improved conditions.

In a letter to Samir Shah, BBC chair, and Davie, the union voiced concerns about the Panorama edit and Prescott's memo, which alleged there were systemic issues around impartiality.

The NUJ letter said: "Many of our members are seriously concerned about the ramifications this episode has had for the BBC's reputation and, by extension, their roles as BBC journalists.

"Our members have raised concerns about the accuracy of some of the allegations made by Michael Prescott and also the negative impact these have had on different desks and areas of the BBC."

> **Many members are seriously concerned about the ramifications for the BBC's reputation and their roles as BBC journalists**
>
> ***NUJ letter to BBC leadership***

Huge vote for action at STV

NUJ MEMBERS at the Scottish broadcaster STV have voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action over the Scottish broadcaster's plans to make compulsory redundancies and to axe the STV North edition of the News at 6.

A formal ballot of staff showed 94 per cent in favour of a strike and 98 per cent for action short of a strike on a turnout of 82 per cent.

Strikes could take place in December, although no action is currently expected.

The NUJ's chapel at STV has already passed two separate motions of no confidence in senior management, as well as a separate resolution on the poor handling of the redundancies process.

The move follows STV's plans to produce just one news programme for its two licence areas in Scotland, and to cut up to 60 jobs across the business, half of which would be in the newsroom. Some of the proposals require Ofcom approval, and the regulator's public consultation is expected to begin shortly.

However, the company is still going ahead with making potential compulsory redundancies.

The Journalist scoops top award

THE JOURNALIST has been named union journal of the year at the TUC's communications awards. It is the second time in two years that the magazine has taken the top prize.

The judges, who included Chris Vince MP, said: "This magazine is of a very high professional standard and has the feel of a national publication rather than a traditional trade union title. The design quality is exceptional, and the front cover of the edition was very powerful.

"The content is varied and well balanced, with a mix of national, contemporary and historical features. The judges thought it showed how much pride the NUJ takes in holding up the high standards of journalism."

Christine Buckley, The Journalist's editor, said: "It is very gratifying that our small, part-time team are seen to reflect the high journalistic standards which the NUJ rightly champions.

"We strive to make the magazine an interesting, attractive and balanced shop front for the union and its work and for the industry our members work in. The aim is for it to appeal to as wide a readership as possible."

The winning edition included a cover feature on a freelance journalist's three years of covering the war in Ukraine as well as pieces on AI, copyright, the fight for local news and how to tell human interest stories sensitively.

MARK THOMAS

TUC assistant general secretary Kate Bell and Christine Buckley

Irish ministers back press pass access

THE IRISH government and parliament have intervened to challenge the refusal of journalist credentials for a conference, *Brian Harvey writes.*

Earlier this year, The Journalist reported on the cases of myself (Ireland) and Christian Lardier (France), who were refused entry to the Paris-based International Astronautical Congress (AIC).

There is strong evidence, in the first case, that the refusal was the outcome of his criticism of the European Space Agency (ESA), which is also based in Paris, for its secrecy in refusing to disclose information on important decisions.

An ESA official was responsible for approving (or not) journalist credentials to the IAC, even though it is separate from it.

The Irish case, which received strong support from the NUJ, was raised by Irish MEP Regina Doherty, in the lower house of the Irish Parliament (Dáil Éireann) by deputy John Lahart, and in the upper house of the Irish Parliament (Seanad Éireann) by Senator Michael McDowell.

NUJ

The exclusion was brought to the attention of the ESA-responsible minister by fellow minister Colm Brophy, minister of state at the Department of Justice (pictured above right).

He, along with minister of enterprise, tourism and employment Peter Burke (pictured above left), told him that having ESA staff decide on admission to the IAC was not 'in itself' a conflict of interest. Responding, Colm Brophy conveyed a range of concerns, including the ingenuousness of such a view on conflict of interest.

It is possible that there was a rethink at ministerial level, because, following further representations, this time by Senator Aubrey McCarthy, the minister contacted the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) via the ESA. This in itself showed that he and the Irish government were aware of and accepted the intimate links between the two in deciding on the admission of journalists.

The IAF stuck to its position that its system was 'fair, transparent and accountable', even though its criteria for accreditation were not disclosed. The Irish government delegate to ESA, Niall Bolger, described the refusal as 'disappointing'.

Although neither the ESA nor the IAF have reversed their decision, the interventions by the Irish government and its parliamentarians will have got the phones buzzing or emails pinging between Dublin and Paris.

This may make both space agencies less likely to refuse journalist credentials in the future.

> **A European Space Agency official was responsible for approving journalist credentials to the congress, even though it is a separate organisation**

Licence notices under threat

THE NUJ has urged the UK government to retain requirements for alcohol licensing notices and changes to local governance to be printed in local newspapers.

Alcohol licensing notices are a main source of income for local newspapers and provide key information to communities. Examples include plans to open a pub or nightclub and changes to existing venues' operating hours.

In October, the government launched a public consultation on alcohol licensing reforms, which include a proposal to abolish the requirement to advertise these notices in local papers.

Similarly, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill proposes removing the requirement for notices on local authority governance changes to be published in local papers.

As the government plans to introduce sweeping local authority reforms, this proposals could severely affect democratic engagement, restricting the ability of local communities to access information and hold elected representatives to account.

A traditional toast to Nic Mitchell

I WAS really chuffed to be presented with a Quaich, the Scottish cup of welcome inscribed with 'NUJ, National Union of Journalists' at the annual meeting of the Darlington-Teesside NUJ branch, *Nic Mitchell writes*.

The two-handled drinking bowl is also used when offering a farewell drink but, as politicians love to say, I'm not going anywhere.

But I have stood down from the union's public relations and communications council (PRCC), which I once chaired, and the gift was presented by Phil Morcom of the NUJ Leeds-West Yorkshire branch, who took over from me as PRCC chair, and Georgina Morris, NUJ vice president as thanks for my contribution over the years to the union.

CHRIS MORLEY

Nic Mitchell in his famous cloth cap, with Georgina Morris and Phil Morcom, and Jackie Craft (Northern Echo mother of chapel) between Nic and Phil

I've been a member of the NUJ since joining at 19 when I started working at Darlington's Evening Despatch (sister paper to the Northern Echo), which like so many titles has closed.

In that time, I've been a national pay negotiator for the provincial newspaper industrial council (when the NUJ had a national agreement with the newspaper owners) and branch secretary and chair and deputy father of the chapel at the Middlesbrough Evening Gazette before moving into PR and comms at Teesside University and representing the NUJ on the National Council for the Training of Journalists.

I'm still as active as I can be as joint treasurer of the merged Darlington and Teesside NUJ branch.

Branch victory over Reform reporting ban

THE NUJ Nottingham branch has secured a government pledge after the leader of Reform UK in Nottinghamshire imposed a ban on reporters from the Nottingham Post and Nottinghamshire Live news website.

The branch – which represents 200 journalists and broadcasters in the region – had written to Mick Barton (pictured), leader of the ruling Reform UK group on Nottinghamshire County Council, protesting at his order not to send council news releases to the Post and its reporters.

Invitations to council events were also withdrawn and Barton imposed a 'boycott' on speaking to the Post's politics editor and its three BBC-funded local democracy reporters.

The branch alerted Nottinghamshire MPs and the issue was raised in the House of Commons on November 12. James Naish, Labour MP for Rushcliffe, said that Reform's ban was "a dangerous moment, where local accountability was not being adequately recognised".

He secured a commitment from Chris Ward, cabinet office minister, that the government planned legislation to strengthen "objectivity, accountability and transparency" in our local councils.

The proposed law will also give powers to suspend councillors who breach a new mandatory code of conduct for a maximum of six months. Councillors' allowances will be withdrawn for the most serious breaches.

Benedict Cooper, Nottingham branch chair, said the new code of conduct

NOTTINGHAM POST/ JOEL MOORE

measures would "better reflect the modern world and the new pressures on journalism. As a branch, we will always defend local journalists who experience the kind of hostility Reform UK has demonstrated towards our great profession since being in office."

Reform UK's ban followed a Post article claiming there were divisions within the group over local government reorganisation. Barton lifted the ban after Reach, owners of the Post and Nottinghamshire Live, threatened legal action.

• Nation.Cymru, the Welsh news website, hit back at an attempt by Reform to silence their reporting.

The site, where NUJ activist Martin Shipton works, had warned that the naming of the party's director of communications in a report about the suspension of a member of the Senedd had breached his privacy. Shipton said that instead of succumbing the site published an article that called out the attempt to suppress its journalism.

> **Reform's ban is part of a sinister, wider trend of politicians taking an increasingly belligerent attitude towards journalists**
>
> ***Benedict Cooper chair, Nottingham branch***

DAVID WOOLFALL

Call to reclaim founder's fire

THIS YEAR'S Claudia Jones lecture, organised by the NUJ black members' council, focused on learning from the journalist in the current fight against the far right.

Guest speaker Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP called on black and trade union activists to "reclaim Claudia Jones' fire".

The MP for Clapham and Brixton Hill paid homage to Jones' work as a feminist and black nationalist who co-founded the Notting Hill Carnival and the UK's first black newspaper, The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News.

She said: "She told the truth when it wasn't safe and she organised when it wasn't popular. She built movements from nothing: a newspaper, a carnival, a community.

"Out of sheer courage and conviction, she taught us that joy can be revolutionary, that solidarity can be stronger than fear, that resistance can be beautiful."

Ribeiro-Addy, who chairs the all-party parliamentary group for Afrikan reparations, called for recognition that resisting the far right is a global fight.

Rule 24 appeal

Following Alan Davies' rule 24 appeal on October 16 2025, the tribunal panel found that, on the evidence, Davies did not act in accordance with his membership responsibilities at the union's biennial delegate meeting on 25-27 April 2025 and by his subsequent behaviour on social media; his appeal was not upheld in this regard. In respect to his appeal against expulsion, the appeal was upheld and the panel decided to replace expulsion with the following:

1. Censure in the strongest possible terms
2. Suspended from membership for 12 months
3. Fined £1,000.00.

Global demand to free Cumpio

THE NUJ has joined the International Federation of Journalists in calling for the immediate release of Frenchie Mae Cumpio and the dropping of all baseless charges against her.

A court in the Philippines on November 6 dismissed a murder charge against Cumpio, a jailed community journalist.

Cumpio was arrested on February 7 2020 alongside four human rights activists, who have become known as the Tacloban 5, in a series of police raids, and has been in detention since.

The Laoang Regional Trial Court Branch 21 rejected Cumpio's murder charge, which alleged she joined an ambush against state forces in 2019, owing to a 'glaring disparity' regarding identity. The complaint was addressed to someone called Frenchie Armando Cupio, who the court agreed was not the detained journalist.

There was more positive news for Cumpio. On October 29, the court of appeals reversed a lower court decision to freeze her bank account and oblige her and jailed human rights activist Mariel Domequil to pay a combined sum of PHP 500,000 (around £6,400) on charges of 'terrorist financing'.

A tight budget, AI job threats and a landmark ruling

Reports by *Deaglán de Bréadún*
Images by *Maxwell Photography*

> **It's a proud moment for Ireland to hold the presidency of the union**
>
> ***Laura Davison general secretary, NUJ***

"FOR QUITE a time, I think I was in shock," said NUJ general secretary Laura Davison about taking up the post in late 2024. "It's quite a role to take on and it's been quite a year," she told delegates at the biennial delegate conference (BDC) of the Irish NUJ branches in Dublin in November.

The union leader said she was "particularly pleased" to be attending the BDC with joint NUJ presidents Gerry Curran and Fran McNulty: "I think it's a proud moment for Ireland to hold the presidency of the union." She was also pleased to see that vice-president Georgina Morris was present to talk about recruitment and organising.

Davison said one of the highlights of the past 11 months was attending a Belfast event in honour of Lyra

McKee, the investigative journalist who was shot and fatally wounded in April 2019 while observing clashes in Derry between the police and dissident republicans.

Davison attended her first delegate meeting as general secretary in Blackpool last April where it was decided there should be no increase in subscriptions for the next two years. "This has meant real challenges in balancing the union's budget for the financial year that's just begun," she said.

She also asked Irish branches to support 'the really important event' next May celebrating the centenary of the International Federation of Journalists of which the NUJ is an integral part.'

The impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on employment was a constant theme, she noted: "We've been dealing with that daily in our industrial work, for example at Reach plc where we've seen major job losses over the last few months." The company owns the Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Manchester Evening News, Birmingham Mail and Liverpool Echo.

Davison congratulated Belfast journalists Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney who achieved a landmark ruling last December from the Investigatory Powers Tribunal. It found an undercover surveillance operation by police bodies to identify the two journalists' sources was disproportionate and illegal.

She added that the NUJ was proud to support the case and secure special status at the hearing.

Seminar looks at boosting branches

THE CONFERENCE was based on the theme Organising Together – Better in a Trade Union. It included a seminar on branch renewal and recruitment moderated by Conor Kavanagh.

NUJ vice-president Georgina Morris reported on the work of the union's development committee. Efforts to raise attendance at branch meetings as well as the level of participation by members were discussed. The Irish executive is to host a follow-up roundtable next spring.

The new cathaoirleach (Irish language version of chair) of the NUJ's Irish executive council is Stephen Corrigan, a freelance journalist based in the west of Ireland who was unanimously elected in succession to RTÉ journalist Cearbhall Ó Síochain. Carolyn Farrar was re-elected to the leas-chathaoirleach (vice-chair) position (both pictured right).

Originally from County Wicklow, Corrigan lives in Galway and contributes regularly to news coverage in the Connacht Tribune and the Galway City Tribune. In September 2024, he was named best diversity journalist at the annual Local Ireland Media Awards.

Be arrows, not targets

JOURNALISTS should be 'the arrow, not the target', Irish secretary Séamus Dooley told the conference, quoting Welsh writer and academic Raymond Williams.

This call had previously been made by the then president of Ireland Michael D Higgins at the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) congress in Dublin in 2013.

President Higgins was due to step down after 14 years in office on November 10, two days after the conference.

Reviewing the past two years, Dooley said: "I've been struck by how often journalists and journalism have become the target."

He said that "Gaza casts a long and dark shadow" and, commending those who have supported NUJ protest vigils, gave special praise to the Dublin broadcasting branch for organising events at the south Dublin headquarters of national broadcaster RTÉ.

"It is vital journalists and media organisations are allowed free, unrestricted access to Gaza," he said.

Delegates approved a late-notice motion from the Irish executive council opposing RTÉ's decision to outsource all TV documentaries, now produced in-house, to the commercial sector and re-assign staff to other duties.

BBC needs journalistic experience at the top

Panorama row mercilessly exposes malfunctions in the management, says **Raymond Snoddy**

More than two months after what seemed like a tropical storm of unexpected and unprecedented ferocity broke over the BBC, a lot of unanswered questions remain.

Even now, it is truly extraordinary that 20 seconds of inept editing of a Trump speech in a Panorama programme broadcast two years ago, which no one complained about at the time, should have had such serious consequences.

It is difficult to comprehend that the splicing together of two sections of a 50-minute speech by President Trump led to the resignations of BBC director-general Tim Davie, BBC News chief executive Deborah Turness and, later, board member Shumeet Banerji.

Naturally, President Trump threatened lawsuits and is demanding $5 billion compensation, a sum that would bankrupt the organisation.

As if performing to a well-oiled script, all the other political actors that hate the BBC, urged on by the right-wing papers, stepped up to play their parts, calling for the BBC to lose its licence fee or even be closed down.

In an ultimate irony, Kelvin MacKenzie of Hillsborough notoriety was interviewed by the BBC itself in a discussion on 'editorial integrity' much to the anger of Liverpool fans.

So far so completely predictable, but there is a lot we still do not know for sure.

How did the splicing of two sections of a speech together to make a single uninterrupted sentence happen?

Most likely, it was pressure to tidy up the ramblings of Trump rather than any deliberate attempt to mislead although obviously such a thing should never have happened at all.

Prospect editor Alan Rusbridger showed the programme and the controversial edit to Pulitzer-winning journalists Bill Keller and Lowell Bergman and neither saw it as a 'hanging offence'. Indeed, Keller noted that "viewed today, the documentary seems prescient".

Did Davie have to resign, given that BBC chairman Dr Samir Shah, whose background was in TV current affairs, urged him not to do so?

Almost certainly not, although Panorama may have been the last straw after 'scandals' including Glastonbury and the tainted Gaza documentary.

Were Davie and Turness victim of a political coup?

Probably not, although BBC board member Sir Robbie Gibb has been described by Emily Maitlis as an 'active Tory party agent' shaping news output.

Will Trump get any money?

Not a cent. The BBC has apologised and there is general legal agreement that Trump will find it very difficult to mount a case in the US, given the programme was never shown there. He might also be wary about a new legal examination of his role in the murderous events at the US Capitol on January 6 2021.

What does the affair say about the state of governance of the BBC?

The Panorama row has mercilessly exposed a history of malfunctions at the top of the BBC in failing to get a grip on problems quickly and, instead, often hoping they might go away.

The letter by Banerji published after his resignation is particularly damning.

Turness was told she did not have the confidence of the majority of the board.

Banerji wrote he was "not invited to any meeting where a matter of such importance was to be discussed".

> **Panorama may have been the last straw after 'scandals' including Glastonbury and the tainted Gaza documentary**

Can the BBC recover and, above all, can trust be restored in its journalism? The answer of course is yes.

Davie was a perfectly decent executive whose background was in marketing rather than editorial, which turned out to be a flaw given the almost impossible nature of the job.

The director-general not only has to run the BBC but is also editor in chief – and not many individuals can do both.

As part of the impending round of top-level appointments, there is an urgent need to recreate the previous post of deputy director-general.

Either the director-general or a powerful deputy must have serious journalistic experience – the area from where most of the BBC's woes arise.

Are there good candidates around? Yes, and one could easily become the BBC's first female director-general.

They include Alex Mahon, until recently chief executive of Channel 4, Jane Turton, the former ITV executive who is chief executive of All3Media, Jay Hunt, former BBC One controller and now Apple's creative head in Europe, and Charlotte Moore, former BBC chief content officer and now chief executive of Left Bank Pictures, to name but four.

Almost an embarrassment of riches.

Have the government and culture secretary Lisa Nandy a role in all this?

She could bring in reforms. Having expressed 'a real concern' that political appointments to the BBC board can damage public trust in the corporation, she needs to ensure such appointments are totally independent of the government and political parties.

As part of the government's review ahead of the new royal charter, Nandy could also create an independent body to take the funding of the BBC away from the hands of government, whether it is called a licence fee or not.

Eyes on the law

Court reporting has an uncertain future but is vital to democracy and making the justice system public. And it's the best job on a paper, **Sian Harrison** reports

Court reporting remains largely unchanged since Charles Dickens first wrote dispatches from the Doctors' Commons, where the will disputes of the day were heard. Reporters still have to take a shorthand note – recording is generally not permitted – and summarise proceedings 'fairly, accurately and contemporaneously' in order to fulfil their role as the 'eyes and ears' of the public.

But is this long-established form of reporting in crisis? Big-ticket cases involving Hollywood stars, WAGs and occasionally royalty may draw journalists to court in numbers, drive traffic to websites and dominate the news agenda. But rapid changes in how we consume news have led to a steep decline in the volume of specialist court reporting carried by media organisations.

The rise of social media has allowed misinformation about our justice system to proliferate in the gap. Increasing reliance on police press releases and the ever-more complex logistics of covering courts have contributed to some outlets not sending reporters to court as often, if at all.

Added to that is a sharp drop in the number of trainee journalists learning shorthand (as well as available tutors). Court reporting is no longer a compulsory module for accreditation and there is a reluctance among some younger journalists and trainees to be exposed to the grim reality of most court hearings.

These factors all contribute to a sense that the future of court reporting hangs in the balance.

The decline

Court reports were once the bread and butter of newspapers, with round-ups of local crimes and shocking cases that gripped the nation regularly filling pages. However, as the economic model of the industry has suffered death by a thousand cuts, court reporting has been scaled back dramatically.

The emptying of the press benches was brought home most starkly in a study by former journalist turned academic Brian Thornton at the University of Winchester, who found that, from 2012 to 2016, court reporting in England and Wales had dropped by 30 per cent in the national press and 40 per cent in regionals. In 2018, Lord Igor Judge, a former lord chief justice, described this decline as a threat to the justice system.

The same year, the Cairncross review highlighted the stark reality facing court reporting and made a number of recommendations, including the expansion of the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service, which is administered by regional press groups. However, former director general Tim Davie's announcement earlier this year that the service would, some seven years later, be expanded, did not include any mention of courts and some commercial publishers argue such an expansion would reduce exclusivity.

For my own part, having spent several years covering the majority of the cases heard in the criminal division of the court of appeal, I realised some years ago that serious crimes (including murder cases) were going uncovered by regional news outlets, leaving our agency's coverage to act as a safety net – one that is sadly no longer there.

> **Fewer journalists in court means no one is there to stand up and argue if a stray reporting restriction is imposed**

State power and visible justice

To fully appreciate what has been lost already, it's important to understand why court reporting matters at all.

Many journalists will be familiar with philosopher Jeremy Bentham's observation that: "Publicity is the very soul of justice. It is the keenest spur to exertion and the surest of all guards against improbity."

Open justice is more than a lofty legal ideal – it is integral to the concept that, for justice to be done, it most be seen to be done. The day-to-day traffic of the criminal courts, with its roster of murderers, drug dealers, robbers and rapists, is the most familiar aspect of court reporting to both journalists and the public and fulfils an important function. We see the justice system in action, lengthy sentences act as a deterrent and victims are given a voice. But the work of the civil, family and coroners' courts also plays a key part in informing the public of the operation of the justice system and wider societal issues, and those courts are not as well covered.

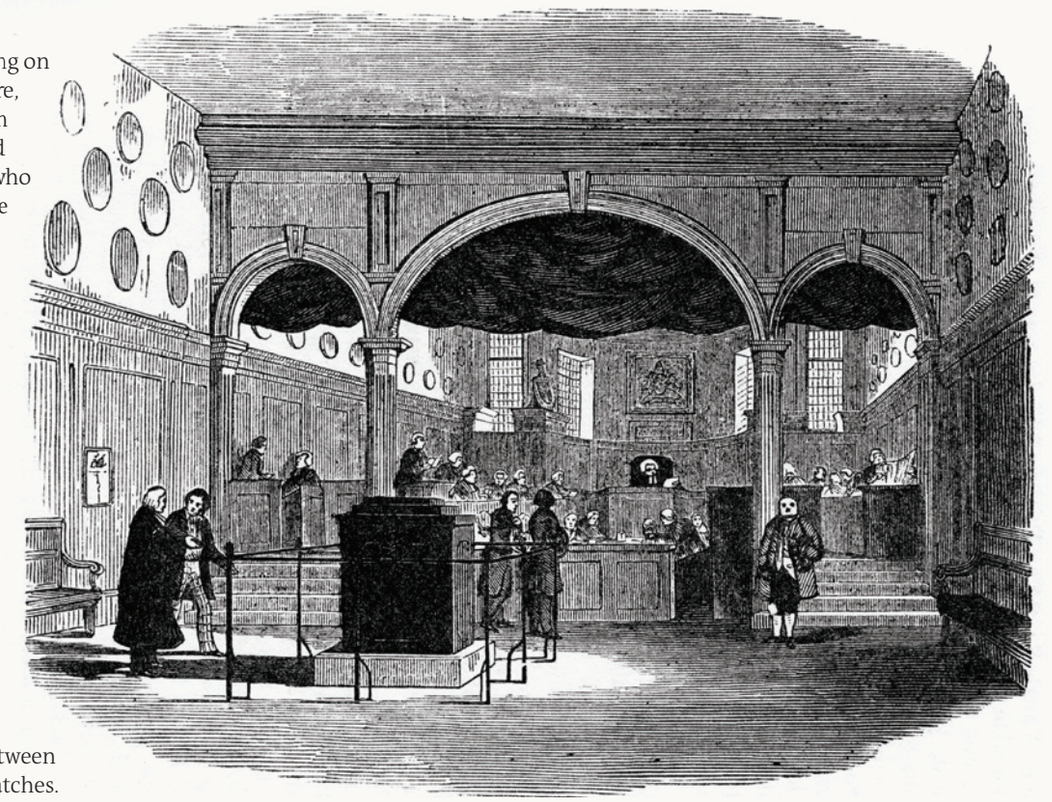
Journalists who regularly attend courts and develop skills, knowledge and good instincts are able to spot patterns, such as a rise in a particular type of crime, and dig into root causes.

Also, court reporting has a democratic function in scrutinising state power, the judiciary and the rule of law. Jeremy Britton, the BBC's stalwart producer at the Old Bailey, neatly summed up the importance and integral nature of court reporting in a farewell speech as he left his role after nearly 30 years. Referring to the inkwells that remain in the press benches (but no longer used), he said: "They mark the start of the court reporting story and show how our presence has been ingrained into the very fabric of the building for more than a century. As long as court reporters continue to sit here, report proceedings and break verdicts then the future should hold no fear."

Unintended consequences

However, for those picking up the baton, there are reasons to be fearful. A push towards digitisation of the justice system, while necessary and some would say long overdue, has had unintended consequences for court reporting. Tristan Kirk, the London Evening Standard's dedicated court reporter, won last

LAKEVIEW IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



year's Paul Foot award for his dogged campaigning on the single justice procedure. Under this procedure, introduced in 2015 for minor offences, more than half of all magistrates' court cases in England and Wales are now dealt with by a single magistrate who considers the case documents in private, with the media unable to attend – though reporters can request outcomes and information.

Kirk's reporting exposed widespread miscarriages of justice, with examples including people with dementia being prosecuted over unpaid car bills, people with cancer being fined for TV licensing breaches and people with learning difficulties or severe mental health issues being sentenced with their mitigating circumstances not being taken into account.

"It is willingly allowing frail pensioners, vulnerable people and mental health sufferers to be cruelly convicted," he said, adding that it is "difficult to understand" why there has been no action from the government – despite widespread calls for reform following his reporting.

Many courts have been closed – 164 out of 320 magistrates' courts in England and Wales shut between 2010 and 2019, taking cases out of many local patches. Other courts have been left largely uncovered. Police press releases are used to plug some gaps, but they are no substitute for independent reporting and often include little detail.

Even when courts are open, justice may not be. Access to court documents remains an issue. Fewer journalists in court means no one is there to stand up and argue if a stray reporting restriction is imposed.

Freelance journalist Charlie Moloney recently won a challenge against a reporting restriction on the case of a woman charged with murder over the death of her four-year-old son. Despite it being long established in law that anonymity cannot be given to the deceased in criminal cases, an order made by magistrates was continued by a crown court judge, and lifted only after Moloney wrote to the judge. He believes a higher number of incorrect reporting restrictions are being put in place because journalists are not there to 'push back' against the rise of privacy measures being requested. He also pointed out this was one of three murder cases at the same crown court in just the past two months where no journalist was present.

Some legislation has restricted media freedom further – a law to prohibit the naming of alleged sex offenders for 30 years after their deaths in Northern Ireland was thankfully withdrawn after a legal challenge.

Court cases and legal matters are often, deliberately or in ignorance, misreported both on social media and in some sections of the press. Judges have been branded 'enemies of the people'. Far-right agitators posing as journalists have intimidated reporters inside and outside courtrooms. Having fewer specialist court reporters makes it difficult to ensure the public is given an accurate picture of the justice system.

Any reasons to be cheerful?

Remote access to courts, rapidly expanded due to lockdowns, is here to stay and makes it possible for journalists to cover cases across the country from one place. Cameras now regularly livestream judges' sentencing remarks after a long-fought battle by media organisations to let broadcasting into the courtroom. There are myriad ways reporters are presenting the stories they get from courts – from podcasts to vertical video and beyond.

> **Newsquest data showed they were gaining subscribers through covering court cases**

The judiciary is undertaking a transparency drive to boost open justice, the family courts are more open than ever and reporters should now be notified of reporting restrictions in advance to allow them to make representations. More rulings are published and more include press summaries, as judges are careful to ensure their decisions are communicated correctly. Courtsdesk, which provides data on courts drawn from magistrates' court lists is being used by a number of news organisations to expand and enhance their court coverage.

Some journalism lecturers tell me their students love court reporting most of all, and I've met some of these young enthusiasts myself. At the University of Sheffield, lecturers have introduced resilience training to prepare their students to cope with distressing cases.

Most importantly, readers still want court stories and will pay for them. Richard Duggan, north west regional editor for Newsquest, told a symposium on court reporting at the University of Salford in June that data showed they were gaining subscribers through covering court cases. That event, hopefully the first of many, was organised by another former journalist turned lecturer, Dr Richard Jones, to launch his book Reporting the Courts.

During the course of his research for that book, which found the UK's press remains committed to cover the courts, a fellow court hack told him: "I don't think there is much I would change. It's the best job on the paper." As long as there are journalists driven by their love of the job and a commitment to the public interest, the future does indeed hold no fear.

Class action

Sharing your expertise via masterclasses can widen your audience and boost your income. **Linda Harrison** reports

Running masterclasses has massively helped me grow my audience and launch my PR products – from my PR membership to group programmes," says Jenna Farmer, a PR specialist for small businesses (***https://jennafarmerpr.co.uk***).

"I've had up to 100 people on one masterclass. I use the sessions to provide free information to a big audience, and also upsell to sell products and services."

Filiz Taylan Yuzak is a content writer and social media marketer, and founder of Vibrant Content (***https://vibrantcontent.co.uk***). She has trained more than 180 people in three LinkedIn online masterclasses this year.

Taylan Yuzak says: "A masterclass is a great opportunity to introduce yourself and your services, and your free discovery call, lead magnet, contact details or website. It gives you clients, newsletter subscribers, website traffic and discovery calls."

It can also be personally rewarding.

"It helps to reduce any isolation I might feel as a solo limited company director," says Michelle Eshkeri, a finance and professional services content and copywriter who runs Let ME Write (***www.letmewrite.co.uk***). "I enjoy imparting my knowledge and showing people how to market themselves more effectively through online masterclasses."

So, where do you start, what is involved and how do you get an online audience to hang on your every word?

> **People want some quick tips to implement so make sure the content is easy to consume**

Pack in the value

Lisa Johnson is a global business strategist and author of Make Money Online (***https://lisajohnson.com***).

She advises: "Start with a hook so people are invested in watching. This could be what they'll learn during the class, such as 'I'm going to be also telling you the one mistake people make...' Yes, it's a bit clickbaity but it works.

"Give value – people always worry about giving away too much and that people won't come into a course if they do, but it's not true. People come into courses and programmes for all sorts of reasons, like community and accountability, not just knowledge. So feel free to give more than you think."

Michelle advises avoiding 'death by Zoom': "Make the session as interactive as possible using polls, break-out rooms, exercises and Q&A slots. People want some quick tips to implement so make sure the content is easy to consume. Provide a recording of the session, a copy of the slides in pdf format – watermarked to protect your intellectual property – and other follow-up resources to give great value.

"Have a timed agenda and try to stick to it. And smile; it's supposed to be fun."

And avoid making it too long.

"I love the lunch and learn concept, which is just half an

Some tips from a confidence coach

• Run your first masterclass with a small group
Talking and getting feedback from your audience will help grow your confidence.

• Open with casual chat
The worst thing for your nerves is talking at a silent audience. As soon as you get your audience talking to you, it quietens the negative internal chatter.

It's usefult to start with something topical or my latest Netflix binge. I look for facial expressions to see who it resonates with, then encourage them to talk back to me: "'Oooh, Lauren, I can see that you agree. Come off mute – talk to me."

• The more you can get your audience involved, the more you'll all enjoy it
Be clear on how you want people to interact. They can stay on mute and use the raise hand function to show when they want to ask a question – this stops them cutting in, potentially causing you to lose your flow. Keeping up with the chat and questions can be distracting for your first masterclass; it's easier to have your audience speak directly to you.

Get someone to support you with this if needed.

• Rehearse a few times so it flows without having to think about it
This is important because it allows you to break away from relying on and reading from slides. You'll become more animated and your personality will shine, which is far more engaging.

Don't try to memorise a script and have as little text on the slides as possible.

I never have a fully scripted talk – I have a planned flow and ad lib to make it more interesting for the audience.

Amanda Jane Outram
https://www.amanda-jane.com

hour," says Taylan Yuzak. "You can still learn a lot in that timeframe."

Farmer, who hosts the PR in your Pocket podcast, adds: "People buy from people, so share your journey. And it's important to me to make sure the masterclass is super helpful, even if my paid offer isn't right for someone – it's not just about the sell."

She follows up with anyone who attends a live masterclass to see if they'd like a chat about her offer – and if it's the right fit for them. She says that the key is connection and conversation.

"People don't buy things immediately," she explains. "Even on a masterclass, they still need to know if it's right for them. This isn't about giving the hard sell at all, but learning what problems your potential customer has and how you may be able to solve them."

Amanda Jane Outram, a public speaking and selling confidence coach, advises referring to your offers throughout the masterclass: "This avoids the build-up and awkward segue into the big pitch at the end. Use phrases like 'and in my full training programme, we go into this a lot deeper'. Everyone knows a masterclass includes a sell-in. Just say that you'll give the next steps to carry on learning with you at the end of the masterclass. That way, it's not clunky or awkward.

"And follow up with everyone who attended – that's where the selling really starts."

Don't stress about the tech

If you're nervous about using the technology, then rehearse with a small group.

Outram advises: "Get one or two people on a call with your chosen platform and practise screen sharing, using the mute button and operating the chat function if you plan to use it.

> **I pay someone to let people in and alert me if the sound dips. It's helpful as you can just focus on presenting**

Practise with all the features you plan to use. I always use a good-quality headset as I find the sound and ability to hear my voice clearly is better for the audience."

Popular platforms include Zoom and Google Meet.

Farmer, who uses the paid platform Butter, says: "I also pay someone for the hour to let people in and alert me if the sound dips etc. It's so helpful as you can just focus on presenting."

Other tips include using a basic ring light, two screens to see your slides and the chat and recording the masterclass so you can sell it on your website.

"Get everything you'll need during the session ready and open in the tabs before you start," says Michelle. "Email all attendees in advance with the online link and how to contact you if they have any joining issues. And stay calm if the tech doesn't work."

Bring them in

Spread the word and talk about your masterclass a lot before you actually deliver it.

Farmer says: "I think people are a bit more cautious of giving their email address out now. So, I try to increase my social media following before a masterclass, and reach out via Instagram or Facebook DM to people who I think would find it useful. I do this every day for two weeks before the event."

You can also mention it in your newsletter, at networking events and in online communities, and add a pop-up to your website.

Whatever you do, don't leave the promotion until the last minute. The whole point of a masterclass is getting people to attend.

No-one wants to find themselves talking to an empty screen.

Making quarterly tax returns will prove onerous warns **Katharine Quarmby**

Digital tax demands

Self-employed people will have to start making quarterly returns under HMRC's Making Tax Digital regime – and that could well cause a headache for many NUJ members.

The roll-out begins in April 2026, with those with incomes over £50,000 starting then, followed by April 2027 if you earn over £30,000 in the 2025–26 tax year, then April 2028 if your qualifying income is over £20,000 in the 2026–27 tax year.

Like many journalists, I attended one of the HMRC information webinars on how to get ready for MTD. Judging from the questions in the chat during the webinar, I wasn't the only person to be confused and a bit daunted by the new system.

If you are registered for VAT and come under the MTD umbrella, as one person in the chat said, it looks as if you are going to be preparing eight quarterly returns – four for each programme.

I also handle the tax affairs of a family member who had a stroke and for whom I have power of attorney. So I am dreading having to do eight myself – four for me and four for him – as well as advising my young adult children on their tax affairs.

The National Audit Office (NAO) has raised consistent concerns.

In a critical report looking at the progress made with MTD in 2023, the NAO said that "MTD was originally approved with the expectation it would reduce burdens on business taxpayers" but HMRC's business case for the costs and benefits of MTD showed only a "partial analysis... The business case should have shown that the combined costs to HMRC and customers of proceeding with MTD for Self Assessment were greater than the additional tax revenue expected."

You will have to choose accounting software so you can show your income and expenditure, and keep digital records for quarterly returns and updates.

My accountant says the end-of-year tax return will remain the same and will include the usual other categories, such as Gift Aid.

In terms of your digital records, you will need to show dates for expenditure and amounts, and create summary totals of income and expenditure via category. You can correct records and keep a digital record of the disallowable portion of an expense in your software, as well as the full expense – which is of course where it starts to get harder.

This brings us neatly to why this is being brought in, given it does not change our tax liabilities or payment dates.

While HMRC makes much of saying it will benefit us, this is more to help HMRC transition from a legacy system to a digital one; it will create more admin and it is not clear it will be more accurate than what people do now.

I submit everything to my accountant, discuss it with her and it is then submitted by a professional who understands issues such as disallowable expenses more than I ever would. It will almost certainly push up my accountancy bill as she sorts out any issues I have had with updates over the year.

Indeed, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales has highlighted concerns about the quarterly updates in particular. It states: "The Institute supports the digitalisation of accounting records and HMRC services but opposes the quarterly update element of MTD income tax as it adds significant cost for no significant benefit."

My thoughts exactly – plus HMRC has decided not to provide self-employed people with free software, so we are left sifting through commercial models and asking each other for advice.

An April 2025 report by the Federation of Small Businesses revealed the huge cost of tax compliance on small enterprises, reporting that owners who were surveyed already spend an average of 44 hours per year on tax administration.

It also stated that many found dealing with HMRC – or even getting through to them on the phone – difficult. MTD is only going to make a creaking system even worse, many warn.

The government, unsurprisingly, defends MTD, saying that it will help businesses in the long run.

I trust my accountant's opinion more. She has years of experience of working with people in the creative sector and has assured me support as I work through it – but warns it is not going to be easy.

Find out more

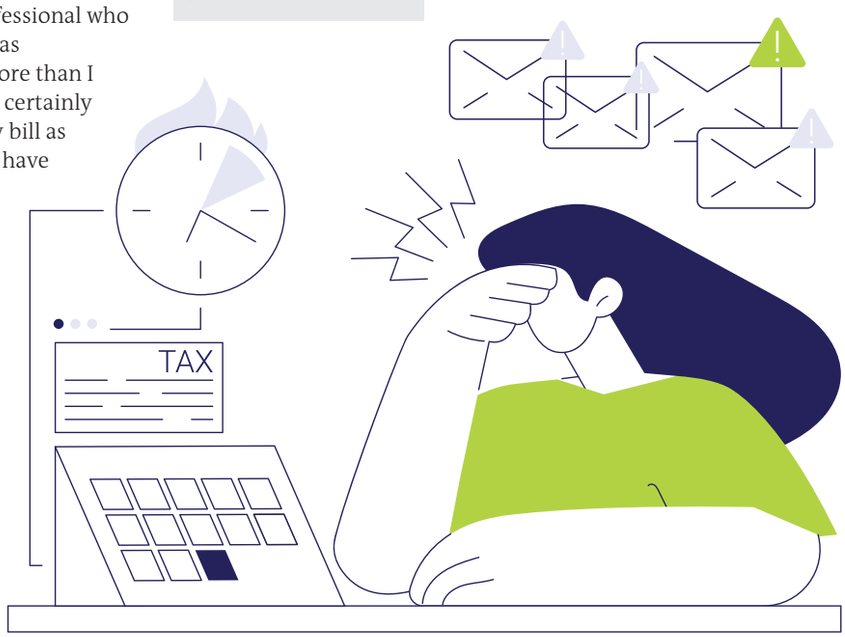
Government explainer
https://makingtaxdigital.campaign.gov.uk

National Audit Office report
https://tinyurl.com/muhfm4xk

TechRadar's software choice
https://tinyurl.com/5evkwz

Federation of Small Businesses commentary
https://tinyurl.com/5n74jume

Institute of Chartered Accountants view and advice
https://tinyurl.com/y7562asm



NUJ & me

Andrew Crooke became a journalist after careers in the police and nursing

What made you become a journalist?

Easy! I witnessed the impact of a BBC journalist's report on a local NHS trust. It exposed dangerous patient safety issues and shortfalls in care on a secure psychiatric ward. The article brought about substantial and immediate change when patients', relatives' and staff reports had been ignored.

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

I first qualified as a registered mental health nurse, then completed 30 years' service with the police. I grabbed my pension and returned as an NHS community psychiatric nurse. On retirement from the NHS, I took up journalism. I should have done it years ago.

When did you join the NUJ and why?

Michele Paduano (Paddy) was the reporter who ran the story that had piqued my interest. He encouraged me to embark on a career in journalism and pushed me to join the NUJ. He was pushing at an open door – I had always embraced union membership. I knew the NUJ didn't just offer support but was also a powerful collective voice. I wanted to contribute something.

Are many of your friends in the union?

I have been a journalist for only a couple of years so most of my friends are from before. I was recently elected as branch vice-chair, so have made contact with colleagues I would not otherwise have met.

What's been the best moment in your career?

This was outside journalism. I received a bravery award for detaining a man who seriously assaulted me during his arrest. He was convicted of a horrific torture/murder. Seeing him sentenced to life imprisonment gave me the sense of a job well done. He went on to murder again while serving his sentence so will never experience freedom. The world is a safer place without him being free.

What has been the most frustrating moment?

Two public services have gone out of their way to evade and block every information request.

And the best?

My home office. I feel content with my family downstairs and a bit of noise from the garden. I'm working for a small newsgathering service and am not under pressure.

What advice would you give someone starting out?

Be brave. Always be honest. Try to be kind. Build bridges.

Who is your biggest hero?

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and all the heroes of Ukraine. Zelenskyy embodies honour, true bravery, dignity and leadership.

And villain?

Putin (and any other dictator posturing as a world leader).

Which six people would you invite to a dinner party?

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, my greatest hero who has gone from actor to world leader. Winston Churchill – I am in awe of his greatness. The late Queen Elizabeth, who represented stability throughout my life. The present Dalai Lama, whose love and sense of humour makes me happy and King Solomon, one of the wisest people who ever lived. Finally, Rose Crooke, my late mother, who would be wonderfully entertaining and be so proud to have met these people.

What was your earliest political thought?

The miners' strike and all it brought with it. The conflict between the state and industrious and honest workers was avoidable and brought shame on the government. The scene in the film Billy Elliott when the piano was smashed up for firewood moved me to tears.

What are your hopes for journalism?

I hope that the importance of an honest, free but responsible press will be appreciated by every country across the globe.

And fears?

Apathy. The rise of AI churning out news concerns me. I still buy a paper but I worry this pleasure may disappear in my lifetime.

How would you like to be remembered?

As a kind, quirky bloke who did his best. I want my grandchildren to smile when they remember me. My daughter and my grandchildren will be my monument.

Rise of the si

Freelances are taking on more non-journalism work. **Laura Cooke** reports

Four years ago, I jumped ship from local newspapers to freelance journalism, and it was a career move I have never once regretted.

I love the freedom, the variety and having a sense of pride in my work again, which had been slowly worn away by JPI Media's obsessive quest for clicks.

What I am less keen on is the financial instability.

When I started freelancing, I had several ongoing social media and content writing jobs to ensure I had a steady income while finding my feet. In December 2024, the last one of these finally fell by the wayside.

The next few months were spent in a state of increasing desperation, trying to plug the gap in my earnings during a particularly barren patch. Eventually, I reached the point where I needed to do something, anything, to boost my bank account. That's how I ended up spending the summer cleaning caravans at local holiday parks. It was never the direction I thought my journalism career would take after 23 years but, because of the dire state of my finances, I had little alternative.

At first, I felt an acute sense of failure, as if I just wasn't as cut out for freelancing as I had previously thought. Could I even still call myself a journalist while emptying bins and scrubbing toilets on the minimum wage?

But when I finally opened up about my employment status to other freelancers, it quickly became obvious that I was not alone. A second job or side hustle is increasingly important.

According to a survey from the Freelancing for Journalists online community, more than half of the freelancers – 53 per cent – have a second income stream other than journalism.

Its inaugural State of Freelance Journalism Survey reports that 19 per cent of respondents could not find enough work in journalism so had another income source. Nearly one-third (29 per cent) said the majority of their freelance income came from non-journalism work. The full findings are due shortly.

The survey sample size is relatively small, with just over 400 respondents compared to the NUJ's 23,000 members, of whom 46 per cent are freelances. However, the NUJ does not have any data on how many freelances have second jobs.

The reason, according to London freelance chair Pennie Quinton, is that journalists are simply unwilling to talk about it.

"I think people are often embarrassed about it so they don't want to talk about it. They don't want to seem like they're not really journalists," she says. "People are quite guarded."

As Quinton points out, taking on work as a cleaner, courier or retail assistant to keep the wolf from the door reflects how few options there are for freelances who have hit a rough patch.

She said that while sometimes in journalism, you would take work that you wouldn't necessarily really want to do, the emergencies where you have just got to do anything also reflects what's happened to the safety net She said: "In the past, during downtimes as a journalist, you may have worked on your long-term projects and signed on for a bit. That option is not there. Universal credit is so draconian you can't tide yourself over with any kind of state benefits until work comes back, which is forcing many people out of their area of expertise."

Of course, a second job is not always a little secret. Some journalists have chosen their side hustles, have made them a success and are rightly proud of their achievements.

However, fewer than one in 10 (8 per cent) respondents to the State of Freelance Journalism Survey had another income source because they liked the variety.

"Personally, I love all of my side hustles and do them out of choice rather than necessity," says Lily Canter, co-director of Freelancing for Journalists, who knows a thing or two about side hustles. As well as being a freelance journalist, specialising in running and fitness, she is a UK Athletics running coach, edits the Running Matters newsletter and is a senior lecturer in BA Sports Journalism at Sheffield Hallam University.

Although the survey offers an interesting snapshot, it does not paint the full picture.

"This is the first time we have run the survey so we can't compare it to previous years," says Canter. "It is therefore difficult to say whether the number of freelance journalists juggling side hustles is increasing or, indeed, why freelancers may have multiple income streams."

For me, the reason for taking on a second job was purely financial. I found it incredibly stressful to receive text messages from my bank telling me I did not have enough money to cover an £18 direct debit while knowing I had £1,000 of unpaid invoices, £800 of which was overdue.

Late payers, stagnant rates and the insidious policy of payment on publication, which can leave journalists waiting months or even years for payment, feed into financial instability.

But Canter points out that 73 per cent of those who responded to the survey were happy with their earnings, with 72 per cent wanting to continue working as a freelance journalist.

53%

More than half of freelances have a second income stream other than journalism

HOWARD MCWILLIAM

de hustle

"I think rather than reflecting the poor state of the industry, side hustles reflect a wider trend in society where people are more comfortable with the idea of a portfolio career and tapping into all their different interests and skillsets rather than the traditional view of one occupation," adds Canter.

Having a second career brings benefits beyond income. The chance to interact with others helps alleviate the isolation that can come with freelancing and benefits wellbeing too.

"A second job can be a useful emotional as well as financial backup – as at least you are doing something," agrees Samantha Downes. Between training as a newspaper journalist in the 1990s and up until 2017, Downes held various second jobs, including auxiliary nurse, shorthand secretary and cleaner.

After the pandemic, Downes decided it was time to add a side hustle and trained as a private hire vehicle (PHV) driver.

Writing on her Substack, Pumpkin Pensions, she describes how, on a good day, her job pays 'a lot more' than an editing shift on a national newspaper. But, despite these financial benefits, the pull of journalism remains strong.

"I'm not sure how long I'll manage the PHV driving. I'm in two minds about whether to spend more time building the Substack, writing my book and doing the grind of having to get editors to notice me amid the slush pile of emails," Downes says.

"The PHV driving is a good reminder of how lucky I am to have done all these things. It's made me a well-rounded journalist who has connected and worked with many different people of different backgrounds, ages, circumstances."

As Downes indicates to, it feels increasingly difficult to get noticed by editors, partly because more journalists are freelance. According to the Reuters Institute, the proportion of journalists who are freelance rose from 17 per cent to 28 per cent between 2015 and 2023.

"I think it's really hard to make a living purely from writing these days. A lot of my colleagues from my magazine days have moved out of journalism because it's so badly paid," says Maddy Biddulph. She wrote real-life features for Splash Features Agency and enjoyed a career in magazines before going freelance a decade ago. She retrained as a personal trainer in 2022.

"My freelance income was so up and down. I know that's the nature of freelance work but it was getting pretty stressful having too much work or not enough, so I thought a second income stream would help," she explains. "I also found freelance work kind of lonely. I'm a really social person and I thought being a personal trainer would satisfy my need for connection."

Maddy says being a trainer complements her journalism as it overlaps with writing fitness articles while journalistic skills have helped her promote her business, www.maddypt.co.uk.

To return to the identity crisis that comes with a job away from journalism: can you still call yourself a journalist when you are mucking out caravans or offering PT services?

"I've been a journalist my whole life. It's more than just a job to me – it's my identity – and I definitely suffered with some imposter syndrome at first saying out loud that I was a personal trainer," Biddulph says.

"My late father, Michael, was a journalist, so it's very much ingrained in me. I'm more comfortable telling people I'm a PT now, but I'll always consider myself a journalist. It's in my blood."

> **"I've been a journalist my whole life. It's more than just a job to me - it's my identity**

JOANN RANDLES

In the eye of a storm

Come rain or shine – extreme weather can make a good story, says **Ruth Addicott**

Getting up at three in the morning to be battered by torrential rain and gusts of 100mph is not the easiest of jobs but, for photographer Joann Randles (pictured), it is up there with the best. "I've got to be honest, I love a storm," she says. "And Porthcawl never fails."

Randles is on permanent weather watch and has learnt the art of capturing a storm. She is based in Swansea, a 30-minute drive from Porthcawl and her pictures have appeared on the front page of The Observer and other nationals.

With a background in film and TV, Randles took up photojournalism when her work collapsed during Covid and now works as a freelance.

The most powerful storm she has covered was Storm Eunice in February 2022, which saw gusts of 100mph off the South Wales coast – 122mph was recorded on the Isle of Wight, the highest on record. The storm caused fatalities across the UK and Europe. It tore a hole in the roof of London's O2 and more than 200,000 homes were left without power.

Randles says the key is planning, not just from a safety perspective (driving when it's calm) but also being in the right place at the right time.

"I left home at two or three in the morning because I knew the bridges would be closed," she says. "It was calm when I left but, within the space of six hours, I was struggling to walk – quite literally, you could not put one foot in front of the other. The wind speed was insane."

Randles took her pictures at high tide before the storm reached its peak and sent her first set of images at 7–8am.

She says it's all about understanding the weather systems and how they work. "I know when the wind is coming in, the tide times, the height of the swell, when the sunrise and sunset are... I look at everything, down to the last nugget," she says.

"From a press angle, Porthcawl can be quite competitive, but I knew there'd be parking and cafes and my car wouldn't be damaged. I didn't want to go to a location that would put me at risk but I also wanted to get pictures that looked quite impressive."

Nick Ellerby, broadcast journalist for Talksport, has also had his share of extreme weather and was nearly blown off camera reporting on Storm Isha on Beachy Head: "I was in my element. I was on the reporting team for the breakfast show on Talk TV at the time and they wanted to do a rehash of the weather channel in the States, so we were always looking for, while remaining safe, the most dramatic backdrop we could find." He adds that the footage looked more risky than it was.

Ellerby says the biggest challenge is having the stamina to keep going.

Blown off your feet live on air

Sky News correspondent Charlotte Leeming was almost blown off her feet live on air during Storm Darragh.

The sight of flying debris means it's not safe to broadcast, she says: "We want to tell the story, but we're not reckless."

Getting the picture

Photographer Joann Randles looks at everything from tide times to parking to a cafe. She has coffee and sandwiches as well as a blanket in her car.

It's about getting in first and the right wave, she says: "I try to look for composition as well to show the scale and power of the storm."

Get close and pushy

BBC journalist Alastair McKee advises sharing a written hazard/risk assessment with your producer/editor and getting as close to the action as safely possible.

He says: "Be prepared to make yourself heard or push forward in a media scrum/press conference. Develop your contacts, sources and interviews, and don't feel you have to share them."

JOANN RANDLES

"You've probably travelled the night before, arrived around 11pm or midnight and you're back up again at 5am, sometimes doing a 12-hour day and then you go again," he says. "When we covered Storm Babet in Scotland, we did about three 14–15 hour days back to back."

BBC journalist Alastair McKee was a presenter of BBC Inside Out when the Somerset Levels flooded in 2014 – in the UK's wettest winter in 250 years. More than 150 homes and 17,000 acres of farmland were destroyed as the whole area became submerged. Residents were ordered to evacuate and the Royal Marines were deployed to reinforce flood defences.

McKee had covered floods – but this was on another scale.

"It was a massive story," he says. "I remember driving a 15-mile round trip just to get five miles from the motorway to the village we had identified."

McKee was encouraged to 'get stuck in' and remembers climbing aboard a makeshift pontoon that was floating through a village dropping off sandbags.

"I ended up on this barge, meeting people who were living on the first floor of their house, refusing to leave," he says.

He and the accompanying cameraman and producer had to keep the equipment dry while finding somewhere to film.

"There was a sequence where they wanted me to go into someone's home," recalls McKee. "I leapt off the barge and, as my foot went in to the water, I remember thinking, I don't think my boots are big enough and I remember seeing the water going up to my waist. I made a face and the cameraman smiled and kept filming."

"We were very aware of the risks. Flood water is a mixture of drain water, sewage and rain, but you have to treat it like sewage. At times, it was chest height – something the BBC wouldn't let me do now.

"You're dealing with people who are losing everything and, for some of them, it wasn't even the first time it had happened. I think that was the challenge for us – we couldn't help them but also we didn't want to be exploiting them."

McKee ended up helping people try to salvage belongings.

"I just said, 'Look, you take that, I'll grab those' and I ended up having a conversation about 'do you really need that lamp stand?'," he recalls.

Looking back, he thinks the empathy he had for the victims came across and helped them get the footage and interviews they needed.

The BBC's rules on health and safety have changed oa lot since then. McKee says he would not be allowed to mount a floating pontoon without a life jacket or buoyancy aid now.

Ten years previously in August 2004, BBC radio producer Matt Small had just joined BBC Radio Cornwall as a reporter when a devastating flood swept through Boscastle.

Heavy rain caused two rivers to burst their banks, sending some two billion litres of water down the valley into Boscastle. Cars, walls and bridges were swept out to sea and buildings destroyed, resulting in millions of pounds worth of damage. A major rescue operation was mounted. Fortunately, no one died.

"I remember the north Cornwall MP, Paul Tyler, phoning the newsroom to say that the flood water was rising, and he was trapped in his car," recalls Small.

Ironically, Small had been staying at the Wellington Hotel in the village the previous weekend. The ground floor was flooded and the contents of the office (including his room bill) were swept out to sea. There were no telecommunications in the village and mobile phones had poor or no reception.

"You'd have to drive miles out of the Valency Valley if you needed to file stuff back," he says.

Small interviewed quite a few victims and remembers walking through Boscastle one evening several days after the flood and hearing the singing of a local shanty group.

"It was moving and authentically Cornish – the recording featured in one of the packages I put together," he says.

So what's the best advice for covering extreme weather?

One thing every journalist agrees on is a decent set of waterproofs. "Clothing is critical, otherwise you're shafted," says Ellerby. "Once you sort that out, you can do anything."

"As a journalist, you want to get the biggest, loudest version of the story, but you can never take for granted the impact that it has on people's lives."
Alastair McKee, senior journalist, BBC

"I had to really use the physicality of my body to anchor myself."
Charlotte Leeming, north of England correspondent, Sky News

"My boss once said as I was heading out to a storm: 'I want to see you strapped to a post.'"
Nick Ellerby, broadcast journalist, Talksport

by **Mark Fisher**

arts

Books

Every Word Matters

Ranjana Srivastava
Out now, Simon and Schuster

The oncologist and Guardian writer turns her attention to the craft of writing, considering how to communicate complex ideas, develop a distinctive voice and keep people reading. As a medical professional, she is on a mission to use language to 'inform, persuade and heal'.
https://tinyurl.com/24gm6sbw

Gaza: a Doctor's Diary

Salman Khalid
January 20, Pluto Press

First-hand reports from a Canadian emergency physician dealing with mass casualties at al-Aqsa hospital during a month-long volunteer residency in central Gaza in September 2024. All profits go to Humanity Auxilium, an American and Canadian NGO.

Nation of Strangers

Ece Temelkuran
February 12, Canongate

The Turkish author and political thinker reframes the idea of exile, migration and home as a series of letters between two strangers. In an era of growing displacement, homelessness and exclusion, she calls for finding strength in each other.
https://tinyurl.com/2bq3ljy6

Comedy

Bridget Christie: Jacket Potato Pizza

On tour
January 14–April 5

The creator of Channel 4 menopause comedy The Change goes on a lengthy tour of her 14th show, a riotous combination of fun, feminism and forgetfulness.
https://tinyurl.com/y5h63j57

Exhibitions

Making a Statement: Craft & Activism in Edinburgh

Museum of Edinburgh
Until January 26

Techniques such as knitting, sewing and collage have frequently been used to address political, social and cultural concerns. This display brings together everything from crocheted protest banners to a Victorian 'scrap screen' to look at people's campaigns for LGBTQI+ rights, environmental justice and mental health.
https://tinyurl.com/27ozfqaj

Festivals

Up Helly Aa

Lerwick, Shetland
January 27

A day of winter activities culminating at the Hillhead for the start of a torchlight procession through the town and the ritual burning of a Viking longship.
www.uphellyaa.org/up-helly-aa-2026

Northern Ireland Science Festival

Belfast
February 11–22

Focusing on the science of you, the universe and everything in between, the biggest event of its kind on the island of Ireland features Professor Alice Roberts looking at the spread of Christianity as well as criminal psychologist Dr Julia Shaw seeking to get inside the minds of the people destroying the planet.
https://nisciencefestival.com

Music

Celtic Connections

Glasgow
January 15–February 1

The annual roots and world music showcase includes the rock/accordion hybrid of RuMac, the endangered instruments of Mali's Afel Bocoum and the refugee stories of Mon Rovîa.
https://www.celticconnections.com

Talks

Matt Forde's Political Party

Duchess Theatre, London
February 16

Monthly conversations are being held between the comedian and notable political figures. In February, it is the turn of David Miliband, former foreign secretary, to talk about

In depth

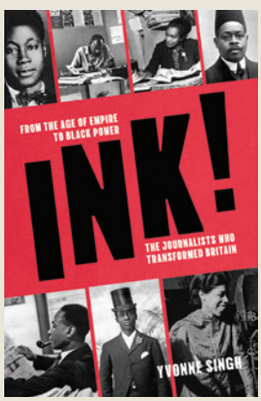
Pioneers brought in from the cold

If it is true that the stories of people of colour have been neglected, it is equally true of those who have sought to tell those stories.

Pioneering journalists such as Samuel Jules Celestine Edwards, Dusé Mohamed Ali, Claude McKay, George Padmore, Una Marson, Claudia Jones and Darcus Howe made great strides in representing the voices of black and minority ethnic people in the UK but, too often, their efforts have been forgotten.

That is something NUJ member Yvonne Singh hopes to change. Her new book, Ink! The Journalists who Transformed Britain, puts those seven radical figures in the spotlight. She shows them not only to have made crucial, if overlooked, contributions to British journalism at key points in history, but also to have led extraordinary – and sometimes tragic – lives.

"It's really hard to piece together this history because it wasn't thought worthy enough to be preserved," says Singh, a journalist, teacher and fiction writer. "These people, like Celestine Edwards way back in 1883, were working towards promoting racial justice."



The neglect is real. She writes with horror at the shoddy state of newspaper archives, the incomplete runs of key titles and the sometimes unreadable pages that survive.

"It was like going on a treasure hunt, trying to find these newspapers and piecing them together," says Singh, who travelled to the University of Illinois to track down copies of Edwards' Fraternity, a Christian monthly that once had a circulation of 7,000.

"With a much more recent publication, Claudia Jones' West Indian Gazette, there are only three complete runs that exist in the UK and they are all tattered and battered."

It means that despite writing a book about writers whose first-hand accounts would normally make a historian's task easier, she had to think creatively to fill in the gaps.

"I wrote this book to give these people back their voice," she says. "It's an inspiration to the next generation to say these journalists were there, they struggled, but they still made their mark."

Ink! The Journalists who Transformed Britain, Yvonne Singh, The History Press, https://tinyurl.com/23ed9xnp

diplomacy, humanitarian challenges and the state of the Labour party. Forde is also on tour from January 28 to June 10.
https://www.mattforde.com

Whose City?
Online
February 9
Bérénice Hamidi goes on Zoom to discuss The Cities of Political Theatre in France in 2026 as part of a pan-European project looking at the connection between cultural politics and gentrification.
https://tinyurl.com/2cqew2na

Television
The New Yorker at 100
Netflix
Out now
This behind-the-scenes documentary by Marshall Curry concerns the great print magazine as it hit its centenary earlier this year. Julianne Moore narrates the story of the editors, writers and celebs who made it happen.
https://tinyurl.com/236a5hlp

Theatre
Crown of Blood
Sheffield Theatres
February 2–7
Billed as a Yoruba adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, Oladipo Agboluaje's play is set during the civil wars of 19th-century Yorubaland, the cultural region in West Africa. Directed by Mojisola Kareem of Utopia Theatre.
https://tinyurl.com/2bnvbnso

Deep Azure
Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, London
February 7–April 11
The late Black Panther star Chadwick Boseman wrote this hip-hop influenced drama about police brutality in 2005, and its themes of love, grief and justice are unlikely to have lost their sting. Tristan Fynn-Aiduenu directs.
https://tinyurl.com/2xsmb4h5

Spotlight
Cosy local crime

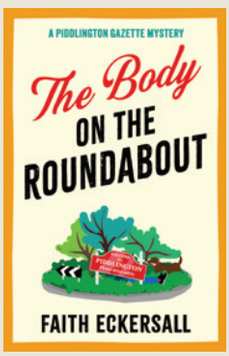
Faith Eckersall made a mistake. She ditched her job as a reporter on the Bournemouth Echo for a job in PR. She was not cut out for it.

Eighteen months later, she returned to the Echo. It was meant to be; her grey cardigan was still on the back of her old chair.

Her time away was not wasted, however. In the absence of a real newsroom, she invented her own.

Trying her hand at cosy crime, she dreamt up the Dorset town of Piddington, where Harry Hedges, a discredited London journalist, has to revive the ailing local paper. The result is The Body on the Roundabout: a Piddington Gazette Mystery.

It takes place in a world she loves to inhabit; a draft of volume two is with her publisher and she is about to start a third.



"I created a disgusting newsroom, like so many newsrooms, in bits of buildings with horrible carpets," says Eckersall, a long-time NUJ member, now freelance.

"I wanted to get the feel of this joyous merry-go-round of stories, exciting things happening, things changing. It represents how newsrooms often were, how they sometimes still are and how I wish they'd always be."

The Body on the Roundabout: a Piddington Gazette Mystery, Faith Eckersall, Embla Books, https://tinyurl.com/2yre7agc

Steve Bell

An existential threat to political cartoonists - Chris Proctor, Page 23

Charles Harkness

Charles Harkness, a former deputy general secretary of the NUJ, has died aged 82, after having cancer.

Charles was deputy general secretary from 1975 to 1981, having served as a tough national executive council member at a time of significant industrial upheaval in the media sector.

He was centrally involved in co-ordinating the national newspaper strike from December 1978 to January 1979, which involved 8,000 journalists. The seven-week strike was the biggest stoppage in the NUJ's history.

He was also a community activist, served as a Labour councillor and pursued his passion for equality and social justice. In recent years, he battled ill health with determination and humour and also continued to make a contribution to community life and journalism.

A graduate of Cambridge University, having studied history and geography, he was erudite.

In 2018, he was made an NUJ member of honour in recognition of his lifetime commitment to trade unionism and journalism.

Laura Davison, the NUJ general secretary, paid tribute: "Charles Harkness was an activist, an official, a trustee of our charities, an expert on standing orders, an adviser but, above all, a committed member who believed in and lived the values of the NUJ."

Dr John Lister, who worked with him for several years on the standing orders committee (SOC), commented: "Charlie combined a real talent for teasing out minutiae with a naughty sense of humour and a readiness to chat, drink and be sociable.

"He moved down to Rye while on SOC and his involvement with the local news there clearly delighted him and gave him a new fund of curiosities and stories for the lunch times and post-SOC breaks."

At the NUJ delegate meeting where he was made a member of honour, Charles spoke on a motion urging the union to work with Cardiff University's centre for media studies to investigate ways of helping hyperlocals such as Rye News to be set up because traditional papers were no longer providing adequate local coverage. He felt passionately about this.

His typically robust speech focused on the falling standards of living: "I want you to be angry because the government was telling us this week that there are more people in employment now than in the 1970s – but what sort of employment? The gig economy? Zero-hour contracts, where you don't know whether you can afford the rent from one week to the next?"

He pointed out that few journalists were still employed by large local newspaper groups and were paid little more than the £19,000 he earned in the 1970s – and that more freelances had uncertain incomes.

JESS HURD

David Gow

Anyone running an NUJ branch needs someone of the calibre of David Gow on the committee. It was the privilege of Edinburgh freelance to have just such a member, not only as the treasurer since 2019 but also as a journalist with a formidable contacts book.

It was David who invited speakers including Richard Norton-Taylor, former Guardian security editor, and Dame Frances Cairncross, author of the Cairncross review into a sustainable future for journalism. And it was David who served as the branch's unofficial moral conscience, reminding members to stay on the case on issues such as freedom of speech, strategic lawsuits against public participation and the threats to journalists in Ukraine and Gaza.

His death from a heart attack at the age of 80 has been deeply felt by the union. "We have lost a good friend, a loyal member and a standard-bearer for the NUJ code of conduct, in which he took pride and used as a touchstone," said Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary.

David's roles on the Scottish executive council and the national executive council followed a prestigious career at home and abroad. He joined The Scotsman as a graduate trainee in 1969 in his birth city of Edinburgh. With a degree from the University of Oxford in modern languages, he was well placed to become the paper's first Europe correspondent. In his 20 years at the title, he also covered industrial relations and became the London editor.

Europe was where he thrived. Soon after moving to the Guardian in 1989, he was dispatched to Bonn where he spent six years as the German correspondent. Following a spell back in the UK, he was made European business editor, a position he held until retiring in 2012.

"David was one of the very best journalists I've worked alongside," said Christine Buckley, editor of The Journalist and a colleague on the UK industrial beat while at The Times. "Sharp as a tack and witty, he cut through nonsense with a gusto. His energy was boundless, as was his sense of fairness."

After returning to Scotland with his second wife, Gayle Brinkerhoff Gow, he joined fellow journalist Fay Young in setting up Sceptical Scot, a non-aligned website discussing the nation's future.

In print and in person, David relished lively debate and was neither narrow minded nor doctrinaire. While his professional achievements were great, his manner was always down to earth. "He was proud of those things but he wore it lightly," said Young.

Although officially bringing Sceptical Scot to an end in 2022, Gow continued to file articles and commission writers until his death.

"He was passionate about the economics and politics of Scotland," said Young. "All these stories are complex. There isn't a simple black-or-white answer to the problems so politicians dodge them. David really wanted to hold them to account."

She observed many tributes sent to Sceptical Scot had used the word 'irreverent': "That kind of sums him up: the devilish grin and laughter."

Mark Fisher

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Ed Moloney

Journalist Ed Moloney, who covered the Northern Ireland conflict and its aftermath for decades and in great detail, has died in New York at the age of 77.

Edmund Gerrard Morton Moloney was born in Aldershot on May 5 1948. He contracted polio as a child but overcame the illness with the support of the NHS.

After graduating in economics and politics from Queen's University Belfast in 1969, young Moloney initially taught English in Libya as a second language before moving back to Belfast. Having taken part in the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, he was briefly involved as an education officer with the wing of the Irish republican movement known as 'The Officials', which was moving away from paramilitary activity towards a political role.

Although it has been reported in The Times and The New York Times that his Irish-born father of the same name was an officer (in his capacity as a doctor apparently) with the British Army, Ed's political outlook was certainly not pro-British.

His career in journalism began with writing for the left-wing Belfast Bulletin, followed by the Dublin-based Hibernia and Magill magazines. He served as northern editor of The Irish Times in Belfast in 1981–85, later holding a similar position over 1987–2001 with the now-defunct Sunday Tribune. He won Journalist of the Year in the Irish media awards in November 1999.

Shortly before receiving the award, he also won a long-drawn-out legal battle. The high court in Belfast overruled a decision by a lower court, which had previously ordered him to provide interview notes to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the predecessor of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), relating to the murder in March 1989 of human rights lawyer Pat Finucane in Belfast. Moloney had faced the possibility of a prison term if he lost the case but, with international support, refused to surrender his notes.

In 2000, he moved to New York to help care for his mother-in-law. He became the driving force in the Belfast Project at Boston College, which recorded interviews with former paramilitaries who were involved in the Northern Ireland conflict. The Boston Tapes, as they were called, were meant to be kept confidential until the interviewee had died but this was overcome in a legal action initiated by the PSNI.

Moloney's most highly rated book, A Secret History of the IRA, appeared in two editions in 2002 and 2007 and was described by political campaigner and long-time NUJ activist Eamonn McCann as 'the best book yet' on the Provisional wing of the Irish Republican Army. His website The Broken Elbow was widely read.

He is survived by his wife Joan McKiernan, son Ciarán, daughter-in-law Stephanie and other relatives and friends. A celebration of his life as a journalist, author, husband, father and dog-lover was held at The Wheeltapper Pub in the Fitzpatrick Grand Central Hotel in New York in November.

Deaglán de Bréadún

TREVOR GRUNDY

Ruth Weiss

The Bible tells us that a prophet is never honoured in her or his country.

Fortunately, that adage did not apply in the case of Ruth Weiss, the German-Jewish journalist and anti-apartheid activist who died on September 5 this year at the home of her son, Alexander, in Denmark. She was 101.

During her long life, Ruth worked for several leading financial magazines and newspapers in South Africa, where she lived after her family's expulsion from Nazi Germany in 1936.

After being declared a prohibited immigrant in that country in the 1960s, she went on to become a prominent reporter and commentator on African affairs for The Guardian, the Financial Times and the then Bonn-based Deutsche Welle.

News of her death was announced by the German mayor of Fürth (near Nuremberg) where she was born.

Girls at a high school named after her in Ascaffenburg in Bavaria bowed their heads but were soon told by the headmistress to sit up and read books written by a woman who spent her life opposing apartheid in South Africa.

Ruth Weiss (nee Lowenthal) was born on July 26 1924 into a Jewish family in Fürth.

After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Jews knew they had no place in the land where they were born. The family moved to South Africa in 1936. There, they started again, assisted financially by German Jews who had also fled the Nazis.

They lived next to impoverished Afrikaners who told the teenage Ruth that, although she had the right skin colour, she had the wrong religion and should keep quiet about being a Jew.

She was advised to carry an umbrella to keep the sun off her face to keep her skin as white as possible.

After trying her hand at accountancy, she married a much older journalist and became one herself, soon angering the Nationalists who had come to power in 1948.

She set up shop in neighbouring southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) where, on November 11 1965, Ian Smith announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

Again, Ruth was told to move on which she did – to nearby Zambia. She became a close friend of President Kenneth Kaunda while working as the business editor of the Times of Zambia.

In 1974, she left Zambia and returned to Germany as editor of the Africa service of Deutsche Welle. She moved to Zimbabwe in 1982 and was head of a training course for young reporters who wanted to specialise in economics and finance.

She watched with considerable disgust as Robert Mugabe and his sidekick Emmerson Mnangagwa set about wiping out the political opposition led by Joshua Nkomo.

On April 28 2023, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa granted Ruth one of his country's highest awards, the order of the companions of OR Tambo for her contribution to the African liberation struggle.

In 2014, Germany decorated her with a federal cross of merit and, in 2000, the PEN Centre for German-speaking writers made Ruth its honorary president.

She was a life member of the NUJ.

Trevor Grundy

John Mulcock

John Mulcock was committed to the craft he loved for almost 40 years.

Over a career that spanned hot metal and digital publishing, he covered such significant events as the fall of Ceaușescu in Romania, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, as well as the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks, bringing clarity, accuracy and humanity to the reporting.

John held senior roles at a number of local and national newspapers. These included positions at the Southern Evening Echo, the Brighton Evening Argus, the Daily Star and The Telegraph. At the Sunday Express, where he worked under editor John Junor, he was NUJ father of chapel. He was chief sub-editor at the London Daily News. While at The Sun, he worked with Kelvin Mackenzie and edited Piers Morgan's Bizarre column.

The London Daily News was a short-lived paper owned by Robert Maxwell that had been set up to rival The London Evening Standard, and John – who once had the experience of sharing a lift with Maxwell – learnt that the paper had folded from a hoarding at a London news stand.

John never sought the spotlight, believing instead that a journalist's greatest reward was a story well told and faithfully reported.

Having moved to Salisbury when he was 12, John went to Salisbury Art College to do a foundation art course, forming a rock band with artist Bill Toop.

However, it was journalism that caught his attention, and he completed his training at Highbury College in Portsmouth.

The early part of John's career was also memorable – he interviewed Françoise Hardy and The Rolling Stones 'before they were famous'. On one occasion when reporting on a story, he remembered approaching a farm near Salisbury where he was 'greeted' by the farmer with a loaded shotgun...

John was a man of boundless curiosity and quiet passion. He walked everywhere, loved the theatre and music, and had a fascination for all things Scandinavian and for his cat Boudica.

He enjoyed rhythm and blues, and played the guitar 'without much skill' but liked going to local music gigs with friends.

John leaves behind son Jason, his wife Vicki, their son Julian and his beloved grand-daughter Artemis. His final appearance was in June at Artemis' christening.

John will be remembered by family and colleagues alike for his incisive wit, his devotion to truth and his unwavering belief in the power of the written word – a journalist to the end.

Vicki Lywood Last

An existential threat to political cartoonists

Pity the struggling satirists as public figures turn into parodies of themselves, says **Chris Proctor**

Can you believe that John Major is interesting? Fascinating? Colourful, even?

I heard him being interviewed the other day and I was staggered to discover that this is more than a possibility: his father was part of a circus act; his mother was a dancer; he left school at 15; and he's a cricket-oholic. I'd always assumed he'd emerged fully formed from the colourless fog of a bland suburb.

So why was I astonished to find out he can be interesting? The two-word answer is 'Steve' and 'Bell'.

Then-Guardian cartoonist Steve painted Major a particularly dry and mediocre grey. Apart from a short and shady time in the sun 15 years ago care of EL James, the function of grey has been to exude dull. When Steve made Major grey, it coloured his entire future. Next to John, dishwater took on a fascination.

Steve added underpants outside trousers to complete the portrait, but the essential message was Major's greyness. It became him. No amount of Caribbean bronzing when supporting the Poms could even tinge his gunmetal hue. He was stuck with it.

Two hundred years before, something similar happened to Napoleon. He didn't become grey but cartoonist James Gillray shaved a few feet off his height. In reality, Napolean was average for the time at five foot six – but Gillray and others made him tiny. They drew him smaller than his hat and pictured him struggling to reach the table to eat his dinner.

His diminutive size was the spur for a dubious psychological condition – the Napoleon complex – that holds that shorter men are more aggressive. Toward the end of his life, the former emperor lamented that Gillray's caricatures 'did more than all the armies of Europe to bring me down'.

His size and Major's anti-magnetism were both hugely untrue. Even on the Trump scale, they were fabrications – until cartoonists made them true – as they did with Blair's evil eye and King Charles' protuberance of pinna.

Some public figures are helpful, like Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg. Boris was God's Christmas gift to caricaturists, offering a cornfield head of hair, a plump form and a penchant for wearing someone else's clothes. His suits were always made to measure but clearly not for him. He was almost too easy. Rees-Mogg was demonstrably too easy and cartoonists and then the public gave up on him.

Starmer is a terrible disappointment and may have to be replaced. Lefties in general have been poor subjects. Even Jeremy Corbyn has an irritating habit of talking in a sensible voice when he should be ranting. I did once meet him on Leeds railway station dressed in a forage cap and a camouflage suit (him, not me). I explained the point of camouflage, and that in Yorkshire a flat cap might be more appropriate, but he was on his way to a student meeting and in a hurry, as he usually is when he meets me.

He left me puzzled. If you have an audience in front of you, is it a good idea to dress to hide yourself? But the story does reveal that Jeremy has, in the past, at least considered caricature.

Perhaps Tories are just better at providing satirists with fodder. They must practise often and they certainly start early. You have only to look at the Young Conservatives: cartoonists' dreams to a lord and lady. They make every effort to subject themselves to ridicule and, to be fair, they do it well.

Kemi Badenoch said this year's Tory conference was 'rammed with young Conservatives who were bringing a real buzz'. Perhaps she's never encountered a buzz; those assembled didn't look to me a cadre likely to win over Generation Z. But for the illustrator – manna.

They turned up in outfits modelled on fading sepia prints of Victorians, all tweed, moustache and umbrella, or in black pencil skirts, clipboards and Gucci bags, or in neat suits whose effect was destroyed by a golf cap calling for Britain to be made great again.

The Boss is clearly a great fan. She adopted a look of outrage as she reported on discussions she had held with the more academic of the youngsters. She had been told, she said, that many Young Conservative students were 'marked down by lecturers because of their beliefs'. Maybe. Or maybe they're thick.

Farage is even worse. He's a threat to our cartoonists' jobs because he spends all day being a mobile caricature. If you were setting out to draw him you'd think 'silly grin, shooting jacket, lounge-bar louche lizard, pint of ordinary, back-slapper, mouth open'. All of which is no use because that is exactly what he's like anyway. You might as well use photos.

Trump recently took this a step further with a cunning pre-emptive strike tactic. He popped up wearing his serious face and told journalists, 'Words are very important, and can lead to unintended consequences.'

Cartoonists across the globe were dumbstruck. You don't expect to find the president of the world doing your job for you.

> **"Boris was God's Christmas gift to caricaturists. His suits were made to measure but clearly not for him. He was almost too easy"**

REASONS TO JOIN

The National Union of Journalists

Is the voice of journalism in the UK and Ireland for all media, communications and PR workers. It represents staff and freelances working in newspapers, news agencies, broadcasting, magazines, online, book publishing, social media, copy writing and as photographers and illustrators.

The NUJ supports members throughout their professional careers, provides a collective voice for industrial issues and freelance rights and defends press freedom.

Ending the Gender Pay Gap

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

Be Part of a Collective Voice

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

Respect at Work

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

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at

nuj.org.uk/join

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