LESSONS LEARNED?
30 years since the miners’ strike
NUJ representatives are fresh back from the delegate conference, the major policy making event of the union. There is a lot of work to do from the conference as the union campaigns to try to stem the flow of closures, job cuts and ever increasing stress for journalists.

The media industry is facing unrelenting pressure and change and unfortunately this is forcing some people to leave journalism. Things won’t go back to the way they were before the internet revolutionised the way we make and receive news. But with strong campaigning we should be able to curb some of the excesses of news organisations as they desperately try to do much, much more with fewer and fewer staff.

But the good news is that the NUJ is in a stronger position to do this thanks to the success of our financial recovery plan. And in other good news the work and dedication given by Eddie Barrett (formerly acting editor of The Journalist) to the union was recognised when he was made a member of honour.

You can read the main stories from the conference on pages 6-8 and there is more coverage on the NUJ’s website. And if you want a different take on the proceedings, read Chris Proctor’s very amusing take on conference life in And Finally on page 26.

And lastly please do have your say on the magazine. We have expanded the letters pages to include tweets and welcome your feedback.

Look forward to hearing from you,

Christine Buckley
Editor
@mschrisbuckley
Newsquest production moves hits south-east

Newsquest plans to move the production and sub-editing of its Sussex local newspapers to Weymouth, where the Dorset Echo is based.

Eleven full-time subbing roles in Southampton and Brighton are at risk.

The regional group is also in the process of moving production of its newspapers in Yorkshire and the north-east to a subbing hub in Newport, Wales, 270 miles away. The NUJ staged one-day strikes in Bradford, York and Darlington earlier this year to protest about the move that threatens 25 jobs.

In a statement to staff in Southampton, Newsquest said: “In order to improve operational efficiency within the Newsquest Sussex business and to reduce costs, we are notifying you of Brightons’s (Newsquest Sussex Limited) proposal to transfer their sub editing production contract with Southampton to the Weymouth (Newsquest Media (Southern) Limited) sub editing unit in Dorset.

“As part of these proposed changes all sub-editing roles in the department at Southampton, with the exception of sports production, would move directly under the control of the regional chief sub editor, in a general subbing unit, working on any publication, therefore removing the distinction between news, features and supplements, and including the Hampshire Chronicle, Hampshire Society specialist sub editors.”

The union attacked the plan as “ill-thought out and not in the interests of local journalism”.

NUJ national organiser Laura Davison said: “These proposals are already discredited. We know from experience elsewhere that shifting subbing miles further away from the communities the papers serve doesn’t work.

“Readers deserve better than this relentless cost cutting by Newsquest. The staff affected cannot simply uproot their families and their lives. Newsquest is putting them in an impossible situation. And, to top it off, draconian pay freezes in five out of the last six years will also hit redundancy payments.”

Union wins at environmental health charity

After taking strike action twice over a one per cent pay rise, the NUJ at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, which is the professional voice for environmental health practitioners, has brokered a deal with the management.

The union had asked for an inflationary increase for staff at the charity, whose pay has fallen by 15 per cent in real terms since 2009. Now all staff will benefit from the deal negotiated by the union.

Tom Wall, NUJ Father of the Chapel at the charity, said: “We walked out twice because our pay had fallen so far behind the cost of living. Although we are a small group, we stood firm and negotiated a two-year pay deal, which will ensure all staff will benefit from inflation-matching pay rises until 2016.”

CALL FOR DIGITAL RECOGNITION

The union is urging the management of the Independent to recognise the union for journalists in its digital section.

It has so far refused to do so, saying there are no representation rights for the NUJ to be involved in discussions with staff in its digital team.

This is despite close working and integration between digital and print content.

Now the NUJ’s Independent chapel, which covers print and digital members, has put its weight behind the call for representation in the digital section and for the company to address serious issues facing people in the section. A meeting passed a resolution to this effect.

in brief...

GUARDIAN WINS PULITZER PRIZE

The Guardian and Washington Post have been named as the joint winners of the US Pulitzer Prize for public service journalism for their National Security Agency stories.

The Guardian US was praised for its “aggressive reporting to spark a debate about the relationship between the government and the public over issues of security and privacy”.

BRAND DONATES LIBLET WIN FROM SUN

Russell Brand has won libel damages from The Sun and pledged to donate them to the Hillsborough Justice Campaign. The comedian took legal action after the paper ran a story claiming he had cheated on his girlfriend Jemima Khan with a model. The Sun first said that it would defend the action but has settled with Brand out of court.

MAIL ONLINE PAYS WELLER DAMAGES

Mail Online has been ordered to pay damages of £10,000 for breach of privacy to the children of musician Paul Weller after publishing photos taken of them while on a family outing. The photographs were taken on in October 2012 by an unnamed photographer in Los Angeles.

HENRY URGES LAW FOR MORE DIVERSITY

Lenny Henry has called for new legislation to reverse the ‘appalling’ percentage of black and Asian people in the creative industries. He said the situation had deteriorated badly with the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic people working in UK television falling by 30.9 per cent between 2006 and 2012. They make up just 5.4 per cent of the broadcasting workforce.

METRO EDITOR GOES AFTER 15 YEARS

The editor of Metro, Kenny Campbell, has left after 15 years with the paper. He will be replaced by Ted Young, who is online editor of the New York Daily News. Young will return to Associated Newspapers after previously serving as editor of Mail Online.
TUC women back NUJ bullying campaign

Delegates at the TUC’s women’s conference unanimously supported an NUJ motion calling for a union-wide campaign to combat bullying and harassment.

Debbie Cavalildoro moved the motion and stressed the need for bullying to be specifically defined in legislation.

She spoke about the huge amount of bullying in the media and said the NUJ’s campaigning on this had been vindicated by inquiries such as Dinah Rose QC’s review, which found bullying and harassment endemic at the BBC.

A survey by the Federation of Entertainment Unions had shown that the media and entertainment industries were a hotpot for bullying, harassment and discrimination. The survey found that eight out of 10 women who reported bullying, harassment and discrimination said that their gender was a factor. The respondents reported incidents from lewd comments to sexual assault and commented on pressure from superiors to enter sexual relationships and unnecessary scripted nudity.

Women said they had to develop strategies to avoid sexual harassment as their career progressed, but then found they were discriminated against because of age and were viewed as beyond their shelf-life. One in ten respondents in theatre, television and film said they had witnessed sexually related harassment.

Debbie said that bullying destroyed careers and lives. The motion was seconded by the University of College Lecturers, whose delegate said that while researching the issue she had been shocked by the number of reports of suicides that had referred to bullying as a reason or one of the reasons for the person taking their own life.

Other unions, all of whom felt that bullying was a problem in their own areas, supported the motion. All of the delegates who spoke cited bullying based on gender, mainly male to female, as a problem in their areas.

Mark Lawson quits Front Row

Mark Lawson, presenter of BBC Radio 4’s Front Row, has left the arts programme after 16 years.

His departure follows allegations of bullying among several staff in the BBC Radio arts unit, which makes programmes including Front Row.

Mr Lawson is understood to have denied accusations of bullying, but acknowledges there were editorial arguments. He said he was taking a break from live radio journalism but hoped to return to Radio 4.

In a statement he said: “The BBC and I have agreed that I should step down as presenter of Front Row and for personal reasons I shall be taking a break from live daily radio journalism.

Mr Lawson, who writes for the Guardian, has now also joined the News Statesman as critic-at-large.
Job cuts loom in the Midlands and Scotland

Britain’s biggest regional daily is consulting on taking the title overnight as part of a restructuring that could see the loss of up to 76 jobs.

NUJ members are shocked at the announcement by Midland News Association, publisher of the Express and Star and Shropshire Star, that it plans to cut the jobs, which include 12 in editorial.

A letter from Phil Inman, chief executive of parent company the Claverley Group, said: “The Express & Star and Shropshire Newspapers have strong futures where they will remain the leading publishers in their markets but we must consider new ways of operating that better reflect the change in people’s lives.”

He said the plans to move to overnight publication would require changes to working hours and shift patterns for news editors, sub-editors, and potential moves to continental style shifts for print production staff.

Chris Morley, northern and Midlands organizer, said: “The two daily papers in Wolverhampton and Shropshire have been the lonely standard bearers for same-day regional newspaper news and sport and had been very successful in that over many years. But repeated deep cuts to editorial numbers have critically weakened what they have been able to offer readers by badly overstretched staff.

At the same time, Media Scotland, the Scottish division of Trinity Mirror, is seeking an undisclosed number of voluntary redundancies as it tries to ‘reposition’ the business.

The group says that it needs to restructure to take advantage of digital growth.

The NUJ has warned that journalists on Trinity Mirror’s Scottish titles that include Daily Record and Sunday Mail are already overstretched.

Media Scotland said: “While print circulations and advertising revenues are declining, we are seeing positive growth in digital. We need to restructure our business so

NUJ SEeks TALKS WITH IRISH TITLES OWNER

The union is seeking a meeting with Iconic Newspapers, the new owner of the 14 Irish titles that were owned by Johnston Press.

But Barry McCall, NUJ president, said the sale would be seen as a positive development and urged the new owners to build on the massive goodwill towards the newly acquired titles.

Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary, said: “These are established titles which have placed a pivotal role on the Irish media landscape. Communities across Ireland value their newspapers and it is to be hoped that the new owner will provide editorial investment and leadership at this critical time. The NUJ has been critical of the way in which Johnston Press has managed their titles, north and south, and we believe that with proper investment these newspapers can be

Chris goes the extra mile for our charity

Chirs Morley, the NUJ’s northern and Midlands organiser, is really going to get to know his patch, by walking the 270 miles of the Pennine Way.

Chris set off on May 4th from Edale in the Peak District, and hopes to stagger over the finish line three weeks later at Kirk Yetholm, just over the Northumberland border.

Chris is doing the walk to raise badly needed funds for the NUJ’s charity, NUJ Extra. NUJ Extra helps members who have fallen on hard times with a one-off grant.

The trek, along the UK’s oldest National Trail, follows the spine of England through the Peak District, Yorkshire Dales, along Hadrian’s Wall and into the Cheviots.

To support Chris and donate to NUJ Extra please go to http://portal.nuj.org.uk/portal/public/donate/donate.aspx

in brief...

BBC HEALTH AND EDUCATION ROLES

The BBC has appointed senior ITV journalist Penny Marshall to the new role of education editor. Hugh Pym, chief economics correspondent is also moving to the newly created role of health editor. Marshall has been with ITN since joining as a graduate trainee 29 years ago and has won Emmy, Bafta and RTS awards.

TUC ECONOMIST IS HIRED BY NEWSNIGHT

Duncan Weldon, currently senior economist at the TUC, is to be Newsnight’s new economics correspondent. He is one of several recent appointments by Newsnight editor Ian Katz since he moved to his role from the Guardian last year.

PRO-INDEPENDENCE SITE RAISES £100,000

A pro-independence Scottish political website raised more than £100,000 via crowdfunding. Wings Over Scotland was founded in 2011 by journalist Stuart Campbell and has raised more than £85,000 via the Indiegogo site and a further £19,000 in direct donations. This exceeds the £90,000 raised to launch computer magazine Linux Voice in December last year.

NO MORE NUTS AS IPC CLOSES LADS’ TITLE

IPC Media is to close its weekly lads’ magazine Nuts and its website. IPC Inspire managing director Paul Williams said: “After 10 years at the top of its market, we have taken the difficult decision to propose the closure of Nuts and exit the young men’s lifestyle sector. Nuts launched in 2004 aimed at men aged 16 to 30, particularly those who had lost interest in the tabloid press.

NEW MAGAZINE FOR AFFLUENT 50+ MEN

Hunt Media is to launch a lifestyle magazine aimed at “affluent, intelligent men over 50” who would be embarrassed to be seen reading other men’s titles. Calibre claims to be the first British magazine aimed exclusively at mature men. It is edited by former FT and IPC Media journalist Barnaby Dracup.
The NUJ’s delegate meeting debated many important issues. Journalism is beset by closures, job cuts, growing pressure at work, and the rise of work done for free. But there was also good news on the union’s financial health and its determination to survive as an independent organisation.

National campaign to tackle stress at work

Delegates at the NUJ conference in Eastbourne decided to hold a national meeting of chapel representatives to plan a campaign highlighting the dangers of excessive workloads and stress across the media industries.

Speakers told how long hours, continuous intensive working, excessive workloads and sky high stress levels have become endemic in the industry following years of intensive cost-cutting and job cuts.

The union’s national executive council was instructed to develop a campaign highlighting mental health issues at the workplace, and to prepare a ‘stress busting’ programme to be presented to employers as a matter of urgency.

Conference also backed a related motion about bullying in the media. General secretary Michelle Stanistreet recounted the accounts of bullying of NUJ members she encountered while investigating the issue.

“The stories shared with me were eye watering – literally. One call was from a woman too scared to give me even her first name, who sobbed as she told me that, apart from the counsellor she’d been referred to after sharing with her GP her suicidal feelings, she’d never spoken to a single person about how awful her life was being made at work. The sole breadwinner caring for her elderly parents, she felt the risk of losing her job was too great if she brought a complaint. I pleaded with her to let me help, she said the thought paralysed her with fear, she even apologised to me, as if she was weak, letting me down. I came off the call and cried, in disbelief and anger that someone could be made to feel so worthless in a workplace we all, as licence-fee payers, have a stake in.

“I took evidence of harassment from individuals bullied because of their age, their race, because they are disabled, because they are gay. Members shared experiences of shocking sexism, of sexual harassment. Many individuals had suffered ill health and relationship problems because of the bullying. Some told me that they had even considered killing themselves, just to make it all stop.”

A pair for the NUJ presidency

The new presidency of the NUJ will be undertaken by a job-share duo — Andy Smith (left) from the books sector and Adam Christie who freelances in Leeds and the north-east.

Andy was born and brought up in Bristol. He began his career in publishing at Taylor & Francis academic publishers, as a journals production editor, and has worked freelance and in-house, editing academic journals, principally covering physics and chemistry.

Adam represents Yorkshire, Humber & NE England on national executive and is on the freelance industrial council. He has produced the freelance market monitor for the council and updated the freelance fact pack. He has sub-edited on the Yorkshire Post, produces a magazine for the TUC’s unionlearn and works with several non-profit organisations.
Union finance recovery plan on track

The union’s recovery plan has yielded a surplus of more than £200,000 at the end of the first year, treasurer John Barsby told delegates. He said: “At our last DM, we took decisions to do our utmost to ensure the NUJ remains an independent trade union for journalists. There is no magic wand and we are in no way out of the woods, yet it gives me great pleasure to be able to say that the commitment we made to rebuilding our reserves – crucial if we are to survive and thrive – is making good. In the first financial year under the recovery plan we ended with a surplus of £218,000 and I can report that so far in the first few months of our present financial year, we have achieved a further surplus of £100,000.”

The recovery came from renting out office space at the London office, voluntary redundancies, a move to a defined contribution pension scheme and a new repayment plan on the pension deficit. But there is also bad news, he said. Job cuts, the squeeze on commissions and the increase in casualisation have affected incomes and many have left the industry. This means that the subs increase agreed at the last delegate meeting has been barely sufficient to keep pace with the loss of members.

Eddie, Mary and Mike honoured for service

Eddie Barrett, former acting editor of The Journalist, and a veteran news and trade union journalist, was one of three campaigners made members of honour by the union.

Eddie (pictured on the right) and Mary Maher, another long-time Irish activist in the NUJ, joined London freelance Mike Holderness in being honoured by the union.

Introducing Eddie, Barry McCall, NUJ president, said: “Doing justice to the span of Eddie Barrett’s many achievements during his career as a journalist and trade unionist inside five minutes is a near impossible task.”

Seamus Doole, NUJ Irish secretary, described Mary as the first woman of the NUJ in Ireland. Tim Dawson, incoming NUJ vice-president, said of Mike, who produces the freelance rate for the job guide: “We are here today to honour a true warrior. He may look like a mild-mannered, middle-aged anarchist – but he is in fact a warrior who indulges in hand-to-hand combat on behalf of members in ensuring they benefit from the fruits of their work.”

In the first few months of our present financial year, we have achieved a further surplus of £100,000

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO INCREASE

Subscriptions to the union are to increase over the next two years starting on July 1st.

The new subscription rates are:
Grade 1: £15 (£18) per month
Grade 2: £18 (£23) per month
Grade 3: £25 (£31) per month

Members seeking to pay reduced subscriptions on the basis of the ‘one per cent of income rule’ would normally pay £10 (£11.50) a month. A proposal from the NEC to introduce a new earnings-related subscriptions structure failed to secure a required two-thirds majority of votes.

The proposed new structure would have applied only to journalists joining the NUJ from next July. Some speakers against the NEC proposal said they accepted the principle of earnings-related subscriptions but were concerned that the proposal could create divisions in workplaces among members paying subscriptions under the existing structure and the earnings-related system.

MORE WOMEN FOR MEDIA AND UNION

More women experts, more women on NUJ structures and more women on the back pages were called for during the equality section of DM. Conference heard that the union enjoys a good reputation for its equality work in the UK and Ireland and, with its campaigning work with the International Federation of Journalists, across the globe.

SURVEILLANCE WATCHDOG BACKED

Conference backed a call for a commission to be set up to look at new legislation to protect individuals and organisations against unnecessary state surveillance. Speakers gave full backing to the Guardian for the publication of leaks from Edward Snowden, the whistleblower who revealed mass surveillance carried out by the US security service.

PRESS REGULATION BODY CONDEMned

Delegates condemned the newspaper publishers for setting up a regulation body which ignores many of the Leveson report recommendations, by refusing to let journalists on the code committee, taking only limited third-party complaints and by refusing to set up an arbitration panel offering cheap redress to the public.

ISRAELI BOYCOTT CALL REJECTED

Conference voted against a motion seeking to support a boycott of all Israeli goods and to support the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions movement against Israel.

FUNDRAISING URGED FOR SOUTH AFRICA

NUJ chapels and branches are being asked to organise fundraising activities such as sponsored walks and cake sales and to start collections to raise funds for the Media Workers of South Africa to carry on fighting at a time when journalists in South Africa need the support of their union more than ever. The NUJ has offered support to its South African sister union for more than 25 years.
More support for health campaign

The NUJ’s campaign for journalists and PRs working in health (see The Journalist, August 2013) is looking healthier, and could be the start of similar campaigns in other areas – thanks to a successful fringe meeting and motion of support.

At the fringe meeting John Lister, a veteran health campaigner, and Alan Taman, a former NHS PR, described why the campaign started, and how it must continue if the risks unique to health journalism are to be avoided.

Alan described how a survey of health journalists and PRs had vindicated the campaign, and John related this to extensive research across Europe that had raised the same concerns over an almost total lack of training.

The motion supporting the campaign instructed the union’s NEC to look at ways of resourcing the campaign for reporters and PRs working in health, and to see if this could be used for other specialist areas.

Alan told the fringe meeting how his concerns about health PR had made him launch the campaign: ‘NHS PRs want to be autonomous, professional people but the system simply does not support them’, he said, ‘At the moment their role is defined by how their chief exec sees it – and they’ve nothing to fall back on if they want to say no. That’s simply appalling.’

John emphasised that the point of the campaign was not to ‘reinvent the wheel’ in developing resources and training, but to point to the many excellent resources already in existence, but which busy journalists – especially non-specialists who have health ‘dumped’ on them – simply may not have time to find. And, crucially, to build networks of support.

John and Alan are organising an international conference on health journalism, 14-16 May, in Coventry. Details: www.europeanhealthjournalism.com; twitter: @healthjournos

UNPAID WORK IS CURSE OF FREELANCES

Unpaid work is the curse of the freelance classes, NUJ freelance organiser John Toner (pictured) told delegates as he attacked internships and the use of ‘free content’.

He said the need for a framework of freelance rights had never been greater, and in the coming year the NUJ should press the TUC to address this issue with greater urgency.

He said: ‘The rise of the internet and digital technology has made it possible for millions of people to write, take photographs and video, and upload them for public access. This is described as ‘content’ – because to describe it as work would be to accept that it has value.’

‘And so our planet is daily deafened by a billion virtual voices screaming their virtual opinions: a billion egos who believe their opinions are of interest to someone other than their cat.”

John said that his response to those publishers who asked why they should pay for content when they could get it for free was: why should I pay to download your content if you don’t think it’s worth paying for yourself?

Union strikes deal with PR group

The Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) and NUJ have reached a groundbreaking agreement to work together on a range of issues facing the public relations industry.

Key areas include lobbying regulation, ethical public relations and increasing diversity in the industry.

As part of the agreement, NUJ members will be offered a promotional rate for PRCA membership. Those who join the PRCA before the end of July will be able to get half price membership.

Phil Morcom, co-chair of the Public Relations Ex Communications industrial council (pictured) said: “With so many NUJ members moving from print and broadcast journalism into public relations and other communications, it is important to work with others in the industry to make our voice heard. We have to make sure that we build on the best traditions of ethical journalism to make sure that wherever our members work, they are seen to be acting with integrity. Our ethics code highlights those values, as does that of the PRCA.”

Conference voted to abolish the elected position of deputy general secretary. The move was recommended by the union’s finance committee following the sudden departure of the last deputy general secretary Barry Fitzpatrick.

Barry left two years into a five-year elected period last November. The finance committee then decided to review the role as part of an overall review of staffing. It was decided by delegates that the general secretary would, in consultation with the union’s chapel look at ways in which other officials could deputise when needed.

Deputy general secretary role is abolished
New challenges, new campaigns

Fresh from the NUJ’s policy making conference where lots of decisions were taken by delegates from branches throughout the union, I’ve got that ‘back to school’ feeling that a new term and new challenges ahead used to give me many moons ago.

A huge range of issues about the industry and the union were debated at the NUJ’s delegate meeting in Eastbourne last month, as you will have seen from The Journalist’s reports. They ranged from ensuring the union’s finances are secure and that an independent future stays on track to prioritising recruitment in the next two years, to the very future of journalism itself.

There’s a huge amount of work to do in the two-year period until the next delegate meeting reconvenes in Southport in 2016, and advancing those campaigns and acting on the decisions taken at conference will now form the framework for the work of the union’s ruling National Executive Council during that time.

Amidst all of the debates there were also opportunities for activists to recharge their batteries. A gig on the eve of conference by comedian and NUJ member Mark Thomas was a great way to kick off what was a busy weekend. It was also a brilliant way of showcasing the work that the NUJ is doing to tackle the police misuse of a database that is labelling journalists as domestic extremists, simply for doing their job. That campaign is continuing, and if you haven’t yet put in a subject access request, please do it now. The results we’ve had so far are proving very interesting indeed.

A fundraiser organised by Irish Secretary Seamus Dooley, remembering the achievements of NUJ members who had sadly died, including former presidents Rosaline Kelly, Kyran Connolly and Mark Turnbull as well as member of honour Tony Benn, raised over £1,250 for union charity NUJ Extra. It would be great if more branches and chapels could follow their example and organise their own fundraisers. Funds are needed to support both NUJ Extra, the union’s welfare charity, and also the George Viner Memorial Fund which gives bursaries to enable black and ethnic minority aspiring journalists to fund a journalism course. Both are brilliant NUJ initiatives in need of broader support across the union!

Another campaign, launched at the delegate meeting that we really need your help with is the European Initiative for Media Pluralism – a campaign to push for change on the unhealthy status quo of a mainstream media dominated by a tiny number of players, with all of the influence and power that has brought the individuals and corporations involved, not just here, but throughout Europe and globally.

The TUC is backing our campaign, alongside a range of other pressure groups, with the aim of securing enough signatures throughout Europe to trigger a debate in the European Parliament on tackling media ownership concentration. It’s also something we’re raising through the NUJ’s website, or go straight to www.mediainitiative.eu and add your name to the petition. And more importantly, do all you can to campaign in your own networks to get others to do the same.

For all the latest news from the NUJ go to www.nuj.org.uk
At one time, almost every national newspaper in Britain had a northern reporter and office in Leeds,” says Peter Lazenby, a former reporter at the Yorkshire Evening Post who worked in the city for more than four decades. “Some shared offices – the Daily Telegraph, Times and the Guardian among them. The journalists met in the same watering hole, the splendid Victoria and Commercial Hotel behind the city’s town hall. It is one of Leeds’ finest pubs, ornately restored to its 19th century splendour.

“That was 30 years ago and those days are long gone. The nationals are no longer represented in the city, though the Victoria thankfully continues to thrive…”

Despite such changes in the industry, Leeds continues to be an important media centre. The daily newspaper staples are the Yorkshire Post and Yorkshire Evening Post (YEP), both owned by Johnston Press. The Yorkshire Post is a broadsheet covering the whole of Yorkshire with a focus on international and national as well as local news. It’s also one of the oldest newspapers in the country. The YEP is more tabloid in style and covers Leeds and Wakefield.

Jonathan Brown has been a reporter at the YEP since joining as a trainee in 2011. He says: “I moved from Burnley and my first impression was that Leeds was a very exciting place to be. I feel hugely fortunate to have been able to start at the YEP, it’s a very newsworthy area and there’s a lot of variety in the job. I’m glad to be in an industry where every day is different.”

JP staff have seen major changes recently, including the company’s decision to quit the city’s iconic Yorkshire Post offices. The original landmark 1960s building was opened by Prince Charles in 1970 and at the time housed more than 1,300 employees. Today, staff are significantly fewer and are based nearby in modern offices while the old building faces demolition.

Peter, a life member of the NUJ and former Leeds branch chairman, adds that weekly freesheets in local towns have been shut down. However, the NUJ is still thriving in Leeds with nearly 450 members.

Aside from its long newspaper history, Leeds has several broadcasters. The BBC’s Yorkshire region is based in the city and serves North, West and South Yorkshire. As well as Leeds, the area includes Bradford, Sheffield, Harrogate, York and Huddersfield. Meanwhile, ITV has studios in Leeds and TV channel Made In Leeds is due to launch this year.

The BBC also produces Radio Leeds, which has been broadcasting since 1968, while commercial local radio is represented by Radio Aire and Real Radio.

Radio Leeds reporter Richard Edwards has worked in the city for nearly ten years. He says: “This is a city full of stories. It’s a cracking place to work as a journalist. I’m lucky – working for BBC Radio Leeds I have the whole of West Yorkshire as my patch but Leeds, as the biggest city in it, inevitably turns up lots of our news.

“It’s a place with a long and proud history, with a fierce, even tribal, sense of identity and it’s a city that is divided by its wealth like no other I know. There are pretty well off areas and desperately poor areas – you can move between the two

Linda Harrison looks at working life in Yorkshire’s biggest media centre
in a matter of minutes, and there aren’t that many places that fall between the two. The one thing that unites them all is that ferocious sense of identity. Yes they’re Yorkshire here, but they’re Leeds first and they’re proud of it. This is a big city – the true population will be well over 800,000 – and you’d be lucky to drive across it in an hour at busy times. One of its best points is the mix of backgrounds.

“They’re blunt to the point of rudeness and they tell it like it is. But if you’re straight with people, make sure your ego is in check and report the news as you’ve told them it’ll be reported, you’ll have contacts – and friends – for life.”

Web sites in the city include thebusinessdesk.com, an online business news service founded by David Parkin, former business editor of the Yorkshire Post. The company’s Yorkshire office is in Leeds with other offices covering the North West and West Midlands.

Magazines include glossy lifestyle publication North Leeds Life and community lifestyle title Covered Magazine.

According to John Baron, a freelance journalist and lecturer who’s lived in Leeds all his life, local blogs, websites and magazines have been starting up all over the city. John, a former reporter/blogger for the experimental Guardian Local Leeds site – a collaborative community journalism pilot project – writes about local issues for several outlets. One is the website and lifestyle paper The City Talking, which started life as a Facebook page for friends to talk about Leeds.

“Johnston Press closed the Pudsey Times and left a vacuum there – so a whole raft of hyper local websites have come and gone, with magazines springing up,” John explains. “As mainstream media withdraws, local stuff is starting where local residents feel there’s a gap in the market.”

This includes The Pudsey Squeaker, covering the city’s Pudsey area.

John adds that he wouldn’t consider living anywhere else, although the industry is changing. “If I want work I have to create work,” he explains. “Looking to the future, it’s almost being entrepreneurial. I’m looking to the independent sector, I’m not interested in going back to mainstream.”

Peter describes Leeds as a vibrant city that’s constantly modernising. It’s still seeing major development, including the new Trinity Leeds shopping mall and Leeds Arena in the centre. But while there’s loads going on socially, including bars, ‘proper’ pubs, a busy underground scene and sport, one of the things that seems to make Leeds stand out is its people.

“Leeds Kirkgate Market is huge and used to be a constant source of stories for me,” says Peter, who now lives in the Pennines and is northern reporter for the Morning Star.

“When the traders got to know me as a reporter, they’d be calling me to their stalls or shops to pass on information. It could take me an hour to buy a pound of sausages because I kept getting called over on the way in and out. “On Christmas Eve it was hard to stay sober because so many stallholders had a bottle of Scotch stashed away somewhere and would shout me over for a nip and a natter.”

Richard adds that the best thing about the city is its nature and character.

“It’s alive, unpredictable, won’t be told what to do and stubbornly refuses to follow anyone or anything,” he says. “This is a place that goes its own way, best illustrated by the 2011 riots. There was no copyscat stuff here in Leeds. Those characteristics mean this is a place where things happen, the sort of place a journalist should always want to be.”

### THE MAIN EMPLOYERS

**The BBC - about 138 full and part-time staff work out of BBC Leeds**

The city is the BBC’s main broadcast centre for the region, producing programmes like Look North (Yorkshire) – news, sport and weather with 11 bulletins every weekday and four at weekends. There’s also BBC One’s regional documentary series Inside Out Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, Late Kick Off, which focuses on Football League clubs in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, and Helicopter Heroes, plus BBC One’s Sunday Politics (Yorkshire and Lincolnshire). Meanwhile, Radio Leeds covers news and current affairs with weekly music shows on folk, brass and Northern Soul. Plus, there are three BBC Local websites providing news, sport, weather and travel information.

**Johnston Press – about 100 staff in the Leeds office**

The main titles are the Yorkshire Post and Yorkshire Evening Post. It also has a number of weekly newspapers, such as the Wharfedale Observer, Dewsbury Reporter and Morley Observer, free weekly the Wharfe Valley Times, and two websites.

**ITV**

There are approximately 30 journalists working in and around the Leeds newsroom, including head of news, production and on-screen journalists and presenters.

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**WORDS FROM THE STREETS**

- **Jonathan Brown, reporter at the Yorkshire Evening Post:**
  “There’s a strong sporting presence here, with football and rugby league – and people are passionate about it.”

- **Freelance journalist Peter Lazenby:**
  “Leeds has a rich ethnic and cultural mix, something I always appreciated. It has a busy nightlife... and it has some brilliant pubs.”

- **Richard Edwards, reporter at BBC Radio Leeds:**
  “Leeds’ parks are brilliant – Roundhay and Temple Newsam are days out in their own right.”

- **John Baron, freelance journalist and lecturer:**
  “What I love about Leeds is that it’s a big city but not massive – the city centre is walkable and you can bump into three or four people you know. It’s small enough to be a community in itself.”
Digital storytelling is fast becoming a vital partner to print, says Tim Dawson

A picture is worth a thousand words

Last summer, the Guardian’s science correspondent Alok Jha got wind of plans to unveil the world’s first synthetic beef burger. With $250,000 grand funding from one of Google’s founders, Dr Mark Post of Maastricht University, had grown fibers in a lab that he was now offering to serve to the world in a bread bun.

“I knew that there was going to be a big launch, which in the normal run of things, I would have attended and written a slightly piss-takey colour piece”, Jha remembers. “But I thought that there was a potentially far more interesting story if I could get into his lab.” After negotiations with PRs, Jha and a video producer were invited into the labs where the ‘frankenburger’ had been created. To those pictures they added reactions from food writers and a farmer. “The package that we made was only six minutes long, but took the story to a whole new audience – some of whom might have also read the 2,000 word analysis piece that I also wrote”.

The Guardian is, of course, just one of many papers that are increasingly asking reporters to contribute video, as well as text. This marks a profound change that is underway in the media, according to Pat Younge – until a few months ago the BBC’s chief creative officer, and before that President of Travel Channel Media in the USA. “All the emerging money is around web video; which is what all of the papers want now – so if you are going to cover a story, why wouldn’t you film it as well? And with an interview, the very least you can do is audio record it and make that available – audio is underused”.

Younge’s proudest boast, as a digital storytelling pioneer, comes not from the BBC, where he was in charge of 3,000 program makers, but in his previous role. “We needed video content for the Travel Channel website, but could not afford the kind of budgets that we had for network programs.” His solution was to set up the Travel Channel Academy – a video production ‘boot camp’ on which participants paid $3,000 for a four-day course. “We taught the basics of storytelling and clearances and at the end of the course, we would offer the best students paid commissions. Those who did not make the grade, we gave exercises to do at home to get their work up to our standard.”

Over a couple of years, the academy built up a small army of videographers – many of whom went on to significant industry jobs, others remained on the fringes of the Travel Channel, picking up freelance work.

The Travel Channel approach has been replicated all over the world – with much of the teaching provided by Michael Rosenblum, the author of iPhone Millionaire (a guide to low-tech video production that is far better that its get-rich-quick title suggests). Rosenblum’s message is that anyone with a smart phone, editing software and a little imagination can make the kind of short packages that Jha and Younge are enthusing about. It is a move that has seen many media outlets using video in place of still photography.

At New Jersey’s Star-Ledger (nj.com), whose journalists were nominated for a clutch of Emmys for their video content, recently, for example, much of their coverage of college sporting contests is now presented in short clips. Shot with a single camera – it works better with basketball that outdoor sports – and then edited to the most dramatic two minutes of play – they provide a respectable overview of matches that could only otherwise be seen live.
Traditional broadcasters have also got in on this low-tech approach. RTE News has recently used packages in its news programs shot entirely on smart phones.

The Wall Street Journal has applied a similar model to its international correspondents. Two years ago, the paper trained more than 400 reporters to create short clips entirely on their iPhones. “Our video viewership has more than doubled in the past six months to over 20 million streams, and the creation of this video blog is a milestone in the expansion of video at the Journal,” said Alan Murray, deputy managing editor of The Wall Street Journal. “Our reporters are demonstrating the opportunity that technology has given them to capture powerful images that enhance their great journalism. We now have the opportunity to deliver that video more quickly and efficiently for use in our rapidly growing video operation.”

The result is not in itself a lush, multi-textural approach to storytelling, but a huge collection of short bursts of footage – a little like Twitter, but comprising only video news footage. Since its launch, the WSJ has boasted that it is now attracting ‘premium’ advertising rates around its video footage, and the technology that underlies the WSJ’s initiative – tout.com – has been taken up by CBS, Fox, NBC Universal, WWE, New Corp and Conde Nast among others.

The prospect that this kind of material will become the main fibre of the web, rather than text-based ‘pages’ is one that is now common currency – at least among crystal-ball gazers.

Yale University computer scientist David Gelernter’s essay “The End of the Web, Search, and Computer as We Know It” – argues that the web’s old metaphors ‘pages’, ‘desktops’, and ‘bookmarks’ are all destined for history’s ‘recycle bin’ or ‘trash’ “The space-based web we currently have will gradually be replaced by a time-based worldstream,” he writes. “This lifestream – a heterogeneous, content-searchable, real-time messaging stream – arrived in the form of blog posts and RSS feeds, Twitter and other chatstreams and Facebook walls and timelines. Its structure represented a shift beyond the ‘flatland known as the desktop’ (where our interfaces ignored the temporal dimension) towards streams, which flow and can therefore serve as a representation of time”.

Gelernter envisages a seamless web of information and images that flow before us until we actively request that they stop. The contribution of journalism to this seems likely, at least in its front-page form, to be in short videos.

Jha for one, is optimistic about the way in which these forces will shape journalism in the years to come. He sees boundaries between different types of media and the outlets though which they are consumed blurring. “Ten years ago, when I was getting started, all I thought that I would do was write, today, if you try to tell stories without video and graphics, it would be like doing it with one hand tied behind your back”. He also notes that the young journalists alongside whom he is now working are enthusiasts for technologies that are every bit as alien to him, as the web was to his editors when he first joined the newsroom.

Jha anticipates that boundaries between print, television and the internet will continue blur until it is no longer clear to the consumer which channels started out on which legacy platform. It will never deflect him from the medium that he calls his first love, though: “Funnily enough, the challenges of working in video have made me a much better writer”, he says. “I now think much more visually, and particularly in longer pieces, think of how one scene leads to another. Writing will always be what I enjoy doing most.”
The miners and the media

Barrie Clement, former Times Labour Reporter, recalls reporting on the biggest industrial dispute since the general strike

They looked like a ragged mediaeval army. Hundreds of them, stumbling across the fields from Yorkshire into Nottinghamshire. They were coalminers. They were waving banners and flags and making their way across land to picket collieries in Nottinghamshire where their colleagues were defying the great pit strike. The police had set up roadblocks. Miners were forbidden to drive over the county boundary, so they took to the fields.

It is an abiding memory of my time as Labour Reporter on The Times. And it is a reminder of the degree to which parts of the United Kingdom, that bastion of fair-minded civilisation, had become like a police state in the 1984-85 dispute.

What amounted to martial law had been extended far from the coalfields of northern England. At the Dartford Bridge miners from Kent – there were three pits in the county at that time – were routinely prevented from travelling north.

The police had become the coal board’s private army. There was no question of even-handedness; no possibility that the human rights of pickets would be respected to the same degree as those of miners defying the strike. This was a war and the police were on Thatcher’s side.

On one occasion I was in a car with two Yorkshire pitmen who were driving towards Nottinghamshire to prove to me that the freedom of movement had been withdrawn.

Sure enough the police stopped us and told us we’d be arrested unless we drove back to Yorkshire. Alas, a large primitive tape recorder with which I’d been equipped, failed to work, possibly through electrical failure, more likely through my own ineptitude. But I heard what was said – and so did Patrick Wintour, then my opposite number on the Guardian, who was also in the car. The story duly appeared on the front page of the Guardian and of The Times. In those days The Times was an old school Conservative newspaper, but one with a sense of fairness.

Inevitably the security services were hard at work. Indeed I have a strong suspicion that my home phone was tapped. This is not just the fevered imaginings of an aging socialist. My wife Susan, a far more level-headed person, corroborates my claim.

The evidence for such an assertion was the phone’s intermittent failure to work and the strange clicks and whirs on the line. Sue and I also heard other people’s conversations when we picked up the phone. In a subsequent national dispute, a person at the other end of the line announced himself as ‘DC Prople’ – although I wasn’t ringing the police.

From the point of view of the Special Branch and the security services, it would have been remiss of them not to take an interest in industrial reporters.

Tim Jones, a member of the Times labour staff in the late 70s with limited sympathy for trade unionism, told colleagues on the paper that he had been approached by MI5 over lunch. Addressing Tim as a ‘patriot’, the man informed him that the authorities were worried about Communist infiltration of the industrial correspondents’ group.

In the 80s a self-confessed Special Branch officer often joined industrial reporters for a pint in the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street.

During the miners’ strike I used to amuse myself by occasionally picking up the phone – and deploying industrial language to those who I assumed were listening in. There was little point in complaining. Who would I complain to? How could I prove it? And yet I’m convinced I was targeted. I spent a great deal of time where much of the ‘action’ took place. I was the ‘legman’ in Nottinghamshire for the Times Labour Editor Paul Routledge.

Unlike today, there was no pressure to stay in the office recycling agency copy. Quite the reverse. Routledge insisted that fellow correspondent David Felton and I kept ‘spare knickers’ at work so we could leave at a moment’s notice.

It might have been thought by those listening in to my

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MAIN EVENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1984</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 5:</strong> The Thatcher Government announces plans to close Cortonwood pit, near Barnsley. Miners throughout Yorkshire walk out, sparking one of the biggest industrial disputes in Britain’s history.</td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 6:</strong> Coal board chairman Ian MacGregor says 20 pits are earmarked for closure with the loss of 20,000 jobs. NUM president Arthur Scargill says the real target is 70 pits and 70,000 jobs. Scargill was far nearer the truth. MacGregor was lying, Cabinet papers reveal.</td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 12:</strong> Scottish and Welsh miners walk out. An estimated 93,000 miners are now on strike. The working miners make repeated calls for a national ballot, but the NUM points out that the strike had been backed by pithead votes.</td>
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<td><strong>JUNE 18:</strong> Some 5,000 miners and thousands of riot police clash at the Orgreave coking plant in South Yorkshire. Mounted police wielding batons charge to break up the crowds.</td>
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<td><strong>SEPTEMBER:</strong> Miners and police clash throughout the coalfield. Pitmen had been on strike for six months. The NUM leadership refuses to accept proposals to end the dispute.</td>
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| **NOVEMBER:** A growing number of strikers return to work. Fighting on the picket lines becomes widespread. A South Wales taxi driver is killed when a concrete block was dropped onto his car as he carried a working miner to the pit. |

| **1985** |
| **JANUARY:** After Christmas, the trickle of men heading back to work becomes a flood. Striking miners were in desperate straits. |
| **MARCH 3:** Amid emotional scenes a specially convened NUM delegate conference votes by 98 to 91 to call off the strike. |
conversations that I was in regular contact with officials of the National Union of Mineworkers who would reveal their tactics to me. Unfortunately, that was rarely the case. Routledge was the man with the contacts. He was also a man with convictions. He combined objective coverage with a weekly donation of a day’s wages to the strikers at Frickley Colliery, South Elmsall, Yorkshire.

These days electronic surveillance is infinitely more sophisticated and, one assumes, there is no way of telling whether your phone is tapped.

If we had had mobiles, I’m sure they would have been bugged too. The lack of portable telephones – or indeed pagers – presented practical problems. When you were ‘in the field’ you were on your own. You had no idea what the agencies were filing – unless you rang the news desk and asked for wire copy to be read out, which felt like an admission of failure. Freelances were all over the story, day-in day-out.

There was rarely an edition of a heavy paper during the year-long strike when it was off the front page. You had to rely on colleagues to keep you in the loop. The estimable and hyper-active Nicholas Jones, then BBC industrial correspondent, was particularly informative.

Having covered the 6am shift, industrial reporters would meet at about 10am and divi up the pits for the afternoon and night shifts. It was the only practical way of working.

Clearly there was one advantage of being incommunicado: you could choose when you spoke to the news desk, which might burden you with a pet project combining fevered enthusiasm with bottomless ignorance.

It has to be admitted that members of the now defunct Labour and Industrial Correspondents’ Group would often ‘go AWOL’ on licensed premises. This was ill-advised since many of us were driving round Nottinghamshire.

One useful man to have around was Charlie Rae, the Sun’s industrial reporter. Despite his rugged, lived-in visage, he was teetotal and would occasionally act as chauffeur.

Charlie had a rough time of it. Sometimes his copy was hijacked by Sun editor Kelvin Mackenzie who would put his own spin on it. On one occasion Mackenzie wrote a headline on the Sun splash calling the striking miners ‘scum’.

The next day Charlie drove me to a pit in south Nottinghamshire where we approached a group of unusually
large miners on picket duty. They asked me where I was from and I told them. The pickets were unimpressed. “And which paper are you from?” they asked my chauffeur. Pointing to me, Charlie said: “I’m with him.” It was a sensible and quick-witted piece of self-preservation.

It was the heyday of industrial and labour correspondents. The Times, Telegraph and the Guardian had three each, while the Financial Times had five. Even the tabloids had a minimum of two.

In order to secure exclusive stories, you really had to identify yourself with one side or the other. That is a crude generalisation, but in practical terms that’s how it was – even with newspapers that aimed to do an honest job.

The Financial Times had the best contacts on the Right of the labour movement through its labour editor John Lloyd; The Times on the Left, courtesy of Routledge.

In the end the opponents of the strike were calling the shots. Under enormous family and financial pressures, striking miners drifted back to work. They were at the mercy of an all-powerful, ruthless government and a National Coal Board chairman Ian MacGregor prepared to do its bidding.

The claim by NUM president Arthur Scargill that Thatcher and MacGregor.

Thatcher and MacGregor. 

had a secret plan to close more than 70 pits with 20,000 jobs lost.

In his contribution to a new book on the dispute “Settling Scores – The Media, the police and the Miners’ Strike” published by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, Nicholas Jones exposes the denials as lies.

Cabinet papers for 1984 released by the National Archives in January reveal that Macgregor had advised ministers of his plans to close 75 pits with the loss of 64,000 jobs.

In a letter to all miners, Macgregor ‘categorically and solemnly’ insisted that Scargill’s claims were ‘absolutely untrue’. Throughout the strike the NCB insisted that it wanted to close only 20 pits with 20,000 jobs lost.

One of the inevitable paradoxes of covering such a serious and damaging conflict was that it was meat and drink for journalists. To be honest, most of us were enjoying it.

For the striking miners, their families and their communities it was horrific. The deep personal and social scars still remain. It was anything but ‘enjoyable’ for them.

Barrie Clement donated his fee for this article to the Dove Workshop, a charity set up by women from the Miners’ Support Group in the Dulais Valley, South Wales. www.doveworkshop.org.uk

Arts with Attitude, Pages 18-19
Is it time for cabinet ministers to actually know something about what’s in the red box they suddenly pick up? This is of course a revolutionary idea that will take some getting used to. The fiction has long been that with the continuity of the civil service behind you and a mind quick enough to master your brief, all will be well. Perhaps the world has become so complex that it is time to question the good old British tradition of the ‘amateur’ secretary of state.

The new secretary of state for culture, media and sport Sajid Javid has obviousy the merits of being clever, numerate, making millions in banking before the crash and doing well as a junior treasury minister. He also has the great advantages, in the context of the current Conservative party, of having a Pakistani father who once worked as a bus driver and went to a state school and a university that was not Oxbridge.

But he has no known knowledge or interest in the arts, media or sport.

The only relevant experience that can be discerned is a taste for appearing on Question Time and an appreciation that he now has to mug up quickly on some football facts to avoid being caught out on live radio by impertinent journalist johnnies.

The issue was eloquently raised by children’s author and poet Michael Rosen who wondered whether he knew how people manage on a shoestring in the arts, the poor wages, terrible conditions backstage, the crisis in libraries. “If you do, you’ll know it’s a very, very different world from the outrageous, lavish, crazy world you lived in while you were at Chase and Deutsche Bank,” Rosen said in an open letter.

There have now been 12 culture secretaries since John Major created the department in 1992. So we can begin to take a view on whether a lack of knowledge is a dangerous thing. Maria Miller had worked in advertising but apart from her weakness in filling in expenses her only contribution of note to the media was getting herself entangled – though it wasn’t her idea – in the ill-fated attempt to impose a Royal Charter on the press.

The other was Chris Smith who has a genuine love of the arts and culture and a hinterland that include a doctorate on Wordsworth.

Their knowledge and tastes helped them do their political jobs jobs well, and if they ever had greater ambitions and were looking over their shoulder for the next big post it never showed.

Sajid Javid will soon start making the right noises from his brief whether he really knows what he is talking about or not. The hope is he will not do too great a damage by deploying a banking/Treasury sensibility before moving on up the slippery pole.

The BBC in particular has much to fear. Javid’s old boss George Osborne wants a much smaller corporation.

Maybe his Question Time appearances will help to soften the culture secretary’s hard Treasury heart.
Billy Bragg, anarchic comics, politicians at Hay, new books by journalists, and theatre spanning unions, rebellions and consumerism.

Music
Billy Bragg: The Tooth & Nail Tour
Hammersmith Apollo
1 May
The English songwriter and activist who famously fronted Red Wedge, the group of musicians who aimed to engage young people in politics is on an international tour. London’s Eventim Apollo will be the first UK date but if you don’t catch that, look out for summer festival appearances. www.billybragg.co.uk

Festivals
Hay Festival
Hay-on-Wye
22 May – 1 June
Once dubbed the ‘The Woodstock of the mind’, the Welsh market town’s annual festival is back for 2014. The event – one of 15 festivals produced by the team each year across Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East – attracts writers, politicians, poets, scientists, musicians and comedians to celebrate great writing, music and comedy. Politicians and journalists lined up include Alan Johnson (who will discuss his memoir This Boy), Chris Bryant, David Aaronovitch and Jeremy Paxman. www.hayfestival.org

Exhibitions
Comics Unmasked – Art and Anarchy in the UK
British Library, PACCAR Gallery
From 2 May
Featuring some of the biggest names in comics, including Alan Moore (V for Vendetta), Neil Gaiman (Sandman), Mark Millar (Kick-Ass) and Grant Morrison (Batman: Arkham Asylum), the British comics tradition stretches back to the Victorian era and beyond. The show will demystify the process of creating comics while presenting work that challenges the status quo. Its materials unflinchingly examine issues around gender, violence, sexuality, drug-taking and politics. www.bl.uk

Just two years into his comedy career, comedian Omar Hamdi is still new to the circuit but is quickly establishing himself as a talented comic commentator on topical events.

Hamdi grew up in a traditionally Jewish part of Cardiff with Egyptian Muslim parents and admits that, on reflection; ‘I’d be lying if I said that didn’t make me a bit funnier!’ Hamdi believes that one of the few things that all comedians have in common is the outsider perspective. ‘Being a bit of an outsider in Wales, and a bit of an outsider in Egypt, but also feeling strangely at home in both those places, has given me a slightly different view of the world,’ he reflects.

Still, comedy wasn’t the obvious path. As a child he thought he would take the expected route of training as a doctor, before quickly realizing: ‘I knew that I had to do something to do with issues, to do with having an opinion, and communicating it. If I wasn’t a comedian I’d be a journalist or a lobbyist.

Although Hamdi is interested in and responds to politics and news events, he insists he has no agenda, nor does he wish to convert his audience to any particular view – even on subjects on which he is passionate. His style is more observational. ‘I’m just saying: “Look at this, isn’t this world a bit mad? Aren’t we all a bit mad?”’

Lately, Hamdi is particularly excited by The Kaneing – a topical comedy podcast hosted by Russell Kane (whom Hamdi is currently supporting on tour) where a panel of guest editors pitch their stories of the day to a fictional magazine. ‘We threw together the first episode in an hour or so and it went to the top 10 in the overall iTunes chart overnight,’ he recalls. For great political comedy he also looks to satirical mockumentary The Thick Of It and Charlie Brooker’s programmes providing tongue-in-cheek news commentary.

Hamdi is looking forward to his upcoming work-in-progress gigs at the Brighton Fringe in May, which he will use to develop his debut show for this year’s Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The working title, ‘Mummy Issues’, has multiple meanings. One area that interests him is the irony that in matriarchal cultures such as Egypt, where women have fewer rights, mothers are also held sacred. He describes the show as being about his life so far, his relationship with his mum (who raised him as a single parent) and his view of the world. It will certainly be one to look out for at both arts festivals this year.

www.brightonfringe.org
www.edfringe.com

Amy Powell-Yeates
**Theatre**

**Playful Acts of Rebellion**
The Bike Shed Theatre, Exeter  
29 April – 3 May 2014

Inspired by courageous protesters who risk everything for what they believe in, three women resolve to stop their ineffectual moaning and find ways to create change. Charting the performers’ attempts to stand up for what they believe in, this new show from Gramophones Theatre uses visual storytelling to tell uplifting tales about what makes us act.

[www.bikeshedtheatre.co.uk](http://www.bikeshedtheatre.co.uk)

**All Roads Lead to Rome**  
UK tour  
From April

Chris Dobrowolski has lovingly repaired his family Triumph Herald so he can drive it from his childhood home in Braintree to Rome via Turin where this quintessentially English car was designed. Part investigation into his father’s time as a Polish soldier in World War Two’s Italian Campaign and part muse on consumerism, the one-man show brings together car mechanics, a road trip, dictators and the fetishisation of possessions in a solo performance using old photos, new film and mechanical objects. Tour locations include Oxford, Brighton and Norwich.

[www.artsadmin.co.uk](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk)

**The Pajama Game**  
Shaftesbury Theatre, London  
From 2 May

In 1950s America, romance is blossoming at the Sleep-Tite Pajama Factory as handsome superintendent Sid Sorokin falls for feisty union rep, Babe Williams. But when the employees are refused a 7½ cents an hour raise, the pair find themselves at odds in this musical comedy based on the novel ‘7½ Cents’ by Richard Bissell. Directed by Richard Eyre, it transfers the novel 7½ Cents by Richard Bissell. Directed by Richard Eyre, it transfers

The Pajama Game, [www.artsadmin.co.uk](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk)

**Books**

**Images of the Past: The Miners’ Strike**
Mark Metcalf, Martin Jenkinson, Mark Harvey  
Pen and Sword, £14.99

Marking the 30th anniversary of the Miners’ Strike, this book brings to life the momentous strike and the tough struggle of the mining communities with many evocative photographs taken by the late photographer and NUJ member Martin Jenkinson. It shows the miners and their families in the thick of the disputes and as they tried to enjoy family life as best they could without their household income. Words are by Mark Metcalf and additional photography is by Mark Harvey, both NUJ members.

[www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk)

**Settling Scores: The Media, the Police and the Miners’ Strike**
Granville Williams (Ed)  
Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, £6.99

This new book documents the work of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign and the Justice for the Coalfields campaign, and explores both the bias of the media during the strike and how they have been the stimulus for new initiatives to obtain truth and justice.

It includes chapters by various journalists and academics including Nick Jones (former BBC industrial correspondent), as well as a personal testament about Orgreave by former miner Ray Riley.

[www.cpbf.org.uk](http://www.cpbf.org.uk)

**Preview**

**Jan Fairley Memorial Award**

Applications are now open for the Jan Fairley Memorial Award – a new prize aimed at emerging Edinburgh-based journalists writing arts journalism with an international outlook.

The award has been created by the NUJ’s Edinburgh Freelance branch, in memory of their colleague and friend Jan Fairley (1949-2012). The music journalist was a committed NUJ member, campaigner for human rights and lifelong promoter of world music with strong connections to Latin America.

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Entrants should submit up to three pieces of between 500 and 1,500 words that have already been published in an edited publication, online or in print. The pieces should demonstrate arts writing in a way that sets it in a wider social or international context. There is no age restriction but candidates should not have been employed as professional journalists for more than five years.

The prize will be a certificate, £300 and publication of a selection from the winning entry in The Scotsman newspaper. The closing date for applications is 30 October 2014 so applicants have plenty of time to put together their submissions, many no doubt taking inspiration from this August’s Edinburgh International Festival.

[www.janfairleyaward.net](http://www.janfairleyaward.net)
William Palmer, a respectable Staffordshire doctor, probably never knew what was going to hit him from the press when he was arrested for poisoning one of his horse racing friends in December 1855. As in so many things his timing was poor – stamp duty on newspapers had just been lifted and not only were cover prices plummeting and circulations rising but the daily press was desperate for sensational stories. Within weeks Palmer’s name was in every paper in the country – even Queen Victoria was reading about him as her journals show – and within months papers in the US and Australia were reporting on the case: the New York Times called him “the Borgia of the Betting Ring.”

More prosaically, British newspapers such as The Times and the Manchester Guardian started describing him as The Prince of Poisoners as each suspicious death of relatives and acquaintances emerged: how many had he killed around Rugeley where he lived? Was it a dozen, or even more? Even Charles Dickens covered his trial, denouncing Palmer as “the greatest villain who ever stood in the Old Bailey dock.”

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His trial was held at the Old Bailey because of the likelihood of prejudice in the Midlands (an act of Parliament was passed especially to enable it to be moved to London) and the Lord Chief Justice called on the press to exercise pre-trial restraint. Two days before The Illustrated Times published a 40,000 word supplement on the case which did its best to convict Palmer before he ever stood in the dock. When the paper’s editor Henry Vizetelly came to write his memoirs 40 years later he admitted candidly: “(We) came out...filled with portraits and views and a narrative of this and other crimes of which Palmer was supposed to be guilty, together with the family history and all the incriminating gossip that could be picked up. Today one cannot but express one’s amazement that a quarter of a million copies were allowed to be sold without the courts being appealed to...for so outrageous a contempt.” He admitted that some of illustrations were faked. The paper also investigated the insurance industry because Palmer had taken out policies on his victims. It sent journalist Henry Mayhew (author of London Life and the London Poor, the first reporter to interview ordinary people in what would now be called vox-pops) to the companies to find salesmen eager to sell dodgy policies with no questions asked (sound familiar?)

The Rugeley Poisoner quickly became one of the most notorious mass murderers, but his notoriety derives almost entirely from the press reports. Palmer was actually found guilty of only one murder – and no poison was found in the body – but that’s another part of the story.

Stephen Bates was a senior Guardian correspondent. His book is published by Duckworth in June.
What made you become a journalist?
After an agriculture degree I realised I wanted to be a generalist, not a specialist. A patient chief sub on The Land newspaper taught me how to write an intro. With that as my only training I got a job as journalist/editor on the Eastern Riverina Observer, a weekly in Henty, New South Wales, population 1,000. I loved it.

What other job might you have done?
I was a volunteer in the Office of the National Commission on Women’s Affairs in Bangkok. Now I’m doing full-politics – which is like daily newspapers in that how the day finishes is often not what you expected at the start.

When did you join the NUJ?
As a young Australian journalist I joined the AJA the week I started work, and I did the same with the NUJ when I came to Britain. In both cases I recognised that my interests and my employer’s might not coincide.

Are many of your friends in the union?
At the Guardian yes, many fewer at The Times.

What’s been your best moment in your career?
At the Bangkok Post I got a story about HIV-positive women being forced to have abortions, which would have been buried inside, on the front page.

And the worst ones?
We went through a 10-day strike on a small paper, trying to save a staffer’s job. She got a payoff, but, rightly, recognised, that management would make her life hell if she came back.

What is the worst place you’ve ever worked in?
No bad newspapers, but I did go to North Korea as a freelance having written on my visa application “I am not a journalist or writer of any kind.” It had its moments – particularly when my guide said “of course, we know you’re a journalist”.

And the best?
I spent a couple of years at the Cootamundra Herald, a little group that produced eight newspapers a week with its own press and printers. It was a wonderful, tight-knit team that led by the late Barry Clarke, who’d been editor for decades and had a fierce ethos of community service.

What advice would you give someone starting in journalism?
Learn every technical skill you can – video and audio, editing, HTML/CSS; read a wide range of press and watch a wide range of reporting; and develop one or more specialities and make yourself the expert – film or a small community area or an area of science.

What’s the most rewarding thing about your job?
As both a journalist and a politician, I love the variety, and the chance to learn new things.

And the most frustrating...
As a journalist, I loved trying to present a complete, comprehensible picture of the world – particularly as editor of Guardian Weekly – but I got frustrated at reporting the same story each year – malnutrition in India, coups in Africa, environmental disasters in China.

What advice would you give a new freelance?
Have a blog, be prepared to write for nothing, but only for people who aren’t making money out of you.

Who is your biggest hero?
My Mum – she had a toxic, damaging upbringing, and as a struggling teenage mum refused to pass the damage on to me.

Which six people (alive or dead) would you invite to a dinner party?
Kier Hardie, Millicent Fawcett, Nellie Bly (who should need no introduction here), Isabella Whitney (a poet in Elizabethan London), Wangari Maathi (founder of the Green Belt movement), and Zenobia (Queen of the Palmyrene Empire).

What are your hopes for journalism over the next five years?
Ownership limits that when one owner controls over 15 per cent of the market they are subject to public interest obligations, and a ban on shares of over 20 per cent.

And fears?
The BBC bows further to rightwing pressure and further privileges establishment voices.

How would you like to be remembered?
As someone who tried to leave the world a bit better than I found it.
The relationship between man and machine has often been uneasy when it comes to labour-saving technology.

But if an experiment by the Guardian is anything to go by, journalists should not be too worried about being replaced by robots. When a Guardian developer created an article-generating robot the results were very reassuring for humans. The article about quinoa described the grain as a ‘crime-ridden family’ and mistook chef Yotam Ottolenghi for something edible. Not since Christian website the American Family Association renamed US sprinter Tyson Gay ‘Tyson Homosexual’ has a robot got news so wrong.

But as the ‘Guarbot’ was publishing the results of its experiment in March, an earthquake was waking LA Times programmer/journalist Ken Schwencke. Within three minutes he had published a story about the seismic event that had been generated by his creation the ‘Quakebot’.

Schwencke later told the Huffington Post that used this way, newsbots can save journalists a lot of time. Automated newsgathering tools are nothing new. Many of us are already using technology to make the process more efficient, including setting up automated actions with web-based tools like IFTTT.

But the ‘Quakebot’ and other recent developments go further than before, showing how journalists can work with developers to automate the preparation of stories where the key source is data. As with science, stories based on sports results are where newsbots are being used successfully.

But there is a limit to what robots can do. And other shortcomings have been identified, for example the consequences of a hacker infiltrating an algorithm and spreading misinformation.

There is also the issue of transparency and accountability – what are the biases and limitation of a bot? Some developers are now making it clear how their creations work.

Robots’ impact on news is likely to have mixed outcomes for journalists. On the plus side, we’ll all be happy if they take care of some of the more mundane aspects of the job. But like any rookie reporter, we will also need to keep a close eye on them. And human journalists will still have to decide on which stories to develop further and follow up on those decisions.

Ken Schwencke told the Huffington Post: “It doesn’t eliminate anybody’s job as much as it makes everybody’s job more interesting.”

Rosie Niven on the latest trends and kit

Filim Pro Mobile Video

With more video from smartphones making it onto national news broadcasts, it’s a good time to see exactly what mobile phones are capable of shooting. Unfortunately for Android users like myself, the iPhone is currently the industry standard for mobile journalists. So to see what I was missing out on, I borrowed an iPhone 4S to try out the award-winning Filmic Pro, one of the leading apps for mobile video.

Filmic Pro offers users more control over focus, exposure, white balance and other elements compared with the stock iPhone app. I tried it without a tripod in natural light indoors, overcast outdoors, and indoors with artificial light. The focus, exposure and white balance settings were easy to set and change while shooting. It is important to lock these settings or there will be a noticeable judder in your footage as your camera adjusts. The zoom took a little working out – you must use it when focus and exposure are unlocked. There are some handy zoom presets that make the process much smoother.

Playing back on TV, the video shot in good natural light was of excellent quality. The developers say that changing the settings can improve results in low light. When shooting handheld, it makes sense to use the image stabilisation, though a tripod and mount would be wise. The iPhone did get overheated when shooting continuously – something that can be fixed by altering the settings according to the developer’s website.

Filmic Pro has basic editing functions and video can be synced to iTunes and uploaded directly to Vimeo and iTunes or cloud apps. Filmic Pro is available through iTunes for £2.99.
TIM ELLIS is where original stories come from. 
contacts yes, even if it means taking 
exclusives there. 
else, so you will not find leaks and 
to be read, by journalists and everyone 
come up with six original view points. 
more than taking time to speak to MPs and 
appear in every other paper, rather 
and paste a dozen comments likely to 
advanced by being able to quickly cut 
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Everything on the internet is meant 
be read, by journalists and everyone 
else, so you will not find leaks and 
exclusives there. 
There is nothing better than personal 
contacts yes, even if it means taking 
them out to dinner. Try it sometime, that 
is where original stories come from. 
I would suggest that Robin Oakley, 
Tony Bevins, Phil Webster and 
Chris Moncrief, among other lobby 
journalists, would knock Mr Hencke’s 
computer into a cocked hat. 
Anthony Hodges 
Retired parliamentary reporter 
for The Times 
Broadstairs 

Online political news has been around for years
Interesting piece by David Hencke 
in the last, March/April issue of The 
Journalist magazine, but he gets some 
key facts completely wrong: some 
time before the Guardian’s Andrew 
Sparrow and PoliticsHome’s Paul 
Waugh became the online hacks they 
now both are, BBC News Online was 
running exactly the kind of political 
coverage you mention here but years 
before.

I know this because I was one of the ‘old lobby hands’ that was now writing 
for BBC News Online – and getting it in 
the neck from PA’s then-political editor 
for daring to file political copy before 
he did. Yes, it was indeed the early days 
of online news and all these things 
had still to be resolved. But David, 
I’m certainly not the only one who 
remembers it!

Nyta Mann 
Former BBC News Online 
political correspondent 
London 

Stand by your journalistic values - no pay, no way 
Chris Proctor suggests that “our next 
recruitment drive should focus on 
anyone who texts or puts words onto 
a Facebook page”. The idea – coming 
in the home run of Chris’s penultimate 
par – may be tongue-in-cheek, but it 
flags up a serious subject.

No man but a blockhead ever wrote 
extcept for money, said Dr Johnson. 
Since his time, journalism has moved 
from private patronage to... private 
patronage, but on a bigger scale. Most 
newspapers are privately owned. The 
blogger who makes a living from a 
website that is entirely supported by 
advertising ought to be considered 
a professional writer – the business 
model is that of the Evening Standard 
in microcosm. The unpaid blogger, 
however, may be some other sort of 
a professional, but not a professional 
journalist.

Journalists are paid for their labour. 
This is the position currently taken 
by the NUJ rulebook. To accept any 
other opens up a world of trickle-
down undercutting and moonlighting, 
eroding whatever job protection a 
century of collective action has built up. 
We all need to stand by our values. 
To put it simply – if there’s no pay, then 
no way.

Fiona O’Cleirigh 
Vice-chair London 
Freelance Branch; NEC member

We should leave ‘curating’ to the art galleries
I was intrigued to see the word ‘curate’ 
being used in the current edition’s 
Technology column by Rosie Niven as 
something ‘social media tools’ do in 
relation to stories.

The word recently won the ‘Guff Word 
of 2013’ award from the Financial 
Times columnist, Lucy Kellaway, who 
gave as an example a vendor of T-shirts 
curating ‘iconic street culture’. 

If journalists curate stories using 
whatever tools are to hand, it might 
suggest they are sitting on them until 
an appropriate opportunity to share 
them with the world arises. When a 
news editor asking where a story is 
receives the answer it is being ‘curated’, 
the journalist might then end up as a 
curator of his or her own misfortune.

Andrew Guest 
Bradford

The Editor, 
The Journalist 
308-312 Gray’s Inn Road 
London WC1X 8DP

Email your letters to: 
journalist@nuj.org.uk

Post them to: 
The Editor, 
The Journalist 
308-312 Gray’s Inn Road 
London WC1X 8DP

To sign the petition, please visit: www.mediainitiative.org.uk.

We encourage all those who want a diverse and independent media 
to add their name to the petition.

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Caroline Lucas MP; Tom Watson MP; John McDonnell MP; Frances 
O’Grady, General Secretary, TUC; Michelle Stanistreet, General 
Secretary, NUJ and 15 others.

For a fuller version of this letter and all the signatories go to http://
www.nuj.org.uk/news/why-we-must-act-to-reclaim-the-media/

There is a problem with media ownership in the UK and you can take 
one simple action to help remedy it.

Unchecked media concentration has allowed some media groups to 
accumulate vast amounts of revenue and influence. It has led, as the 
Leveson Inquiry revealed, to a collusive relationship between media 
owners and senior politicians, skewing public debate in favour of 
private interests, and failing to insulate government policy making from 
the interests of media proprietors.

Urgent action is needed to safeguard the right to independent and 
pluralistic information, and to curb the power of media barons.

The Coalition for Media Pluralism has been launched in order to 
campaign for a more diverse and representative media. The coalition is 
working to promote a citizens’ initiative, a petition that calls for an EU 
Directive to protect against concentration in national media ownership.

The existing media ownership regime is not working to protect 
pluralism or democracy. This initiative gives us the opportunity to 
change how our media is controlled.

We encourage all those who want a diverse and independent media 
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www.nuj.org.uk/news/why-we-must-act-to-reclaim-the-media/
Writers’ & Artists’ Yearbook has had its day
I was amused — not — to see Ruth Addiscott recommend the Writers’ & Artists’ Yearbook as a means of finding work as a ghostwriter. Back in the late 80s like many before me and doubtless many since, I found it of no use whatsoever. The reality is that there are no markets for ghost-writers, verse, plays or anything else it lists; the most you can reasonably expect is a polite rejection slip.

Things have changed dramatically since the internet came of age, now anyone can publish a regular blog, make videos or set up a website; a lucky few can make money out of such. I would recommend your readers do the same. The little paid work I have obtained over the years has come from networking and the occasional lucky break including people seeing my work online and contacting me directly.

Alexander Baron
London Freelance Branch

Paywalls traced back to the times of cavemen
News reporting in its most primitive and original form must have involved one caveman — let’s call him Thag — attracting the attention of another caveman — say Gung — and then ponting furiously in the direction of the huge sabre-toothed tiger that had just prowled into view.

It’s obvious in such a scenario that Gung needs to know about the threat and Thag has done the right thing by alerting his fellow troglodyte to the danger.

Imagine now if it dawned on Thag that he could gain some advantage by withholding that vital information. Instead of simply jumping up and down, pointing at the ‘news’ and going “Ug, ug, ug”, he instead decides to gently tap Gung on the shoulder and then stands still, staring smugly up at the sky.

Gung would know that Thag knew something important but wouldn’t know what that important thing was. Unless Gung hands over an inducement of sorts — say a lump of meat or his favourite club — in exchange for the information he will remain in the dark.

So he then reluctantly hands over his treasured club and Thag then once again points at the ‘news’ going “Ug, ug, ug.”

Fast forward to the 21st century and we find that scenario has evolved to become what we now know as an internet paywall.

Graham Mann
East Kilbride

What do we think about the possessive gazetteer?
The Waterhouse on style letters aroused some interest and comments. What about then — on Possession — where he says “A BBC news reader was heard to announce that a detective had flown from Singapore’s Raffles Hotel to London’s Heathrow to continue inquiries in London’s Mayfair.”

“The possessive gazetteer — Birmingham’s New Street, Liverpool’s Mersey, Brighton’s pier, Cornwall’s St Ives etc — is now so widespread everywhere, except in the everyday English used by newspaper readers.

“Although it has no purpose and doesn’t save space (Birmingham’s New Street, Edinburgh’s Princes Street, London’s Mayfair.)”

Roy Jones
North Wales Coast Branch

Please support an Olympic endeavour for War Child
I hope to encourage fellow NUJ members to sponsor me as I prepare for the London Olympic Triathlon, on 2 August, in support of the charity War Child, and in my Father’s memory.

War Child is the perfect charity for me as I was a war child myself. My Dad was killed in the Normandy landings in World War II, and I was born three months after. So I never knew my Dad. The Triathlon will be the biggest physical challenge I’ve ever taken on (one mile swim, 25 miles cycling, and six miles running). But I’ve been training very hard since last summer and I feel confident that I’ll be able to do it. I’m hoping to complete it in four hours.

One old journalist friend, supporter and marathon runner, Steve Platt, former editor of the New Statesman said: “This is for your dad, Mike, and the 70 years of freedom he and others gave us. And also because I know how hard it is getting an ageing body to do what you’re doing! Much respect, as they say.”

You can see my full story, some photos and make a donation on my fundraising page at http://www.justgiving.com/Mike-Power3

Mike Power
Retired Member

NUJ Extra — efficient and generous when I needed it
I am writing to make public my heartfelt thanks to the NUJ’s charity, NUJ Extra. I have been an NUJ member for more than 25 years, and have reported from mainland Europe for the past 15 years. Six months ago, I was diagnosed with a probable cancer in my throat, which meant I had to undergo many invasive medical tests before eventually being operated upon last October.

Given the nature and urgency of my condition, it was not feasible for me to return to the UK for this treatment. As a result, I was not able to work properly for much of last year, whilst also incurring very considerable medical bills. Fortunately the surgery was successful,

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Fortunately the surgery was successful,
and after a period of convalescence I am now working again.

As a freelance, however, the impact of a string of unexpected bills whilst simultaneously giving up work was financially devastating. It was worsened by the lack of any real social security safety net.

Consequently, the help that I have received from NUJ Extra has been of enormous help. It made a real and direct impact on relieving what had become an acute situation, and was decisive in enabling me to carry on being based abroad and not abandoning an expertise that had taken more than a decade to develop.

I must pay particular thanks to: Tim Dawson, my member on the national executive council, who persuaded me to overcome my personal pride and to make an application to the fund; the unpaid trustees, each one of whom generously dedicates their time to operating the fund; Lena Calvert, the administrator of NUJ Extra, whose response was both efficient and generous.

Personally, it made me proud to feel that such solidarity still plays such a key part of our union’s activities, reminding us all of just what a union is all about.

Thank you

Name withheld

The Journalists Charity is celebrating 150 years

The Journalists Charity (formerly the Newspaper Press Fund) is 150 years old this year. The charity is run by journalists and provides financial help for journalists and their dependents.

The Journalists Charity also has a state-of-the-art nursing home and sheltered housing at Dorking in Surrey. It will be celebrating its special anniversary with various events and hopes to raise its profile (and some money). As you can imagine in the current financial climate the demand on our resources is increasing.

The charity sometimes acts in tandem with NUJ Extra to help with more difficult cases. In the past the NPF and what was then the NUJ Widows and Orphans Fund held joint fund-raising events. I remember the press balls in Norwich from 1958, which continued well into the 1960s when the proceeds were shared between the two organisations.

If you would like to find out more you can go to the website – www.journalistscharity.org.uk.

Brian Ager
Treasurer of the Journalists Charity

The Journalist can help bring in new members

The Journalist magazine can be a very valuable recruiting tool, all the more so as 90 per cent of NUJ members have opted to continue receiving it in hard copy.

Its blend of news and comment about the NUJ, other trade unions and the media, as well as its lively correspondence page, gives potential members a window into what is happening in the union, giving them plenty of incentive to join.

If you have a recruiting drive, therefore, do remember how effective it can be to have copies to hand out to all who attend recruiting drives. Let journalist@nuj.org.uk know five weeks in advance of publication how many copies you want and they will be sent to you.

The Journalist is published on the following dates this year: early July; late August; late October; and mid December.

Jane Hammond
Press and PR Branch

The Journalist is a lifeline

Thanks from the bottom of my heart for the online Journalist!

I was a senior journalist who worked on the Swansea Evening Post, the South Wales Echo, the Bristol Evening Post and the Newport Argus until I had to leave the print trade after suffering a massive stroke.

Now I largely keep in touch with NUJ union events and campaigns, and The Journalist is my lifeline.

Again – thanks.

Mick Tems
Pontypridd

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The otherworldliness of conferences

Chris Proctor muses on seaside gatherings, chips, late-night drinking and standing orders

The thought of journalists across the land packing their bags for the union’s conference in Eastbourne made me feel quite nostalgic for the massed sectarian newsletter sellers, the glimpse of dawn through bar room curtains, the smell of salty sea and vinegary chips, the stuffy halls, the mysteries of standing orders and the well-disguised sense of comradeship.

Participating or reporting, I’ve always enjoyed the alternative reality of conferences, airtight bubbles where the outside world becomes a vague distraction from the important issues, all of which are contained in that day’s agenda.

Presidents, popes and prime ministers become creatures of insignificant when compared with the majesty of the delegate from Carlisle or the executive member for freelancers. The opinions of Putin and the collapse of governments are trifles next to the outcome of proposal 107.

It is a world where everyone speaks in three-minute slices regardless whether they are discussing global chaos, universal rights or the paperclips. To speak for less than 180 seconds indicates a distinct lack of preparation or commitment; to go on for longer shows a lack of discipline or an ignorance of the rules of debate. But at least the NUJ conference has debates. the Labour Party conference doesn’t; the Conservative Party never did; and the Liberal Democrats will agree with anything as long as they can be in a coalition.

At the Labour Party conference, delegates are allowed to ask pre-arranged questions to ministers who sit in threesomes on stages and indulge in pontification. Delegates are tasked with taking notes rather than expressing views: in fact, to be apprehehended in possession of an opinion borders on the criminal. The NUJ won’t go that way: our delegates spend 51 weeks of the year asking questions; they’re hardly going to do the same in their conference.

I am a great fan of standing orders in general and points of order in particular. Delegates are often advised to study these issues before their coastal voyage but to do so is both dispiriting and futile. Every conference has its rule book gurus who can prove anything to be in or out of order at will. They are always correct. This is where the point of order comes into its own.

Delegates hop up on a point of order and make a speech. The chair tells them it was not a point of order. They sit down. Honour is satisfied. The delegate has made her speech and the chair has established its authority.

On the down side, even if you are being paid to be there, not all conference speeches are riveting or indeed bearable. Many border on the tedious and many more cross that line and enter the mind-numbing estate. I have heard speeches that make Van Gough’s decision vis-à-vis his left ear utterly understandable.

This is why I have often advocated the substitution of the traditional raised rostrum for speechmaking with a scaffold-type trapdoor.

The conference chair would control the mechanism, affording the descent of any delegate who continued to speak after saying, ‘Everything I was going to say has been said already’; any person reading notes in a monotone; and anyone shouting at inappropriate times. This proposal will only seem strict to those who have never attended a conference.

For all their defects, conferences are a genuine attempt at democracy and they have uses quite apart from the activities in the speakers’ hall. But conference participants have to realise that not all the world shares their view of their gathering’s newsworthiness or its entertainment value. One old-stager at last year’s TUC mourned to me the fact that the Congress is now no longer broadcast live on national television.

‘But do you think people would watch it?’ I wondered.

He looked at me in astonishment. ‘Everyone here would.’ he told me.

Now, that really is being in the bubble....
As an NUJ member you are entitled to FREE personal injury advice and representation provided by Thompsons Solicitors.

You can claim for any accident – at work, on the road, or on holiday.

Government changes mean that the high street law firms and claims companies you see advertised on TV can now take up to 25% of any compensation from injured people.

Using your NUJ Legal Service provided by Thompsons Solicitors means you will get advice from experts and keep 100% of your compensation.

Make the most of your membership.

Contact the NUJ Legal Service today on 0800 587 7528

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Contact Jane Hammond, Course Director, at trident@btconnect.com or on 01634 847 772 for rates including special discount for you as an NUJ member. More course details at www.tridentconferences.co.uk.