

theJournalist

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Where truth finds refuge

Networking in a Lviv bunker



Some journalists work in conditions that the rest of us can only imagine. None more so than in war. Not only do they risk their lives to tell a story but also hopefully to inspire others. In our cover feature Anttoni James Numminen attends a journalists' conference in Lviv.

And Andre Lombard, who works for the BBC, talks about the challenges of being an LGBTQ journalist working in homophobic countries.

One of the biggest UK stories in recent years has undoubtedly been the Post Office Horizon computer scandal. Richard Brooks, a Private Eye journalist, who followed the story from the beginning talks to Mark Fisher about his new book on the subject.

Sadly, we have an extended obituaries section in this edition to recognise some journalistic and union talents who have left us. They include John Bailey, former NUJ president who was treasurer during a major local newspaper strike. And I'm especially sad to include my friend David Hencke, an exceptionally talented journalist who broke many major stories for The Guardian and did so without a trace of ego. He was welcoming and collegiate to everyone he came across and was passionate about quality journalism.

Lastly, we've had some distribution difficulties with the magazine. If you know of anyone not receiving an edition, please ask them to check their preferences in MyNUJ on the website or email journalist@nuj.org.uk

Christie

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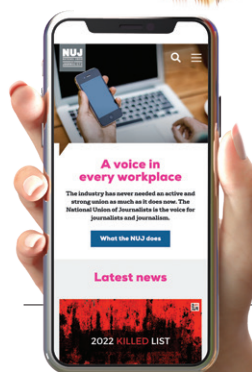
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Cover
Nastia Telikova/LMF

Staff could be represented on BBC board

THE government has said it will “almost certainly” introduce worker representation on the BBC board for the first time in its history and remove political appointments as part of its charter renewal.

Appearing before the culture, media and sport committee’s BBC royal charter review inquiry on July 13, culture secretary Lisa Nandy (right), said “a stronger role for the nations and regions” was also envisaged.

The relatively radical assertions by Nandy came amid plans to axe up to 2,000 BBC jobs as part of a 10 per cent reduction in costs by the end of 2029.

The first wave of cuts would remove 550 roles across the BBC’s news, nations and content teams and the loss of programmes,

including on Radio 4 and the World Service. The corporation also planned to axe correspondents covering 13 key capitals and the United Nations in what the NUJ general secretary Laura Davison described as ‘an act of vandalism’.

Meanwhile, the union has rejected a pay offer of around one per cent and agreed to seek conciliation through ACAS. The NUJ pointed out that the increase is far below inflation and would amount to a pay cut in real terms. This would give full-time staff a rise of one per cent or £500 whichever is greater – when inflation is nearly three times higher.

The union pointed out that the proposals failed to recognise the growing pressure on staff, who are being asked to produce



HOUSE OF COMMONS

‘more with less’ while facing increasing job insecurity.

The NUJ leader said the offer fell far short of what members deserved and would leave many worse off.

“BBC journalists and media workers continue to deliver accurate,

independent, locally relevant and universally accessible journalism in increasingly difficult circumstances. The BBC must invest in the talented and experienced staff who make its public service journalism possible,” she said.

Meanwhile, NUJ resolutions expressing solidarity with BBC workers have been passed, including by the Birmingham and Coventry branch and the Financial Times chapel.

The union also joined forces with sister unions to launch a petition calling on the prime minister and Matt Brittin, BBC director-general, to back the corporation and its workers and called on the government to intervene.

Union members and the public can sign the petition on the TUC’s Megaphone platform.



The BBC must invest in the talented and experienced staff who make its public service journalism possible

Laura Davison
NUJ general secretary

Anxiety over Reach cuts

THE NUJ has warned that constant ‘haemorrhaging of jobs’ across Reach leaves staff in ‘a form of purgatory’.

The company announced yet more cuts as it released its mid-year financial results on July 22, which show that despite a previous target of reducing operating costs by

5-6 per cent, it is implementing 10 per cent cuts. The figures show that group revenue is down 9 per cent (£23.1m) so far this year, with digital income down 11.4 per cent. The company - which publishes titles including The Mirror, Daily Star, Daily Record,

Manchester Evening News, Irish Daily Mirror and Liverpool Echo - said major changes in the digital landscape were largely to blame, particularly the decline in Google referrals.

Management plans to cut 24.2 full-time equivalent roles in regional print

production, placing 67 jobs across the country at risk. Other roles are also under threat, in addition to two voluntary redundancy schemes threatening a further reduction in staff.

In a statement Reach chief executive Piers North said the company would focus on maximising income from digital subscriptions and video and produce

more original content and distinctive brands. However, the NUJ pointed out that this will not be possible with fewer experienced journalists.

The NUJ Reach group chapel said: “The stress on staff caused by the lack of clarity on the company’s coming actions is hitting morale and leaves them in a form of purgatory.”

Lyra McKee: not guilty verdict

THE gunman who killed journalist Lyra McKee has got away ‘scot-free’ after the three men accused of murdering her were found not guilty.

The 29-year-old author and award-winning reporter was shot in the head more than seven years ago when a masked gunman fired towards police during a riot in Derry.

The three accused – Paul McIntyre, 58, Peter Cavanagh, 38, and Jordan Devine, 25 – all denied the charges.

In the long-running, non-jury trial at Belfast crown court, judge Mrs Justice Smyth said the prosecution evidence was wholly circumstantial. But she expressed her regret that the

trial would “not have brought any comfort” to McKee’s family.

The self-styled New IRA admitted responsibility and said she was killed while she stood beside ‘enemy forces’.

Outside the court, her sister, Nichola Corner, said: “This is not over. Lyra said, ‘If you’re going to go down, go down fighting.’ I can tell you right now that every one of my family will, because we do this for Lyra.”

The NUJ was represented at the hearing by Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, and Kevin Cooper, Belfast and district branch acting chair. Dooley commented that the person who pulled the trigger had got off ‘scot-free’.

KEVIN COOPER



MI5 pays out over unlawful surveillance

FOR the first time, the security service MI5 has been ordered to pay damages to a journalist.

It was forced to pay £10,000 to NUJ member and RTÉ News Northern Ireland editor Vincent Kearney over highly intrusive, sustained and unlawful surveillance while he was a reporter at the BBC.

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) also ordered the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to pay £10,000 to Kearney for similar offences.

A three-day hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice in February laid bare the impact of unlawful surveillance, lasting more than a decade, on Kearney's personal and professional life.



The judgment was hailed by the NUJ as a damning indictment of the police and security services and "a clear and unambiguous vindication" of Kearney, the BBC and investigative journalism.

The tribunal heard how police and security forces breached his right to protect his sources and subjected him to considerable risk as a journalist working in a

post-conflict society.

Kearney's family was also subject to intrusion. PSNI admitted to creating a profile that included details of his wife and mother-in-law that were obtained from phone data.

Last year, MI5 conceded it had breached his rights to privacy and source protection by accessing his communications data in 2006 and 2009.

Kearney's case arose from a separate IPT hearing into the unlawful surveillance of NUJ members Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey by PSNI and the Metropolitan Police.

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, said: "This is a landmark judgment and a clear and unambiguous vindication of Vincent Kearney and the BBC."

Speaking to RTÉ, Kearney said: "This is a tremendous victory for journalism and an affirmation of the duty and legal rights of journalists to protect sources."

Kevin Cooper, NUJ Belfast and district branch vice chair, added: "It is time for a public inquiry into all the security agencies and their illegal surveillances."



This is a tremendous victory and an affirmation of the duty and rights of journalists to protect sources

Vincent Kearney
Editor, RTÉ News
Northern Ireland

NUJ reps attend two equality forums

DELEGATES from the NUJ attended two key equality forums during the summer – the TUC LGBT+ conference in Brighton and the TUC disabled workers' conference in Bournemouth.

The former passed a motion opposing the Equality and Human Rights Commission's revised code of practice.

The code, amended following the UK supreme court's decision in April last year that 'sex' in the Equality Act means biological sex, will now be challenged in a motion to the TUC congress in September.

The NUJ has responded to the change by publishing a statement stressing the media's responsibility to

treat transgender people with 'fairness, integrity and respect'.

The NUJ, along with other unions, is raising concerns that the new guidance – which clarifies how organisations can restrict single-sex spaces based on biological sex – does not properly protect transgender people and is unworkable.

The meeting in June followed another TUC equality forum in May, the TUC disabled workers' conference, where NUJ rep Lynn Degele told delegates that the focus must switch from disabled people constantly having to fight their corner to employers fulfilling their responsibilities.

Degele said giving employers seven years to

introduce 'reasonable adjustments' was too long and urged all unions to campaign for faster implementation.

The conference, held on May 19 and 20 at Bournemouth International Centre, was Ann Galpin's last as the NUJ representative on the TUC disabled workers' committee; she will continue as co-chair of the NUJ disabled members' council.

Gazette stalwart reaches a century

FORMER Middlesbrough Gazette journalist and life NUJ member Malcolm Race celebrated his 100th birthday on June 24 – with a cake showing him at his typewriter.

Race joined the Gazette on leaving Middlesbrough High School in 1942 aged 16. He had been evacuated twice, to Scarborough and Teesdale, where he attended school lessons in the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle.

He spent two years as a junior reporter. He was then called up and spent three and a half years in the army; in the last two, he worked on an army magazine, Parade. In 1948, he came back to the Gazette and stayed there until he retired in 1948. He was municipal editor for his last 23 years there.

He was a magistrate for 33 years and took on the roles of president (twice) and secretary (several times) of the Middlesbrough Rotary Club. He also served as president of his school's old boys' association.

Race wrote a number of books on local history. Until last year, he was a contributor to Now and Then, a free community magazine, and the Great Ayton parish church magazine. He served on Yarm and Great Ayton parochial church councils and was involved in Yarm Civic Society.

He was also dedicated member of the NUJ, serving in various positions on the Teesside branch and on chapel committees.



Call on Wales to fund public service news

TRADE unionists from all over Wales backed the NUJ's call for strengthened public interest journalism to counter the far right amid similar moves in Scotland and Westminster.

Moving the motion at the TUC Cymru Congress, David Nicholson, the co-chair of the NUJ Welsh executive council, pointed out that there was an information deficit in Wales, which meant people used social media to access news. This allowed the far right to foment unrest.

Nicholson, who was re-elected to the TUC Cymru general council, pointed out that redundancies were happening across the media

in Wales, with a further 10–15 per cent of cuts proposed by the BBC.

However, he added: "There are many small ways in which the fragile flower of public interest journalism can be nurtured in Wales."

He said the NUJ had called for an early meeting with culture and media minister Heledd Fychan to provide public money to support the sector.

The motion urged the TUC to lobby the Welsh government to enact in full the recommendations contained in the Of and For Wales report compiled by the Wales Public Interest

Journalism Working Group.

The document calls on the government to designate public interest journalism as a vital public service, which would release public funding for it.

It also urges ministers to set up an independent Wales Media Institute, which would be tasked with administering

state grants to encourage media literacy and develop journalism training.

The initiative follows a Scottish Trades Union Congress resolution calling for the Scottish government to help protect local journalism amid widespread cuts, including at STV.

On June 24, MPs from various parties gathered in Westminster Hall to debate the media green paper and urged the UK government to protect public service journalism and address the impact of social media and artificial intelligence. The green paper is intended to improve public access to trusted news.



There are many ways in which the fragile flower of public interest journalism can be nurtured

David Nicholson
Co-chair, NUJ Welsh executive council

Bank shuts Canary account

THE NUJ is seeking an urgent explanation over reports that Lloyds Bank has withdrawn banking facilities from left-wing media organisation The Canary.

The outlet, which launched a daily tabloid in

May, had not been given a reason for being 'debanked' as The Journalist went to press.

However, it speculated that this was because of its support for the Palestinian cause and opposition to the Israeli government.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, expressed concern over indications that it would not be able to pay its staff as a consequence of the action.

She said: "That a major bank appears to have cut off an independent publisher's

financial access without clear explanation sets a disturbing precedent for press freedom in the UK.

"The potential loss of an alternative voice in the sector and employment opportunities for staff and freelance journalists would be a blow to media plurality.

"We are in contact with The Canary and seeking

clarity on why Lloyds has chosen to suspend access. Members at The Canary who are affected should contact the union for confidential support."

In a statement, The Canary said: "We do know that multiple other politically engaged people have suffered similar actions by other banks in recent times."

Steve Bell



Fear over jobs as Sky acquires part of ITV

THE NUJ has demanded assurances over Sky's £1.6 billion takeover of ITV's Media and Entertainment division.

US company Comcast, the Philadelphia-based media giant that owns Sky, has been urged by the union to preserve jobs and programming at what will be the UK's biggest commercial broadcaster.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, pointed out that the deal had been struck after months of speculation, which had caused uncertainty and anxiety among members.

The NUJ leader called on the new owners to invest in local and regional news that would continue to serve audiences across the UK.

She added: "We note the commitment that ITV

channels and ITVX will remain free to air, that ITV News will remain distinct from Sky News, and that 'all public service broadcasting commitments will continue in full' – including regional news and programming.

"The new owners must act on these promises and regulators must do their job by rigorously scrutinising the deal and protecting the public interest. The union will also continue to consult and support members to ensure their rights and terms are protected under the

new ownership." Comcast will pay £1.2 billion in cash initially for ITV's media and entertainment business, which includes its free-to-air TV channels in the UK and the ITVX streaming platform. It has agreed to pay a further £200m in the second half of 2028, depending on advertising revenues.

Sky, which described the deal as a chance to create a 'UK-focused national streaming champion', hopes it will help it compete for viewers with US streaming platforms including

Netflix, YouTube and Amazon Prime Video.

The deal will now face 12–18 months of regulatory scrutiny. If approved, it would mark the end of 70 years of ITV as an independent public service broadcaster.

Sky said it had identified approximately £200m in 'annual cost synergies' that would be realised by the end of the third year after the agreement was finalised.

It claimed that most cost cuts would be made through efficiencies in 'marketing, technology platforms and non-UK content'.

Dana Strong, Sky's chief executive, told The Guardian that a 'minority' of the savings would come from job cuts and these would be where there was duplication, 'primarily in corporate and commercial functions'.



We note that 'all public service broadcasting commitments will continue in full' - including regional news

Laura Davison
NUJ general secretary

PA plans city relocation

THE NUJ is involved in extensive consultations over the Press Association's proposal to close its northern hub at Howden in Yorkshire and transfer operations to Leeds.

The union's PA chapel expressed concern about potential job losses caused

by the proposals, which will involve most of the 250 staff moving to a new office about 30 miles away. NUJ representatives believe there would be limited opportunity for staff to work from home.

In a statement, the PA chapel said: "For more than

20 years, PA staff have chosen to build careers and homes in the market town of Howden in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Many have expressed deep sorrow at the prospect of leaving the area."

The chapel said the proposal could put staff at

risk of redundancy if they chose not to relocate.

Representatives have engaged in consultations with management to look at how the move might work in practice. They have also been supporting staff.

Chris Morley, NUJ northern and midlands senior organiser, said the plans to make jobs in page production redundant was

particularly difficult given the declining print market.

However, he said extensive consultations were under way where the NUJ would be working hard to achieve the best possible outcomes.

"It is essential that the company finds a way to retain and accommodate as many staff as possible," he said.

Pub celebration for two life members

THE South-West England branch of the union hosted a party in Swindon in July to celebrate the award of NUJ life membership to two long-standing members.

Barry Leighton (pictured with branch chair Ray Tostevin) and Paul Watson have clocked up 97 years of union membership between them, with a combined total of 34 of them spent on The Evening Advertiser, known as the Adver.

Two dozen members from Wiltshire, Bristol and Somerset met at The King's Arms in the old town, around the corner from the paper's former home, to toast their colleagues, although Watson, who was unwell, was unable to attend.

Leighton joined the Adver in 1976 after six years in London,

where he first joined the union. He vividly recalled Swindon's part in the national provincial newspaper strike of 1978–79.

He was joined at the party by former Adver fathers of chapel Paul Wilenius and Bob Naylor, and they remembered the strike as a time when a true camaraderie between colleagues emerged.

When former Adver sub-editor George Harris died in 2012, he left a legacy, the specific purpose of which was to finance a party for journalists in Swindon.

Branch chair Ray Tostevin, who presented Barry with his life membership certificate, asked colleagues to raise a glass in memory of their benefactor.





The media giveth and taketh away

News outlets can make and break political careers, as party leaders are finding out, says **Raymond Snoddy**

The premiership of Sir Keir Starmer may now be fading into history as the limelight turns on Prime Minister Andy Burnham, but it is not too late to ask how big a part the media played in Sir Keir's downfall.

The provisional answer is quite a lot, at least in the right-wing press where his every flaw, fault and change of mind were jumped on and magnified daily.

His many achievements from Ukraine to Iran, and including an impressive list of domestic legislation, were ignored or downplayed.

Sir Keir was not a conventional politician and he clearly lacked the gift of connecting easily with the public. And, alas, the errors of judgement, such as accepting suits and glasses from a Labour millionaire and the much more serious decision to appoint Lord Mandelson as Washington ambassador, were very much of his own making.

It is, however equally true that the endless efforts of the press helped to turn a decent and honourable man into a toxic figure on the doorstep.

It was said the public had made up their mind about Sir Keir but it is equally so that a hostile media helped to make up their minds for them.

There is, however, another major media contribution that ultimately did for the former prime minister – the creation of the public persona of Reform UK leader Nigel Farage and the easy ride he and his party were given for years.

Broadcasters were the main culprits, with the BBC famously inviting Farage on to BBC One's Question Time 39 times over the years.

Meanwhile, Sky News seemed happy to drop everything when Farage wanted to call a press conference or make a speech.

When combined with a disaffected rump of the population, uncritical coverage helped create the local election victory for the far-right party and months of leading in the polls.

Otherwise sensible people suggested that Farage could be a prime minister, something he believed himself. The Daily Mail must have thought this was possible – Farage could always have a page in the paper to espouse his views.

It was fear of losing their seats together with the doorstep reaction that led Labour MPs to remove the leader who had produced a record-breaking election victory only two years ago.

We now know that the deed was done at the very moment when the air was seeping out of the Reform balloon and the career of Farage was imploding.

The media giveth and the media taketh away. After years of largely uncritical coverage, it was the newspapers that might now have ended the political career of Nigel Farage. And, without Farage, the threat of Reform would be seriously blunted.

While the media atmosphere had turned more chilly around Farage for some months, it was two journalists – Anna Isaac, city editor of The Guardian, and Gabriel Pogrund, head of The Sunday Times Insight team, who landed what could be killer blows.

The more serious came from Isaac, who revealed Farage had accepted a £5 million 'gift' from Christopher Harborne, a Thai-based crypto-billionaire. Farage gave several conflicting explanations for what the money was for. Then Isaac reported that Farage is alleged to have asked for the handout to compensate for not being able to make a living in the City if he became an MP.

The Pogrund-led tour de force revealed Farage had accepted cash from his aide George Cottrell, who had been jailed in the US for wire fraud. The money covered party office costs. Questions were also raised about whether Cottrell would be deemed a permissible donor given that he is apparently a tax resident of Montenegro.

A Times leader suggested Reform was in danger of repeating the mistakes of Farage's previous political endeavours "in becoming a vehicle for chaos".

Then came what could be the final act of the Farage-comic opera. Many saw his decision to stand down from his Clacton seat so he could stand again and take on 'the establishment' as an attempt to avoid questions about finances.

He decided to spend the summer competing for his old seat with 33 others, including Count Binface, Oxford-educated comedy writer Jon Harvey. The main parties decided not to stand.

Early national polls gave Count Binface a clear lead over Farage and many think he would be a far better MP for Clacton. The count has promised to hold weekly surgeries, answer letters and emails within three days and put one family's bin out each week.

Count Binface is already a media phenomenon. The story of the fight between the leader of Reform UK and the man with a bin on his head has gone around the world.

What of Andy Burnham? We can predict there will be no honeymoon as far as the press is concerned. He is likely to be hounded just as much as Sir Keir Starmer ever was.

As least Burnham, who began as prime minister neck and neck with Reform in the polls, is an old political hand and might have a better chance of avoiding the more obvious bear traps that will inevitably materialise.

The story of the fight between the Reform UK leader and the man with a bin on his head has gone around the world

“You can imagine how big the challenge is to stay in a country at war and to make an everyday choice between serving in the army, being a caring family member, taking care

What makes the resilience of Ukrainian media even more impressive is the relative newness of many of its key journalistic institutions and outlets. Before 2017, Ukraine had no dedicated public service broadcaster and audiences had to choose between state or oligarch-controlled networks. Today, Suspilne, the public broadcaster, is a well-trusted and popular source of news on TV, radio and digital platforms, and its formation was supported by, among others, international

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NASTIA TELIKOVA/LMF



ANTTONI JAMES NUMMINEN

charity BBC Media Action.

Mariya Frey, a member of Suspilne's management board, is a producer begrudgingly turned manager who is responsible for the development of regional teams of journalists across Ukraine.

"We have a very competitive media market and, mostly, the most powerful media companies were sponsored by oligarchs and political parties," she says. "To have your own independent TV channel, it was like a dream – it was almost impossible."

She said that strong public support for the public service broadcaster is "one of the reasons for our success – this is a very demanding Ukrainian audience".

Despite its success, Suspilne faces many problems, from underfunding to the destruction of infrastructure, as well as threats to journalists and audience news fatigue. Since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, Reporters Sans Frontières has recorded cases of more than 175 journalists who have fallen victim to abuses amounting to war crimes committed by the Russian army.

"Our journalists, especially on the frontline, face threats and our colleagues have been killed. Four of them from Suspilne are already dead. At the same time, we are struggling with everything that European media is struggling with, from big tech algorithms, fragmentation of the world, AI disruption and news fatigue as well," Frey notes. "We have the same issues but, because of the war and the insecure environment, a mistake could actually cost you your life."

Frey, who accepted a senior role in the organisation to advocate for colleagues in the field, is cautiously optimistic about the future of Ukrainian journalism, thanks to Ukrainian audiences as well as international support and solidarity.

She adds: "Ukrainians are people who are fighting for freedom. They understand and see when someone is trying to reduce their freedoms.

"I'm also grateful for the long-term support of people in the



Andriy Yusov, of Ukraine's intelligence service; friends from the UK, India, France and Portugal whose gathering was interrupted by an air alert

//

As Taiwanese journalists, we can learn from how Ukraine counters disinformation. China uses the same tactics

UK, the support of your journalists and for many of your institutions in your country that are supporting us. I know that for a long time we were like children to you in the media world. But now we see how our partnership is changing, and how we can become a valuable partner for you to help us reflect our experience, and make it more considerable for other nations and other countries."

Since LMF's inception in 2013, the annual event has become the largest media conference in Central and Eastern Europe; it is the continent's second largest, after the International Journalism Festival in Perugia. Its reach and impact are impressive, and it was fascinating to meet and hear how media professionals from across the globe are finding solutions to similar issues, including disinformation, unaccountable social media platforms and the evolving nature of democratic participation.

As the war grinds on, journalists continue to be targeted. More than 20 Ukrainian journalists are detained by the Kremlin, making Russia the top jailer of foreign journalists, notes Pauline Maufrais, Reporters Sans Frontières' regional officer for Ukraine.

Maksym Butkevych, a Ukrainian human rights defender and journalist, witnessed firsthand while in Russian captivity a version of the world where most people were "reduced to objects of coercion or manipulation, and where the creation of their reality is decisively influenced by small groups of leaders, manipulators, or the wealthy".

The only reality worthy of humanity, he concludes, is one inherently linked, whether we like it or not, to "all political decisions, civic engagement, mutual information-sharing and the shaping of our worldview, and everyday interactions – we are responsible for all of this".

Butkevych's advice and the lessons learned from Ukrainian media are far from limited to hot war settings. Chris Liu, the vice president of Radio Taiwan International, was part of a delegation that shared lessons about maintaining and supporting media institutions in a country with an aggressive neighbour. He emphasised that public broadcasters in particular should be seen as critical infrastructure to be protected in the event of a natural disaster or war.

Liu, who previously headed the Taiwan office of the UK public body the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, told The Journalist that the learning went both ways.

"As journalists, we can learn from how Ukraine counters disinformation, because we know that Russia has a lot of disinformation campaigns against Ukraine, especially in terms of manipulating the vulnerability of Ukrainian society, and the Chinese government employs the same tactics.

"I think Taiwanese journalists not only can learn from Ukraine but also should compare tactics. The other thing we can learn from Ukraine is how to maintain resilience during wartime because in Taiwan, although we encounter a lot of disinformation campaigns and information operations, we are not at war militarily with the Chinese government."

I caught up with Myrovich once more before leaving Lviv, and I asked what message or thought she hoped journalists departing the conference would keep in mind.

"They have to reconsider their role in society and remember they are responsible for keeping society in reality, which is very tough because the human brain is built to escape tough things."

Andre Lombard on being a gay journalist in a homophobic country

Nightmare in Nigeria

This was access we had been trying to arrange for over three years, trying desperately to battle against Nigeria's infamous bureaucracy. We were making steady progress in attempts to gain permission to film in Lagos's state schools. As a senior journalist for the BBC's first-ever African youth news programme, this could make possible a plethora of new stories and angles.

But the regional education minister – the man making the decision – had conditions to our access. “I am happy for you to film,” he told me and my colleague, “if you can promise that you will not cover any gay issues in your programme.”

I was faced with a conundrum. I'm an openly gay man. My initial instinct was to deny the request. To accept it would be an abandonment of my values and also the values that I believe that the BBC should hold.

We had not been planning to cover LGBTQ stories, but were we editorially correct to restrict the topics our programme could cover? Then again, was I putting my principles and identity above the interests of our journalism? And what would I really achieve by making a moral stand?

We did agree to it and I have questioned whether that was the correct decision in the years since.

Nigeria is one of 65 countries worldwide that criminalises LGBTQ people. Same-sex relations are illegal under the 2013 Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, using the colonial language of ‘carnal knowledge against the order of nature’ and ‘gross indecency’. Indeed, in the 12 states of Nigeria that operate Sharia law, legally gay relationships can be punished by being stoned to death. During my almost nine years at the BBC's Africa department, I was fortunate enough to travel to some amazing countries across the continent. Unfortunately, many of them had anti-LGBTQ laws. Friends would often ask me why I was travelling to such places where I could not be my authentic self, something of which I was acutely aware.

Penny Dale became the BBC's Zambia correspondent in 2001, staying until 2004. Openly lesbian in the UK, she says moving there meant she became “very closeted” and “only half myself”.

“I had to be really, really careful as homosexuality is illegal. As I was in my 30s, people would often ask where my husband was or if I had children. I'd have to make some rubbish up, like I was married to my job. One thing about journalism is that you can often hide behind that.”

That's something that James Longman can relate to. As ABC's chief international correspondent, his career has taken him across the globe, including Uganda, Liberia and Syria.

“I'm often conscious of my sexuality in a way that I'm not back home,” he tells me over the phone from Iraq, where he is covering the latest crisis in the Middle East.

The day before we spoke, he had attended a big dinner with local sources.

“There's always a lot of machismo at these events. There's always a lot of talk about women and having children. Often in journalism we gain someone's confidence by talking about family. Do I tell this guy that I have a husband or do I steer the conversation away from personal things?”

Ultimately, though, he says people can surprise you.

“Sometimes, you roll the dice with someone you think will have a problem with it and you get a positive reaction. Gay people by our very nature are everywhere. You have just as much chance of speaking to a gay person as you do at home”.

I've certainly had my own stereotyped thoughts and, dare I say it, prejudices challenged in this way. In Sierra Leone, I was working with a local journalist who, unprompted, rued the state of gay rights in the country, making me feel comfortable enough to come out to him.

Despite the challenges she faced as a lesbian, Dale says she looks back at her period in Zambia with ‘huge fondness’.

“It was a wonderful if intense time. Although I wasn't able to be myself, there were other aspects of me that were able to come out and come to fruition, including falling in love with radio and what a joy it is.”

Eventually, though, her sexuality was the deciding factor in leaving Zambia as she “didn't want to live like this any more”.

Paul, a gay freelance journalist living in east Africa and working across the continent, tells me that his sexuality can affect the stories that he covers. I've used a pseudonym for



Was I putting my principles and identity above the interests of our journalism?



him, as sexual relations between men are illegal in his home country.

“As a queer person, I can find it difficult to tell queer stories of trauma as it’s a bit close to home and they can have a lot of backlash. When I look on social media at comments on a story, the homophobia can feel like a personal attack as I relate to the person I am covering. It can be stressful and I worry about identification of my sexuality if I cover them too much.” Paul says he is out at work to some colleagues but not publicly.

However, a reporter’s sexuality can sometimes be used to tell the story in a way that would not be possible with a straight correspondent.

In 2019, Longman travelled to the Chechen Republic, which is part of the Russian federation. There had been what had been described as a ‘gay purge’ in the region, with the forced disappearance, imprisonment and torture of men who were presumed to be gay.

In a memorable scene, Longman came out to Apti Alaudinov, the notorious head of the Chechen police who had previously said there were “no gays in Chechnya”.

“I had no intention of coming out to him”, Longman tells me.

“It was a calculation in the moment. I checked with our crew if they were happy for me to do it and they said go for it. It felt particularly powerful as it was in the prison room [where gay men had been tortured]. The next 48 hours were intense and I only relaxed when we left the country.

“I came into journalism to show truth to power and shine a light on some of the most vulnerable people in the world, which, sadly, include gay people.

“When I go to Chechnya, I am going to naturally lean towards these stories. It helps being gay to find these stories; however, I don’t want to be just a gay journalist or defined as just one thing.”

Some editors might have reservations over sending an openly LGBT journalist to a country where their sexuality or gender expression is illegal. Indeed, I have spoken to several gay colleagues who believe they could have been passed over for deployments for this very reason.

There may also be worries the effect of being in a homophobic environment could have. In 2013, Stephen Fry said that he attempted death by suicide after an interview with Uganda’s then minister of state for ethics and integrity. He was in the country to interview the minister about Uganda’s



My case studies were ostracised, afraid to be themselves and carrying a heavy emotional burden



notorious anti-homosexuality bill for his documentary, Stephen Fry: Out There.

Certainly, I can relate to feelings of loneliness, isolation and anger a forced return to the metaphorical closet can bring.

Paul says he has also experienced these emotions while covering a story on homophobia in west Africa.

“It was a very interesting time as I had just come out to my family. My case studies were ostracised socially, afraid to be themselves and carrying a heavy emotional burden and I found that very triggering.

“I now make sure that I don’t read comments online or have my socials tagged as the comments can be very triggering. I also make sure I talk to friends, debrief with them and attend regular therapy sessions.”

While of course every editor should be concerned about their journalist’s safety, I would ask that managers talk to their staff about any concerns they have. It is likely they will already have an understanding of the environment they are entering and taken measures to address it.

As Longman says: “It’s imperative that you trust the individual. People need to be able to operate in different cultures and environments.”

It is also important that editors do direct reporters to support that they can receive in the field – such as employee assistance programmes and staff networks – as well as when they return.

Ultimately, though, western journalists visiting or working in these areas can often benefit from something their local counterparts, such as Paul, cannot rely on – privilege.

“I always had the option to leave,” Dale says. “Whether that be to Johannesburg for the weekend to let my hair down at a gay bar or ultimately leave the country if things became too problematic, whereas gay Zambians often don’t have this luxury.”

That’s a point not lost on Longman.

“I feel so lucky that I get to come back to the UK and not think about who I am,” he says. “And that is only luck afforded to me by the lottery of birth.”

Main image: Lagos city, Nigeria Right: Andre Lombard at the Lekki Conservation Centre



Is it better to have a niche? **Linda Harrison** looks at the pros and cons

"However, if trainee or younger journalists have a niche, it is good to build this too, so they can show within their portfolio they have a specialism and can be trusted to report on this in a knowledgeable way."

Plus, your niche can change. Collins says you do not need too many examples of work to start building yourself up as an expert in a given area. It is fine to pivot and rebrand yourself.

Trilivas says: “I’m keen to be regarded as a trusted authority

I've carried out over 3,000 radio and TV interviews. I have no regrets about niching down and am very glad I did

specialise?

in this space, which means I often decline otherwise appealing opportunities that lack a true sense of luxury – and selectivity is essential. There is a meaningful distinction between something that is merely expensive and something that is genuinely luxurious.”

Screen test

If you're looking for a new area to specialise in, Michelle Rawlins says a main niche at the moment for journalists is short- and long-form video.

She explains: “Thinking about how, as a journalist, you can tell a story on YouTube is essential.”

“YouTube has been hugely successful in terms of monetising content. News platforms have adapted to this and therefore need journalists with the skills to create engaging video content.”

“Visual podcasting is also a hugely successful market. It's not just the audio that is important but also what it looks like on video-streaming platforms.”



Multiple niches

How about combining niches? Pete Carvill is a B2B writer specialising in insurance and pensions. But, at weekends, he is often found working as English-language commentator for boxing shown from Germany and Denmark. He has recently moved into sports reporting.

Carvill, also an author, says: “While doing publicity for my first book, *Death of a Boxer*, I was asked to do commentary on one small show in Berlin. It's snowballed from there, with most of my income at the moment coming from boxing.”

While being a specialist can lead to work, there are pitfalls.

“Even though I've been in the news business for 20 years, you find yourself pigeonholed as just a trade reporter,” says Carvill. “I'll often pitch stuff to mainstream places but it'll get turned down – largely because I think there's still a stigma about the type of work that I do.”

Rebecca Barnes also has more than one niche. A freelance writer specialising in cruising and cruise holidays, she is also employed part time as a beauty writer with a niche in aesthetics.

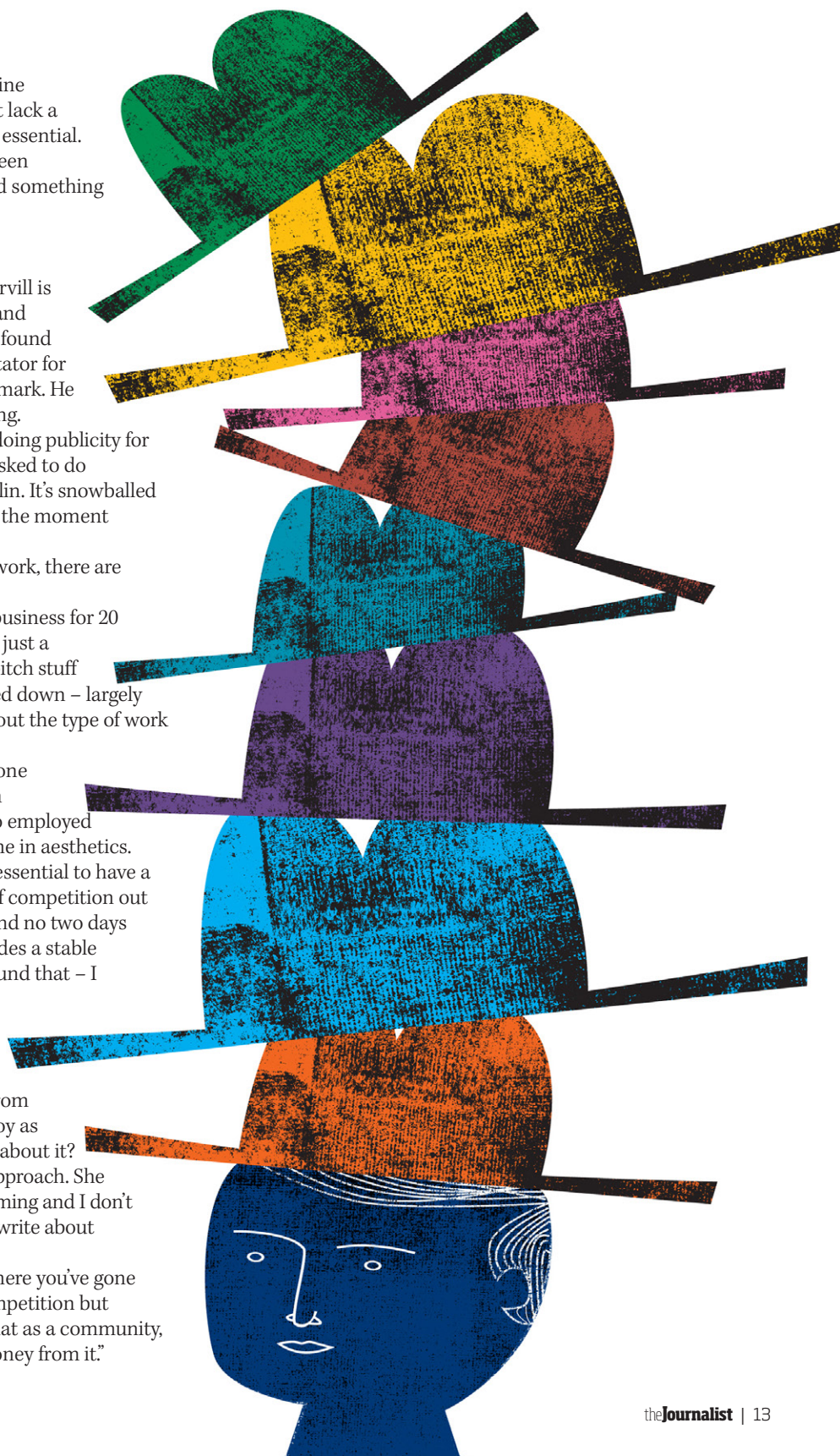
She says: “As a freelancer, I think it's essential to have a niche in certain topics as there's a lot of competition out there. It also keeps things interesting and no two days are the same. My part-time work provides a stable income with my freelancing fitting around that – I could never make a living just being a freelance travel writer.”

Sweet spot

So how do you find your niche, apart from obviously choosing something you enjoy as you'll be spending a lot of time writing about it?

Collins advises a ‘three layers deep’ approach. She explains: “I don't just write about swimming and I don't just write about swimming outdoors. I write about swimming outdoors in lidos.”

“It's about finding that sweet spot where you've gone deep enough to not have tonnes of competition but broad enough that there's interest in that as a community, which means there's scope to make money from it.”



Only shows in town

Ruth Addicott looks at the anarchy and ecstasy of covering the Edinburgh festivals

Sitting in a dark crypt watching a comedian eat a 'medically inadvisable' amount of cheese at 1.50am is not your average job but, for journalists covering The Fringe in Edinburgh, it's another day of performance art.

The Edinburgh International Festival, which runs alongside The Fringe, TV, Book and Film festivals, is the biggest cultural gathering in the world.

It generates more than £400 million and draws an audience of 4.5 million. There are around 4,000 shows and 300 venues, ranging from a world-class concert hall to a public toilet.

Only the Olympics and World Cup sell more tickets.

Chris Curtis is editor of Broadcast magazine and has been covering the Edinburgh TV Festival for 20 years. He says it is vital to have reporters on the ground and the editorial team, including seven journalists and an online content manager, decamp for the three-day event each year. They produce live coverage and three newsletters a day.

"It costs quite a bit of money but it's worth it because of the face-to-face conversations and chance meetings that you didn't know you were going to have," he says. "In an era of Zoom meetings, that feels more valuable than ever."

The main event is the MacTaggart Lecture, the festival's keynote address, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year and is known for being controversial and holding the industry to account. Speakers have included Rupert Murdoch, Emily Maitlis, Sir David Attenborough, Janet Street-Porter, Dennis Potter and David Olusoga.

Despite some 'soul-searching' and 'hand-wringing' at the time, Curtis is sceptical about whether it leads to actual change, even when the criticisms are valid. However, he says, it does make people stop and think.

The TV Festival could move to Manchester or Newcastle from 2027 in a bid to cut costs.

Award-winning photographer Murdo Macleod has been covering the festivals for The Guardian and The Observer for more than 25 years.

He feels the biggest challenge is navigating all the separate press and PR departments as the performers, venues, brands and different festivals often have their own representatives.

"The whole thing is a nightmare from start to finish," he says. "It's a labyrinth. And often, when you do defy the labyrinth and get there, you're not in some opera house, you're in a lorry container with one performer, a microphone, a black background and some dodgy lighting."

Macleod has worked with some big names over the years from Muriel Spark to Salman Rushdie, Oliver Stone and the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

Set the stage to get a story

Get up and close

The TV Festival offers great opportunities for face-to-face conversations, says Chris Curtis, editor of Broadcast.

"The great and the good of

the TV industry are there, so put yourself in front of those people, have something to ask them and make the most of it.

"When you're a trade journalist, your expertise in

the sector and your relationships and contacts in that sector are everything. Any opportunity you get to build or re-affirm relationships is super valuable."

Outlets

The festivals can be a good opportunity for young journalists. Websites and publications (some pay, some don't), include festmag.com, The List, The Scotsman, The Skinny, Broadway Baby and Edinburgh Festivals Magazine.

Join a queue

Interesting conversations with people from around the world happen in queues for shows, says freelance journalist Fergus Morgan. "Get chatting - that's how you find good stories and good shows and have a good time as well."



ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

One highlight was American writer Gore Vidal. “He was so pleased with the photos I took, he asked for a print and sent me a signed copy of one of his books,” he says. “In it, he inscribed that many said it was the best picture taken of Gore Vidal, some said it made him look like God, while others said he looked like Harold Wilson with Alzheimer’s.”

At one point, Macleod was asked to record sound as well as photographs and happened to encounter Tony Benn and John Prescott on the same day.

“I asked Tony Benn if he minded if I recorded a small reflection and he said: ‘Well, let me think, a photograph is a moment’s inconvenience for a lifetime of pleasure.’ That was his response and I thought that was really nice. Then, in the same manner, I asked John Prescott and he said: ‘Shut up and take the bloody picture!’”

Mark Fisher is a freelance journalist based in Edinburgh. He clocked up his 40th consecutive festival last year and is theatre critic for *The Guardian*.

“I don’t think I could have been a freelance arts journalist in Edinburgh if it hadn’t been for the festival because it’s been a central part of my income,” he says. “It’s not difficult to see five shows in a day if you put your mind to it. Even then, I’ll get to the end of the festival and someone will go ‘Did you see such-and-such?’ and I’ve never heard of it.”

Fisher says it is not just what happens during the festival that can generate work; the event can also lead to interviews and commissions later in the year.

Fergus Morgan is also freelance and writes for *The Scotsman*, *Financial Times* and *The Stage*.

“You get exposed to such incredible, weird, adventurous, experimental, mind-expanding work,” he says. “There is so much weird stuff, I worry now that I can’t tell what’s weird or not.”

Morgan was based in London and moved to Edinburgh in 2019 after meeting his wife at the festival.

He says one of the biggest issues is the spiralling costs, which have priced out both artists and freelance journalists.

“It’s the single biggest gathering of the British TV industry and, from a journalistic point of view, it’s the best place for networking.”

Chris Curtis, editor, Broadcast magazine

“It almost got to the stage, say 20 years ago, where you couldn’t shock – the thing had been done.”

Murdo Macleod, photographer

“Journalistically, it’s very rich – you get a mood of the times.”

Mark Fisher, theatre critic and freelance journalist

“People are twisting my arm to sleep on my futon,” he says. “To stay here for a whole month, for a room, you’re talking £2k–£3k at least – too much for a freelance journalist. If your paper isn’t paying for it and you’ve got to foot the bill, that’s an extortionate amount. I think there’s a real paucity of professional critics on the ground now.”

He also believes there is scope for more scrutiny around how the festivals operate, citing the recent ‘pivot’ towards attracting more acts from America as an example.

He tries to cram in as much work as he can for the month of August and sometimes sees six shows a day. Some do not start until 11pm and he will write a 250–450 word review for each.

“I spend a lot of time sprinting around town and I write a lot on my phone when I’m waiting for a show to start,” he says. “It’s the only way I can stay on top of it.”

Like most journalists, he’s had a few ‘traumatic’ experiences, including being hauled up on stage and shoved in a bin by a stand-up comedian, who kicked it around the stage and hurled abuse at him. “I had no idea what was happening, I was in a kind of daze,” he says. “Afterwards, I said to my friend, ‘Was that any good?’ And he said, ‘That was fucking hilarious.’”

Morgan gave it a four-star review.

Another memorable night was a show called *Karaoke Saved My Life*. “It was basically this American bloke in a white suit telling the story of his life and, every three minutes, he would clunkily segue into a pop hit and get someone up on stage to sing with him,” he says.

“I went on a Sunday evening at 11pm. I thought, I’ll have a beer and sit at the back and it turned out there were only three people in the audience. The show started and the guy asked ‘Does anyone want to get up on stage?’ and all four of us were completely silent. This went on for 15 minutes, then one of the people left. It was so awkward. Eventually, I turned to the other two and said, ‘Look, let’s just get up on stage’. So, the show essentially descended into the performer, me and these two other strangers singing karaoke to a completely empty room apart from the sound girl at the back. It actually turned out to be one of my favourite Fringe experiences.”

Sustained Private Eye work helped expose Post Office scandal, says **Mark Fisher**



Above: Ian Hislop with Alan Bates and his wife Suzanne, and the book's author Richard Brooks

First-class journalism

At the end of every chapter in *Post Mortem*, a compelling account of the Post Office Horizon IT scandal, is a cartoon from Private Eye. One of the sharpest appears near the end, after author and NUJ member Richard Brooks has mapped out the sorry story of an organisation that prosecuted its frontline staff rather than admit to flaws in the software it forced them to use.

Drawn by Dave Wight, the cartoon shows a nonplussed panel at the public inquiry listening to a man giving evidence. "I was only obeying postal orders," runs the caption.

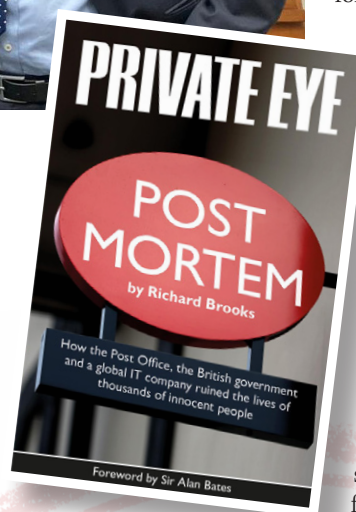
Wight's allusion to the Nuremberg defence is not just for comic effect. As Brooks tells it, the scandal is a lesson about the capacity of people to behave appallingly if they believe their actions are in the best interests of the company. So much was at stake that staff at all levels persuaded themselves that ruining

sub-postmasters' lives was preferable to denting the Post Office's reputation.

Brooks, who has written investigative stories for Private Eye for more than 20 years, says the malaise at the Post Office was less about individual bad behaviour – although there was plenty of it – than a systemic failing. "It's too much of a coincidence: you just can't get so many terrible people in one organisation. It's something big and structural going on."

An institutional bias against sub-postmasters meant legitimate investigations became heavy-handed accusations. To tell managers what they wanted to hear, investigators would routinely lie.

"It was endemic," says Brooks. "There was no document from the top saying, 'This is what you do,' but it was understood that there were set lies that you repeated: you're the only one, Horizon is robust... a lot of people were repeating things they knew were false. It fitted very neatly with what they wanted to do, which was to get convictions."



Keeping up the pressure was where we came in. They had to know that whatever they were doing could come out

Exposing the scandal required three things. There was the determination of Sir Alan Bates, the sub-postmaster whose dogged campaign to clear his name was celebrated in ITV's *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*. There was the probing of former Tory MP James Arbuthnot, one of the few to accept the allegations of workers more readily than the bland assurances of the Post Office.

Then there was the press. Computer Weekly was first on scene with a piece in 2009 by Rebecca Thomson, who saw a pattern in complaints about Fujitsu's Horizon IT system. S4C's Taro Naw followed this up and added some Welsh cases. The following year, Nick

Wallis recorded a piece for the BBC's *Inside Out South* programme and, in September 2011, Brooks filed the first of a stream of reports to Private Eye.

It took time, but this rattled the Post Office. "Journalism was very important," says Brooks. "It did play a role in bringing more victims out."

He admits the press was late to the story, although local papers did good work reporting on convictions. "That's partly our fault. And partly because the sub-postmasters didn't see the press as an important route for a while. I've said to Alan Bates, 'You should have come to Private Eye 10 years before you did'.

"Keeping up the pressure was where we came in. They had to know that whatever they were doing could come out. That forced them onto the back foot. It led to more deception, but it's in the nature of journalistic campaigns that the reaction isn't, 'Fair cop, you've got us' – it's to cover up more. Then you have to probe the cover-up and, if all goes well, you break through."

Brooks thinks there is a good chance the police investigation will lead to prosecutions but, as an investigative journalist, he knows how easily the scandal could have stayed out of sight.

"The truth doesn't always come out," he says. "I've worked on really good stories where someone should have been recompensed and they haven't been. It's just died because the public body or private company has just strung it out and worn people down."

As we speak, he is filing another story about the Post Office. Brooks, for one, is not worn down yet.

Hungary opens up



ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The new government is loosening control over journalism in a major media overhaul. **Rob Hyde** reports

Hungary's new prime minister has begun dismantling Viktor Orbán's vast media machine.

Reforming state media was one of the flagship promises of Péter Magyar's centre-right, pro-European Tisza party after its landslide election victory over Orbán's nationalist-conservative Fidesz movement, which ruled for 16 years.

Parts of the media empire built under Orbán's Fidesz-Christian Democrat coalition are showing signs of strain.

Freelance investigative journalist Tamás Boros has worked for print, online and broadcast media.

He tells *The Journalist*: "Some former pro-government newspapers have already collapsed, firing a large percentage of staff and moving entirely online, and one of the oldest and most prestigious dailies, *Magyar Nemzet*, is switching to a weekly format.

"I've been a journalist since 2014, and I've seen how the sphere for independent media had been shrinking and how the pro-government media had gained more and more ground.

"Fidesz and Viktor Orbán mainly tried to influence public opinion by taking control of different media outlets. Pro-government media relied heavily on state advertising and advertising from state-owned companies, which made the competition very unfair."

"If the government saw a company was advertising in what they called the 'independent' media, they risked being left out of important public contracts or other business opportunities."

The long-term consequences of life as a journalist under Orbán are still being felt says Dóra Laborczi, the journalist and theologian who founded Lutheran public affairs platform *Kötőszó*.

"The polarization, the weaponization of state advertising, the monolithic structures like KESMA, and the transformation of public broadcasting into a political tool are undeniable facts," she tells *The Journalist*.

KESMA is a giant pro-Orbán media foundation that controls hundreds of newspapers, websites, radio stations and television channels.

"The biggest challenge is, without a doubt, sheer economic survival and systemic underfunding," Laborczi says.

"The financial asphyxiation of independent journalism has forced many brilliant professionals out of the field. The toxic environment and financial deprivation have literally broken and bankrupted many excellent professionals."

A similar bleak picture is painted by Alexandra Bólyi, online editor of the health and pharmacy publisher *Patika Tükör Lapkiadó*, whose flagship title is said by its publisher to be Hungary's second most-read monthly magazine.

Speaking to *The Journalist*, she says life as an independent journalist under Orbán was often 'a struggle to survive'.

"Media outlets have practically been ruined in recent years because it was impossible to get ads."

She spent almost a year working for government-controlled media. "We were under constant scrutiny," she says.

"If I interviewed well-known people who weren't pro government, I received letters of reprimand and penalties."

One of the new government's most ambitious proposals is to abolish MTVA, the state body responsible for financing public broadcasting. The plan is replace it with a new Press Fund to support independent journalism, community media, public-service programming and local reporting.

"The biggest question right now – and the one both parliament and media professionals are debating – is what public service media should look like in the future," said Bólyi.

"There seems to be broad agreement that Hungary should continue to have public service media, but the goal is that it should no longer serve the interests of a single political party."

The changes have made journalists cautiously optimistic.

Zsófia Fülöp, a journalist at fact-checking body *Lakmusz*, says ministers are taking questions from independent reporters, and there seems to be a more open approach to media access.

"The members of the new government talk to the press, journalists have access to press conferences, we can conduct interviews... under the old government, this was unthinkable."

Even so, she warns: "We have to be cautious and stick to our watchdog role as independent press, no matter what."

"I think the trust in journalism is quite low in the country. Society is divided and a lot of people don't think independent media can exist."

"Many journalists only worked under the Orbán regime. Now it's time to find our voice in the new political era, when fighting for our existence is not the top priority any more."



We have to be cautious and stick to our watchdog role as independent press, no matter what



by **Mark Fisher**

arts

Books

The Green Socialist: Zack Polanski and the Battle for Britain's Future

Russell Warfield

September 20, Pluto Books

Before moving to climate organisation Possible, Warfield worked in the communications team at the Green Party of England and Wales. That gives him a special interest in Polanski, the man who, at the time of writing, has galvanised the party and increased its membership.

End Times Fascism

Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor

September 15, Allen Lane

Uniting religious fundamentalists, assorted billionaires and the far right is a belief in an imminent apocalypse. Countering the threat from these supremacist survivalists, Klein and Taylor suggest ways to resist.

Comedy

Mark Thomas: 40 in Stand-Up Years

On tour

Until December 13

Getting match fit with a three-week run on the Edinburgh Fringe, the firebrand comedian and NUJ member spends the autumn on the road,

putting the world to rights with a barrage of jokes, rants and state-of-the-nation broadsides.

Exhibitions

Technologies of Peace

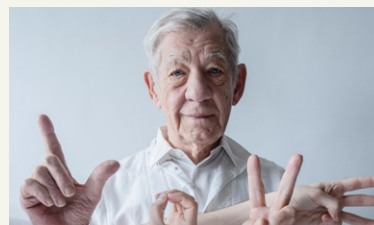
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

September 12–May 9

Surveying recent Irish and European history, this exhibition looks at the mechanics of conflict resolution through the lens of artists including Frances Hegarty, Willie Doherty, Cathy Wilkes, Alastair MacLennan and Sandra Johnston.

Tim Walker's Fairyland: Love and Legends

National Portrait Gallery, London



October 8–February 7

Five years' worth of images of activists, performers, artists and writers explore queer identity, community, love – and fairy tales.

Festivals

Edinburgh Art Festival

August 14–30

One of the Scottish capital's many summer festivals, this citywide event covers the ground from alternative queer images to Japanese fetish prints. Look out for Catherine Opie: To Be Seen at the Royal Scottish Academy.



Dublin Fringe Festival

September 5–20

Nipping in before the Dublin Theatre Festival, the Dublin Fringe has invited artists to explore the space between protest and play with the provocation and theme of Framework for Joy/ Foundation for Resistance.

In depth

War reporting stitched up

Four hundred years before William Caxton set up his printing press, the art of reportage reached an early pinnacle in the Bayeux Tapestry. Across 70m of embroidered cloth, it recounted a Norman-centric story of William the Conqueror's invasion of England, leading up to his victory in 1066 at the Battle of Hastings.

There is much excitement at London's British Museum where, amid controversy about the wisdom of moving such a delicate exhibit, the tapestry is going on display 1,000 years after its completion.

"I was sceptical about transporting this unique and fragile fabric from Bayeux to London," says NUJ member Peter

Fieldman, a specialist in the era, who has lived in France for many years. "But it is a perfect opportunity for the British public to learn more about one of the most important dates in English history."

Published in 2009, Fieldman's historical novel, *1066 The Conquest*, drew on his researches at Le Musée de la Tapisserie de



Bayeux, the relic's home. Over the course of two years, he also travelled from Normandy to Sussex to help inform his novel. This account follows William as he becomes Duke of Normandy at the age of eight then amasses enough power to defeat King Harold and claim the English crown.

While the Bayeux museum is closed for renovation before it reopens for the 1000-year anniversary of William's birth, the British Museum will display the tapestry flat, not vertically, in a continuous length. The medieval artefact will be shown alongside contemporary objects. On loan will be a charter drawn up by Edward the Confessor granting lands

to Westminster Abbey, and an illustrated manuscript believed to have been borrowed by the tapestry's designers for their depictions of clothing, ships and everyday items.

"The symmetries and proportions show careful calculation," says Igor Tulchinsky, the philanthropist supporting the exhibition. "Its chronological structure reveals something equally sophisticated: a modern sense of causality and sequence. It is a narrative about decisions made under uncertainty, about commitments made before their consequences can be known."

The Bayeux Tapestry, British Museum, London, September 10–July 11; 1066 The Conquest, Grosvenor House Publishing

Film

The Uprising

General release

From September 11

Director Paul Greengrass goes back to the 14th century when Wat Tyler led a peasants' revolt against the young King Richard II. Andrew Garfield stars alongside Jamie Bell, Stephen Dillane and Tom Hollander.

The Social Reckoning

General release

From October 9

Jeremy Allen White plays Wall Street Journal technology reporter Jeff Horwitz, famed for his Facebook files. In Aaron Sorkin's follow-up to *The Social Network*, he helps Facebook staffer Frances Haugen (Mikey Madison) to blow the whistle on the company's secrets.

Music

Rinaldo

Arcola, London

August 19–22

The theatre's annual Grimeborn festival aims to put some urgency and political grit into the medium of opera.



Ralph Bridle's staging of Handel's music and Rossi's libretto focuses on captivity, enslavement and the human cost of war.

Television

Freefall: a Reckoning for Boeing
Netflix
From August 19

In the wake of last year's suicide of whistleblower John Barnett, filmmaker Rory Kennedy returns to the theme of her documentary, *Downfall*: the Case Against Boeing, to see how the aviation company's approach to safety and accountability has changed since two of its 737 Max planes crashed in 2018 and 2019.

Theatre

The Story

National Theatre, London
August 27–October 24

A newsroom thriller by US playwright Tracey Scott Wilson about four reporters competing to get the story of a white teacher's murder in a black neighbourhood. This play is inspired by true cases of journalists fabricating stories.

Sylvia

Curve, Leicester, and on tour
September 24–November 15

Beverly Knight reprises her Olivier Award-winning turn as Emmeline Pankhurst, alongside Sharon Rose as Sylvia Pankhurst, in a musical about the pioneering feminists. The tour ends at London's Royal Albert Hall, scene of more than 20 suffragette rallies.



Spotlight

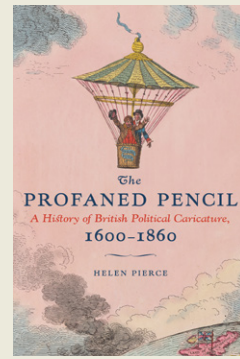
Poison pencils

Political cartoons are a speciality of Dr Helen Pierce, who lectures in art history at the University of Aberdeen.

In 2008, she published *Unseemly Pictures: Graphic Satire and Politics in Early Modern England*, which looked at the use of illustration as a tool of agitation, criticism and provocation in the 17th century.

She is on similar territory in her forthcoming book, *The Profaned Pencil*, which tells the story of British political caricature between 1600 and 1860.

Like the earliest writing in pamphlets and journals, the first cartoons often showed little restraint. Exploiting the immediacy of the visual image, illustrators could have a more direct impact

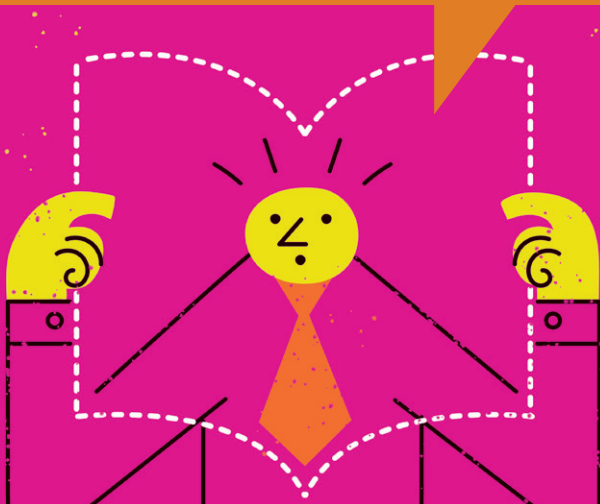


than their colleagues using the printed word.

Pierce traces the evolution of political caricature through changing technologies of the Georgian and Victorian eras, as politicians and members of the royal family came under the satirical microscope. On the way, caricaturists reflected the issues of the day, and tensions around class, gender or war. She looks too at how the drawings influenced dissent and the reactions of those being satirised.

***The Profaned Pencil: a History of British Political Caricature, 1600-1860*, Reaktion Books, October 1**

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Calm amid the storm

Having freelance fears on top of an anxiety disorder makes union support invaluable, says **Tom Sykes**

Generalised anxiety disorder affects 7.5 per cent of people in England, according to NHS survey data.

I was diagnosed with the condition in 2004 when I was 24 and have been managing it since.

I probably haven't helped myself by working as a freelance in situations that would frighten most people. Among other edgy assignments, I've reported on President Rodrigo Duterte's extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and covered the first presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire after its second civil war.

Oddly, though, some of my worst anxiety episodes have not been caused by objectively stressful conditions – I have had panic attacks during pleasant lunches with colleagues at a Manila university and while travelling in relative luxury across the English Channel. Nonetheless, since I joined the NUJ in 2012, whatever work-related psychic mess I've got myself into, invariably the union has come to the rescue.

In my 20s and early 30s, I relied solely on my freelance earnings. As I recount in my book *The Years of Travelling Anxiously*, this was an often jittery existence. I was as worried about not having enough money as I was about future opportunities.

I was spending too much time hunched over a screen and too little exercising in fresh air. Working for publications all over the world in different time zones, I had to pull all-nighters to meet deadlines. The anxiety would skyrocket when a

publication would be slow paying or not pay the agreed fee. This was where my NUJ membership came in very handy.

On one occasion, I noticed I'd been underpaid for two articles I had written by a publication that shall remain nameless.

I wrote to the editor and we argued by email for a while about the fee that had been agreed. The editor would not be persuaded even when I shared the relevant email about the fee.

I called the NUJ who told me that I was not the first member to complain about this publication. An hour after our call, I was copied into an email from the NUJ to the publication that, in no uncertain terms, requested I be remunerated what I was owed as soon as possible.

It was a clear and firm message, and it worked – the following day I was called by the owner of the publication from the plane he was travelling on. After making some dismal excuses – his accountant had just died, the publication was in debt and so forth – he said I'd be sent the outstanding amount later that day. And so it happened. "Hurrah for the NUJ!" I wrote in my thank-you email to the union.

In the unregulated – and barely unionised – digital media landscape, fees for assignments vary enormously.

Early on in my career, whenever an editor or a client of any kind asked me what I would charge for a job of journalistic work, I'd clam up. If I aimed too high, would I put them off and lose a



ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Sykes (above top) was threatened with legal action after interviewing an activist critical of Filipino president Duterte (above)

vital work opportunity? If I aimed too low, would I undersell myself and effectively connive in my own exploitation?

This is where the NUJ's recommended pay rates have come in extremely useful. I no longer fret

about receiving a fair wage for my labour.

At other times, my freelance's anxiety has been defused by calm and simple advice from the NUJ.

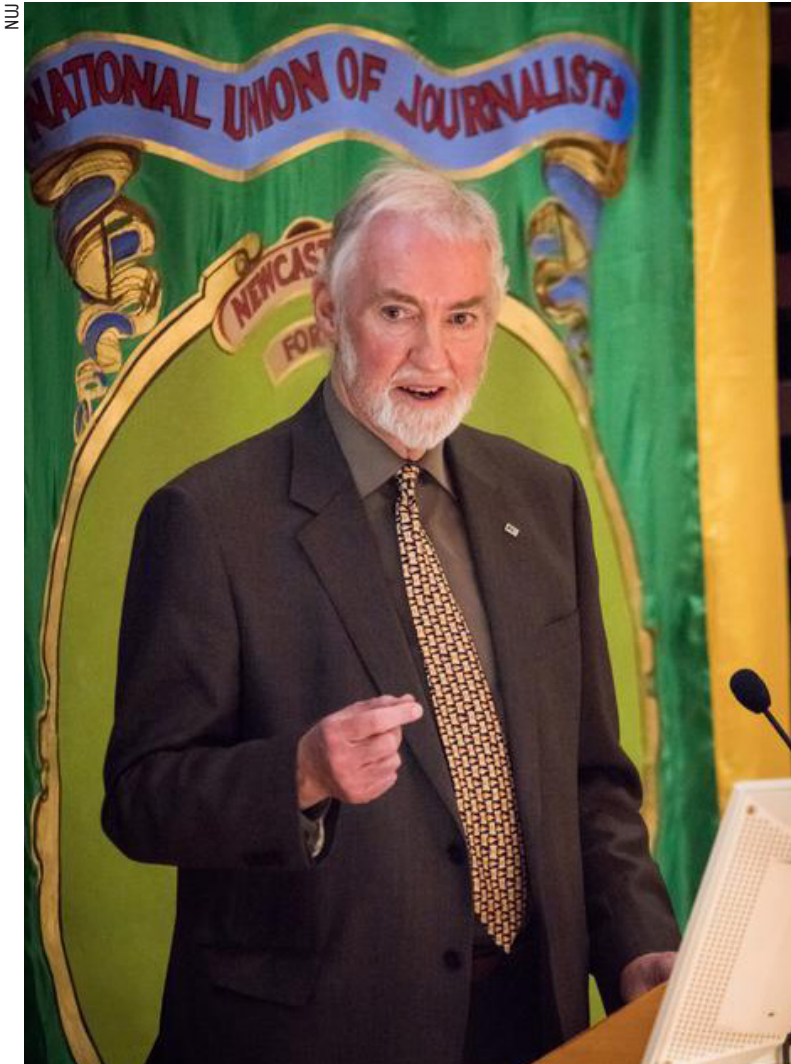
After I published an interview with a Filipino activist critical of the Duterte regime, a political opponent of this gentleman wrote to the editor of the publication the piece appeared in and threatened to sue it – and me.

I panicked. While I was pretty sure the article was not defamatory – it had been checked over by the publication's lawyer, after all – I went into a tailspin. Would I lose my house, career, reputation?

I contacted the NUJ and was advised to ignore this empty threat, which was clearly designed to intimidate journalists out of reporting on matters of public interest. And the NUJ was right – neither I nor the publication ever heard from the would-be litigant again.

In an era of AI, clickbait, failing funding models and all those other modern challenges to our profession, the beleaguered freelance can rely on the NUJ to help reduce the day-to-day anxieties of trying to earn a living and doing their work to the best of their ability.

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The anxiety would skyrocket when a publication would be slow paying or not pay the agreed fee



John Bailey

In the politically volatile NUJ of the 1970s and 1980s, John Bailey, who has died aged 86, was the glue that held the union together – the only person who commanded the trust, affection and admiration of all sides.

He was president and general treasurer during the 1978–79 provincial newspaper strike, the biggest and costliest dispute in the union's history. John, temperamentally a conciliator, played a decisive role in calling for the strike with a crucial intervention at the national executive council (NEC) meeting in 1978.

But he knew it could break the union financially. Leaving others to rally the troops and deliver the stirring speeches, he concentrated on protecting the union's funds and limiting the political damage of the post-strike blood-letting.

If the union came out of those turbulent decades financially and

politically intact, the credit belongs to Bailey more than to any other single person.

John Bailey was born in Southend, the only child of an army officer who was posted to Jamaica when John was eight. For the next eight years he was educated and taught his parents' Catholic faith by American Jesuits at Campion College in Kingston.

Catholicism stuck. He never missed Mass on Sunday. Before meals in the Bailey home, grace was said and, when he ate out, he said it quietly to himself. He was at heart a pre-Vatican II Catholic, instinctively uncomfortable with the 1960s modernisation of the faith. His Catholicism was understated but implacable.

Back in England aged 16, John went to St Chad's, a Catholic school in Wolverhampton, and the next year, while 'larking about' as he put

it on the top deck of the school-bound bus, he met Maureen Neenan, and they began the relationship that was to end only with her death in 2023.

He became a trainee reporter in Essex on the Grays and Thurrock Gazette; Maureen moved south too, to train as a teacher in Roehampton.

They married in 1963, and John took a job on the Hartlepool Mail. Tim, the first of their eight children, was born the next year.

He was to stay in that region for the rest of his life, with a move to the Sunderland Echo in 1974, where he became features editor. He never wanted to go to Fleet Street – he liked the rootedness of regional journalism – and he politely rebuffed those in the NUJ who encouraged him to stand for general secretary.

He helped set up the north east press awards and was one of the region's leading NUJ activists. Elected to the national executive, he became president in 1972 and chaired the Wexford Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) in 1973.

He was already a father of six (there were two more to come) and, in the ADM creche, they met the children of Journalist editor Ron Knowles. Going into the conference chamber, one of the Knowles children asked: "Which is your dad?" A Bailey offspring pointed to the stage and said: "He's the one on the altar."

Wexford was a hard ADM to chair. Irish businesses had decided to show the few hundred journalists in their midst some lavish Irish hospitality, so most of the delegates arrived at afternoon sessions late, and full both of political passion and alcoholic refreshment. It was a combustible mixture.

And there was a motion of no confidence in general secretary Ken Morgan, which stood a good chance of being passed.

John was passionately opposed – he admired Morgan and thought the motion unfair. He managed the remarkable trick of chairing the debate with impeccable impartiality while still making his feelings clear to delegates.

No one else could have got away with it, and John did not disguise his satisfaction when the motion was soundly defeated. It

was an extraordinary display of gravitas from a man who was still only 33.

That gravitas made him a supremely successful general treasurer for the rest of the decade and the first years of the next one.

He was always elaborately courteous but, when he rose, in a calm and measured way, to oppose suggestions for spending the union's precious financial or political capital, he generally got his way – his gravitas was not an act but who he was.

In the evening, over dinner with other NEC members, he was excellent company, laughing and joking, and no more sober than anyone else. He had charm as well as gravitas.

He resigned as general treasurer in 1982 but remained a key figure locally in Hartlepool and Sunderland.

His advice was still sought by successive general secretaries, in particular his old friend Harry Conroy (1985–90) and his new friend Michelle Stanistreet (2011–24). At Stanistreet's request, he returned to the national stage as a member of the standing orders committee.

Around the turn of the century, the Echo made him redundant, and he worked in the Sunderland City Council press office until retiring at 65.

Meanwhile, he found other outlets for his restless urge to improve the world.

He resurrected The Northern Cross, a Catholic newspaper in the north of England, edited it for more than 25 years, and was proud of keeping it as a printed paper. He was heavily involved with voluntary organisations, and two in particular – Street Angels and Churches Together.

Despite being diagnosed with heart failure, in early June he came to London for the launch of the late Lionel Morrison's autobiography, detailing Morrison's imprisonment in South Africa for fighting apartheid.

That Sunday morning, he was still staying with his daughter Dympna in Croydon when he died, suddenly, of heart failure. He already had his suit and tie on, ready to go to Mass.

Francis Beckett

NUJ



John Matthews

During his last illness, two of John Matthews's comrades from the NUJ's Glasgow branch asked if there was anything they could bring him at home. "No," he replied. Then: "Actually..." A long pause. "A cheesecake."

Such a hesitant and peculiar request was typical of John, who has died aged 70. He had a strong sense

of right and wrong, a determination to get his point across – yet a reluctance to announce any trouble. As a branch officer in Glasgow and a long-standing presence on the Scottish and national executive councils, his softly spoken interventions were timed for maximum impact. Disagreements, when they came, would never last longer than the last item of business.

John came later than most to the newspaper trade. Born in Port Glasgow on Scotland's West Coast, he was brought up in Kilmarnock, one of seven siblings. He moved to Edinburgh to study at the higher education college Moray House, and his first vocation was supporting Scotland's destitute. He worked at the People's Palace mission in Edinburgh, before qualifying as a social worker and being deployed to Wester Hailes, a large housing scheme on the capital's periphery.

Later, John travelled to Paris, where he studied clowning and melodrama under master clown Philippe Gaulier, known for his 'legendarily terrifying teaching style'.

It was not his first foray into the entertainment business – and it

certainly would not be his last. As children, John and his siblings had put on plays. "We got money from our parents for sweeties, charged them money to watch this appalling stuff and sold them the sweeties," John's brother Hugh recalls.

John made a proper career from performance, appearing in numerous theatrical productions, skits and revues. In union activities, he both championed the arts and brought a sense of theatricality to the duller of proceedings.

John was the first of his siblings to marry, and had two daughters, Helen and Hannah. In his 40s, he took on occasional Saturday night subbing shifts at the Sunday Post in Glasgow. It helped pay the bills – little did he know it would be the start of three decades in journalism and the NUJ.

He wrote for and edited weekly papers in Ayrshire, while throwing himself into union activity at every level. John was at the forefront of a 2010 campaign to stop the deportation of Cameroonian journalist Charles Atangana, who had fled his home country after being threatened because of his investigative work. John let Charles

move into his home and played a crucial role in raising funds for his case. The campaign was successful. Charles, still living in Glasgow, was a pallbearer and communion minister at John's funeral.

Along with his companion Natasha Gerson, an acclaimed actor and prominent Equity activist, John was famed for giving lively parties that were the envy of Scotland's trade union movement. Later years brought a number of health issues, but John faced them with determination, maintaining an active professional and social life. Natasha's death last year was a heavy blow for John, but he was determined to give her a proper, theatrical send-off, acting as master of ceremonies at her funeral.

John is survived by his siblings, daughters and four grandchildren. On being told that John had died, his grandson Nolan asked if it had happened at 10am – the correct time of death. He knew, he said, because at that time they had been making paper aeroplanes at school – and his was the only one that flew.

Conrad Landin

CLIVE COCKSEY



John Featherstone

John Featherstone, a retired staff photographer for the Manchester Evening News (MEN) died in late May. He was 93.

John joined the paper in 1958 aged 25. He had moved to Manchester from the Coventry Evening Telegraph and remained at the MEN for the next 38 years until

voluntary redundancy in 1996. He was an active member of the NUJ and northern rep for the Newspaper Press Fund.

John, along with reporter Ian McWilliam-Fowler, the then father of chapel, were founder members of the paper's journalists' chapel which began in 1977 with a 25p monthly levy that increased to £1 as a fighting fund. Its name was later changed to the less confrontational sounding Odd Job Society.

John helped Ian in a proposed house agreement the same year, which stated: "Between January 1975 and December 1976, inflation rose massively. We have had rises but they have failed totally to maintain our standard of living. To simply return us to the position we 'enjoyed' in July 1975 needs an immediate increase of 30.6 per cent. I propose a very reasonable claim of 35 per cent which, if achieved in full, would only put us level with inflation during the past two years of wage restraint."

Later, on a train to London on union business, John met by chance Professor Lord William (Bill)

Wedderburn, a leading figure in English labour law. This meeting and Wedderburn's later advice came at a critical time in 1980 when the entire MEN editorial chapel except executives had been sacked after working to contract. It had been described as 'almost bordering on anarchy' by management and in breach of contract.

The dispute dragged on, with the chapel banning overtime and requiring members to take time off owing. Agreement was finally reached with members reinstated and 'receiving considerable back pay for lost months paid just before Christmas.'

John was involved in negotiating a four-day week and sabbaticals of an extra month's holiday every four years as a form of 'refreshment to one's mind'. He introduced 'welly' money – extra money for weather-resistant clothing for photographers at soccer and rugby games.

In his early years at the MEN, John was sent to cover an early morning fire at a garage. The blaze was out when John arrived so,

after taking his first pictures, he asked if he could go inside to take a final picture.

He was told it was safe but wet underfoot. Wearing wellingtons and with plate camera and flashgun, he splashed his way into the blackened interior. He took a picture, treading from one duckboard to another, but the second duckboard was floating over an inspection pit.

John plunged up to his armpits in black, oily water. Reporter Bernard Pratt saw what happened and pulled a soaking John from the pit.

John lived nearby so, instead of returning to the office, he phoned to report the incident then drove home to change and shower. His camera, flashgun and pictures were ruined.

The result was a new Rolleiflex roll film camera and flashgun, but John commented that there must have been an easier way to negotiate new camera equipment.

John leaves wife Jean, daughter Carolyn, two sons and six grandchildren.

Bill Batchelor



David Hencke

When he was a young journalist, David Hencke, who has died from cancer aged 79, discovered something he loved doing and that he was very good at: finding things out that rich and powerful people would rather we didn't know and telling us. He spent the rest of his life doing it.

His first award, EMAP Reporter of the Year, came in 1971 for telling readers of the Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph about a secret plan for a ring road in Wellingborough.

Then, on the Times Higher Education Supplement, he started getting leaked reports on education and training. These followed him to the Guardian

in 1976, where he did his most sensational work.

In 1979 he exposed government plans to close 41 railway lines, and these proposals were quickly vetoed by transport secretary Norman Fowler. His 1983 investigation into Help the Aged changed the way the charity spent its money after it exposed waste and, that same year, he exposed neglect and squalor in mental hospitals.

There was much more. By 1986, he was established as a top investigative journalist, and The Guardian gave him the best vantage point he could hope for: it made him Westminster correspondent, part of the paper's lobby staff but not of it, with a roving brief to find stories no one else had.

It was an unusual brief. For the first six months or so, he felt the lobby resented him, free as he was from the routine tasks and getting his information from unconventional sources. But it worked.

A leak of plans for the Royal Opera House to become a kind of theme park came his way in 1989, and the plans were quickly dropped. The same year, he exposed plans for the government secretly to pay £38 million to British Aerospace to persuade them to buy the state-owned Rover Group.

In 1998, he broke the story of Peter Mandelson's home loan from Geoffrey Robinson, bringing about Mandelson's and Robinson's resignations.

Most famously, Hencke broke the cash for questions story in 1994, showing that some Conservative MPs were taking money to ask questions in parliament. Lobbyist Ian Greer and Ian Hamilton MP sued and lost, and Hencke won Journalist of the Year.

There was much, much more. After the turn of the century, David and I wrote three books: The Blairs and Their Court (2004), then Marching to the Fault Line (2009), the story of the 1984–85 miners' strike, and Blair Inc (2015), about Blair's lucrative post-premiership.

So I was privileged to watch the best investigative journalist of our generation at work.

He was blessed with a wonderfully retentive memory, and an appearance and a set of mannerisms that suggested he was harmless, naive and scatty – a wolf in sheep's clothing.

I remember the two of us at lunch with a senior politician who told us a wonderful story. David did not seem to take much notice. But, as soon as we were alone, David started swaying in his chair – always a sign that he was excited – while he repeated in fine detail what we had just heard.

He spent hours with dense, dusty documents, because there were often secrets buried deep inside them.

He looked for contacts who were on their way up or down. And, when he had something no one else knew, he was bursting to tell the world. Investigative journalism wasn't a trade – it was a mission.

So when he left The Guardian in 2009, he carried on doing it – for the Exaro website, for Tribune magazine, for Byline Times and also for his own blog.

In his last week, dreadfully ill though he was, he was still trying to finish a story.

David's beloved wife Margaret died in 2024. He is survived by his daughter Anne and five grandchildren.

Francis Beckett



Pete Snowdon

A newsman who inspired scores of trainee journalists at Darlington College during an international career has died.

Pete Snowdon was 78. Born in Lincolnshire and the middle of three children, he spent a year studying law before deciding to seek a career as a reporter. He joined a local newspaper as a junior in the early 1970s – a time when the industry was thriving and even a modest-circulation weekly could justify an editor, three reporters, a photographer and a receptionist.

Two other trainees from that time were ourselves – Nick Pigott and Geoff Meade – and we remained lifelong friends. The two of us went on to make our names in magazines and broadcasting, and were at Pete's funeral in Ruislip crematorium in west London.

"Those were golden days," recalled Geoff. "Pete was a brilliant journalist with a wicked sense of humour. We laughed so much, I wonder how we ever got a paper out."

Pete moved to the Lincolnshire Chronicle as a sub-editor but left in 1973 to spend six months backpacking across the US.

On his return, he landed a post with the BBC in London before being recruited by Canadian broadcaster CBS.

Having moved to Toronto, he met Gloria who was working as a political speechwriter. They married in Bromley, Kent, after moving back to Britain in 1979 and had two children, Maximilian and Montserrat.

For several years, the family shuttled across the Atlantic, repeatedly working and living alternatively in Canada and the UK.

They lived in Lancaster, Richmond and Darlington while Pete taught journalism students at Darlington College.

In 2009, the marriage broke down and, the following year Pete moved to live in Spain with his new wife Myriam. He settled happily near Almería and became a fluent Spanish speaker.

He enjoyed travelling widely and had an insatiable love of learning, teaching himself both Russian and Latin. He also enjoyed theatre and classical music, photography and playing acoustic guitar.

He was a great character who will be much missed by family, friends and former students who owe their careers to a teacher who instilled his own passion for journalism.

Nick Pigott and Geoff Meade



Why bother with being impartial?

Do people prefer news from biased papers and social media to reliable journalism? asks **Chris Proctor**

I'm greatly in favour of impartial journalism and think we should all strive to achieve it. The trouble is that no one seems to want it.

Why, for example, would you choose to buy the Telegraph or the Mirror? Is it to read objective, unbiased views of the world? I think not. You shell out because you think the views therein will match your own, thus avoiding indigestion over your breakfast boiled egg.

When the South London Press closed a year ago, it was mourned by the public in general and the Charlton Athletic Supporters' Trust in particular. The footy fans praised its coverage of football 'this side of the river' and insisted 'local, impartial journalism is crucial to supporters'. I didn't believe them. I don't think football fans want unbiased comments. Usually they want solace.

I learned this at an early age when I discovered a Liverpool Football Echo report on a match Everton had played at White Hart Lane. The sad news was that our local team had lost. Worse, we had lost by 10 goals to four.

No Everton football supporter wants to read an impartial view of such a calamity. It would say how inept we were or, worse, how good the other team were. No. What we needed was a rousing piece under the heading 'Everton hit four at Tottenham' with details of the subtle build-up play leading to our goals; a note in the final par could be forgiven for mentioning the minutes in which the other team scored.

This is the point of local papers. They are on our side. It's how a literate Reform supporter would feel with the

Telegraph – although they wouldn't like to discover it's owned by a German called Springer. They come over here stealing our spaniels' names

Ofcom reported that seven out of 10 users of TV, print and radio think they are accurate and trustworthy, while four in 10 trust social media. The same report said more than half of UK adults use social media to get their news. So they decide these platforms are not reliable, then choose to use them. So what's the point of being reliable?

Something equally bizarre happens when there is a major event, like the 2022 death of Queen Elizabeth. The day after the monarch's demise, newspaper sales skyrocketed. Sales of The Times increased by 113 per cent.

What's that about? Yes, some saw an investment opportunity – a newspaper to be sold on eBay for a fortune in time to pay for Christmas. Others wanted a copy for sentimental reasons, fetched it home, gave it a cursory glance and shoved it into the back of a drawer where it remains, yellowing and forgotten.

But others were tempted to the newsagent because of a communal belief: that the news is more true if it's in the paper. Official. It has the stamp of authority. We can be sure it happened.

But don't we want this for all our news? Apparently not.

That Ofcom finding that 51 per cent of UK adults get their news from social media haunts me. Last week this source assured me that Elvis remains hale and hearty and is now the oldest living inhabitant of Leiper's Fork, Tennessee, that HS2 is a bargain and that Trump deserves a Nobel peace prize. I'm not sure about the first one, but the others are palpably incorrect. Even more worrying: why did I read them?

It is because I couldn't avoid them. They appeared in front of my eyes,

unsought, like Proust's madeleine or a mobile home in the front garden. We don't choose our news outlets. They choose us.

We are putty in the hands of the algorithm. It points us where it likes. But it's not infallible. Since I foolishly placed my annual £3 bet on the Grand National online rather than walking to the bookies, the algorithm spies have determined I am a covert gambler; a maverick with high-roller aspirations. Accordingly, I am bombarded by messages, offers and invitations from Big Bass Bonanza, Magic Win and the unlikely-named Lucky Casino. This is especially irritating because I never win. I'm penalised for giving them three quid.

I also worry that the betting people will pass on my details to the news section, and I will be hounded by all the wrong outlets. They'll have me down as a red-faced, horsey punter, resplendent in tweed and pork-pie hat. I'd be put on the register of Mail readers.

I don't want to be on that list because I know DMG media is biased; it leans to the right at an angle of something like 89 degrees. This is a fact, not a criticism: it's what the Mail group offers and what its users choose. They want to be anti-EU, pro-Israel and popular with Tories. That's their job and their readers' choice.

But I don't want to be bothered by their editorial line when, for example, Labour have been thrashed in an election. It's bad enough losing without inviting people in to crow about it. Equally, I don't want to be foisted with a Guardian if I'm not worried about ID cards. And I don't want a copy of the Sun if I've been invited to tea at the vicar's.

We all like to cuddle up to our prejudices, and we know the media to choose to keep us cocooned. But if we know the outlets are all biased – what's the point of journalists being impartial?

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The news is more true if it's in the paper. Official. It has the stamp of authority. But don't we want this for all our news? Apparently not

REASONS TO JOIN



Ending the Gender Pay Gap

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



Be Part of a Collective Voice

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

Respect at Work

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



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