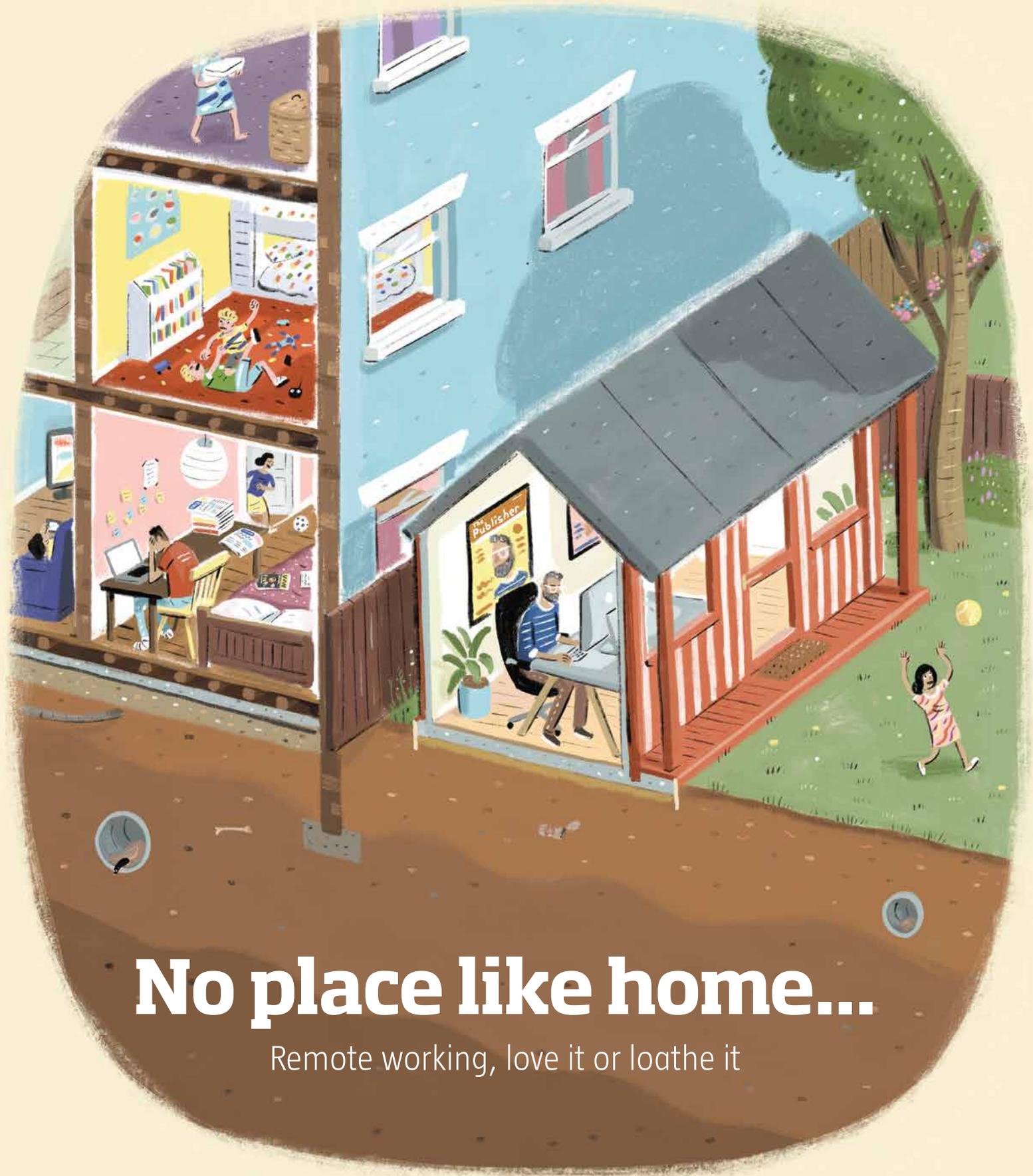


# the Journalist

WWW.NUJ.ORG.UK | AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2021



## No place like home...

Remote working, love it or loathe it

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“



So, after a very long time, life is beginning to feel like it is returning to a semblance of normality.

Social restrictions imposed in the face of the pandemic are lifting and people are venturing out more. Some are going back into offices that have been deserted for nearly 18 months. But the probability is that not all of us will go back to working in exactly the same way as we did before the pandemic. Enforced homeworking has changed the shape of work for good in the industries where it can operate effectively.

Our cover feature looks at the pros and cons of homeworking, drawing on an extensive survey of the book industry carried out by the union's Oxford branch. Working from home is not ideal for everyone. While it offers some people much-needed flexibility and a release from time-consuming commuting, it can also impose isolation on others, and it can be tricky if your home isn't suited to converting to a work space. In our 'And Finally' column Chris Proctor also looks at the ergonomics of working at home.

Another flicker of good news is that recruitment seems on the rise in parts of our industry, particularly at Reach as the biggest publisher starts hiring again.

Here's hoping that the feel better factor lasts beyond the summer.

Christie

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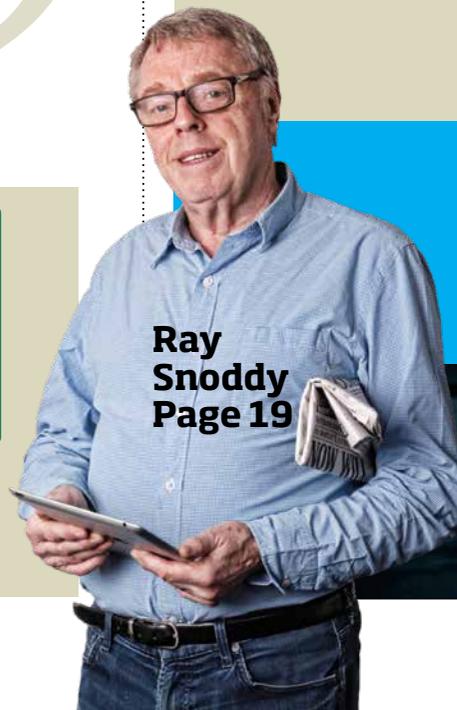
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**Cover picture**  
Stephen Collins



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# Courts could treat journalists as spies under planned laws



**JOURNALISTS** could be treated like spies and the Government would be able to block more information under plans being considered to overhaul official secrets laws.

NUJ analysis of the Government's proposed legislation finds that they conflate journalism, espionage and 'hostile activity'. There also appears to be the intention to increase the risks and penalties for journalists and media organisations acting in the public interest.

The union has pressed the Government to introduce a public interest defence in law for journalists investigating and reporting on state wrongdoing.

The union's submission to the Home Office states:

- The threat of prosecution has been used against NUJ members in an attempt to silence public interest journalism.
- There should be explicit limits within any new legislation to restrict extra-territorial offences in regard to journalists and media organisations abroad.
- New legislation should not remove the requirement for prosecutors to prove that an unauthorised disclosure was damaging.
- Whistleblowers and journalists acting in the public interest should not be subjected to increased prison sentences.
- Journalism should not be equated with espionage and media employees should not be criminalised under any future espionage laws.

News organisations have also warned that the media's work is under threat. The Sun has said that its exclusive on the former health secretary Matt Hancock's relationship with an aide would not have been possible under the intended legislation.



**'The union has pressed the Government to introduce a public interest defence in law**

## Fears for parliamentary coverage

**CROSS-PARTY** concern has been expressed about cuts to the unit which supplies local BBC TV and radio stations with news and clips of their MP speaking about local issues.

MPs who have signed an early day motion about the intended cuts fear

that a 40 per cent reduction in the staff in the BBC Regional Political Unit will mean contributions to debates from local backbench MPs will no longer be covered to the same extent. The cuts could lead to fewer stories being spotted and less scrutiny of the routine

work in parliament. It could also mean no specialist political reporter will be available to explain the key political events to a local radio audience for breakfast programmes, the most listened to broadcasts of the day.

## Irish code of practice rejected

**THE UNION'S** Irish executive council has dismissed the proposed new code of practice on employment status as "a tired old solution which will not solve the problem of bogus employment contracts."

It has urged robust legislation rather than what Irish secretary Séamus Dooley described as "a feeble and inadequate response dressed up in fancy words and breezy photographs of happy

workers". He added: "The NUJ is currently seeking to vindicate the rights of workers in RTÉ, where a review of bogus, self-employed contracts has not resolved the issue of retrospective rights of workers wrongly misclassified as self-employed workers over many years. Against this backdrop it is shocking to read a code which fails to recognise the genuine losses suffered by misclassified workers."



### Rolling Stone British style

Rolling Stone is soon to have a dedicated British edition more than 50 years after Mick Jagger first tried to start a UK version of the iconic US magazine. Stream Publishing, which publishes LGBTQ magazine Attitude, has signed an exclusive licensing deal with Rolling Stone owner Pense Media Corporation to launch the brand in print and online in the UK. The launches are planned for the autumn and seven jobs will be created. Rolling Stone is a monthly publication in the US, but the frequency of the UK title hasn't been confirmed.

### inbrief...

#### RUSBRIDGER TO EDIT PROSPECT MAGAZINE

Alan Rusbridger, the former editor-in-chief of the Guardian, has been appointed the next editor of Prospect, the monthly current affairs magazine. He succeeds Tom Clark, who has been editor since 2016. Rusbridger was editor-in-chief of the Guardian from 1995 to 2015, taking it from being a printed paper only to one of the most used and recognised news websites.

#### SALES FALL AT REGIONAL PUBLISHER

Sales at regional publisher Midland News Association fell by almost a third last year because of the impact of the pandemic. Its biggest paper the Express and Star also lost its position as England's largest paid-for regional daily last year. It reported sales of £17.8 million, down 31 per cent from £26 million in the previous year.

#### KEATING ACCEPTS HACKING DAMAGES

Ronan Keating, the former Boyzone singer, has accepted substantial phone-hacking damages from News Group Newspapers, publisher of the now-defunct News of the World and The Sun. Mr Keating had said that he was suspicious about the origins of stories about him that appeared between 1996 and 2011.

# Longer hours and job cuts at BBC leave staff 'pushed to the limit'

**THE NUJ** has warned about staff morale at the BBC following the publication of the corporation's annual report.

The report for 2020-21 shows that the BBC has reduced its workforce by more than 1,200, equivalent to six per cent. Senior manager numbers were also down by more than five per cent, and spending on top stars reduced by 10 per cent.

The BBC said it had made £272 million in annual savings (up from £199 million in the previous year), bringing its cumulative savings since 2017/18 to £890 million this financial year. In 2021/22, it plans to raise that total to more than £950 million.

Paul Siegert, NUJ national broadcasting organiser, said: "The BBC is clearly doing many things right – and it's good to hear that the gender pay gap is narrowing and that the salaries for some of the top stars have reduced.

"But the recent staff survey shows the BBC is far from a happy place to work. Staff say they don't believe recruitment is fair and transparent or that their careers are likely to progress.

"The reduction of the workforce by six per cent while not reducing the amount of output means there are now fewer staff doing the same amount of work. Staff are overworked and suffering from burnout. Many journalists say they are being pushed to the limit.

"Staff, many of whom worked flat out during the pandemic and were rewarded with a pay freeze over the past 12 months, are rightly aggrieved."

The report said: "Time spent with the BBC went up to 18 hours two minutes, from 17 hours 45 minutes, on average, per week. Over 28 million people came to the BBC for evening entertainment on an average day... In a year of complex news, as the UK battled the global coronavirus pandemic, audiences for the BBC News at Six were the largest in almost two decades. BBC One's 6.30pm bulletin in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions is the UK's most watched news programme."

Research from accountancy firm KPMG showed the corporation delivered £2.63 of direct economic impact for every £1 spent with 50 per cent of that occurring outside London, compared to a sector average of 20 per cent.

It won more than 130 awards since last April, including:

- 31 out of 48 BAFTAs
- 16 out of 23 broadcast awards, including Channel of the Year for BBC Two.
- 16 out of 25 gold wins at the Audio and Radio Industry Awards, from best news coverage to best music breakfast show to best local station.



**Staff, many of whom worked flat out during the pandemic and were rewarded with a pay freeze over the past 12 months, are rightly aggrieved**

**Paul Siegert**  
NUJ national  
broadcasting organiser

## Remembering Veronica Guerin

NUJ members marked the anniversary of the murder of Sunday Independent journalist and union member Veronica Guerin.

A wreath was laid on

behalf of the union by her former Sunday Independent colleague Martin Fitzpatrick, who is chair of the Dublin (Newspapers) branch, and Mary Curtin, who is a

member of honour. NUJ representatives included Cearbhaill O'Siochain from the Irish executive council, Fran McNulty from the

national executive council, and Séamus Dooley, Irish secretary.

Dooley said: "Veronica's death was an assault on media freedom and, as journalists, we honour her by standing up for the right of

journalists everywhere to do their job. Veronica was a brave freelance journalist who was devoted to her work at the Sunday Independent.

"Her enthusiasm, commitment and courage remain an inspiration."



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# Journalists targeted for possible surveillance

**AT LEAST** 180 journalists, including the editor of the Financial Times, were selected as potential targets of surveillance by governments around the world using a spyware surveillance tool called Pegasus.

The targeting was revealed in a report by Forbidden Stories - a Paris-based worldwide collaborative group of journalists and media groups which aims to protect media freedom.

Pegasus is a malware that infects iPhones and Android devices to enable operators of the tool to extract messages, photos and emails, record calls and secretly activate microphones. It has been developed by the Israeli cybersurveillance company NSO and sold to a number of clients, including states across the world.

The NUJ and the International Federation of Journalists have condemned all attempts to interfere with journalists' private communications, encourage journalists to use extra vigilance to protect their data and call



on governments to enshrine in domestic law the inviolability of journalists' communications.

Among others who have been the targets of the global spying operations are human rights defenders, political protestors, lawyers, diplomats and heads of state.

It is thought that Roula Khalaf, editor of the FT, was targeted for surveillance by the United Arab Emirates in 2018 when she was deputy editor.



## Pegasus is a malware that infects iPhones and Android devices

JOEL SAGET/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## inbrief...

### JEWISH CHRONICLE PAYS DAMAGES

The Jewish Chronicle has fully apologised and paid substantial libel damages to journalist and campaigner Marc Wadsworth following an article which alleged that Mr Wadsworth was involved with a group of Labour members which intended to intimidate Jewish Labour activists. The paper said it fully acknowledged that the allegations were entirely untrue.

### GUILTY VERDICTS AFTER BLOCKADE

Six Extinction Rebellion protesters were found guilty of obstructing the highway after a blockade of the Newsprinters plant in Hertfordshire last year. Judge Sally Fudge at St Albans magistrates court said that while the demonstration was 'peaceful' it had a significant impact on the businesses and caused newspapers to lose an estimated £1 million.

### REACH HIRES MORE SPORTS JOURNALISTS

Reach, the UK's largest publisher, is hiring 76 sports journalists. It said the jobs would enable more in-depth coverage of some of the biggest football clubs. It said it would build on projects such as Liverpool Echo's Blood Red podcast.

## Dutch crime reporter killed

**AN AWARD-winning Dutch journalist who exposed criminal and drugs gangs died last month days after being shot in Amsterdam as he left a TV studio.**

Thousands turned out at a public memorial for reporter Peter R DeVries who was

hailed as a hero for his work on behalf of the families of victims of crime. People queued early in the morning to file past his coffin which was displayed in a theatre.

It is believed that he had previously had police protection after being

threatened for his involvement in criminal cases. De Vries has worked for De Telegraaf, Panorama magazine, Algemeen Dagblad and ran his own TV crime programme. He won an international Emmy Award in 2008 for his work

investigating the 2006 disappearance of teenager Natalee Holloway in Aruba.

Tony Sheldon, chair of the NUJ's Netherlands branch, said: "NUJ members are shocked and angry at the murder of Peter R de Vries and stand shoulder to shoulder with our Dutch and international colleagues."

## LGBT+ pressure on government

**THE NUJ** has signed a TUC letter criticising the Government over its inaction to address the inequality experienced by the LGBT+ community who face discrimination at work.

The letter, signed by Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, and Ann Galpin, co-chair of the TUC disabled workers' committee to Liz Truss, women and equalities minister, says:

"We were dismayed that you have jettisoned the 2018 LGBT Action Plan, which was based on evidence from more than 100,000 LGBT+ people. And we were disappointed at the decision to disband the LGBT Advisory Panel.

"Nearly two in five LGBT workers have been harassed or discriminated against by a colleague. A quarter have been discriminated against by their manager, and around one in seven by a client or patient."



### Harri quits after taking the knee

Broadcaster Guto Harri resigned from GB News after he was suspended for taking the knee during a discussion about racism towards England footballers. GB News had apologised after Harri, a former BBC correspondent and advisor to Boris Johnson when he was London mayor, made the gesture.

The broadcaster said it had breached its standards. In his resignation letter, Harri asked the organisation to "please explain how that [Farage's stance] does not breach editorial standards but I did". Nigel Farage had said he wouldn't take the knee for anyone.

ATHENA PICTURE AGENCY LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

# Anger mounts at Newsquest in over 'mean-spirited' fire and rehire

**PRESSURE** is growing on Newsquest to end its practice of firing journalists and rehiring them on worse terms – especially at the Oxford Mail.

The NUJ chapel at the Oxford newspaper said: "This Newsquest group chapel condemns the use of fire and rehire tactics at the Oxford Mail to force through cuts to members' terms and conditions.

"Stripping journalists of bank holiday payments in the wake of a year when they have pulled out all the stops to serve their local communities is disgraceful and has piled stress and anxiety onto a newsroom already facing reduced staffing levels and unacceptably long working hours.

"The treatment of staff in Oxford symbolises a failed

duty of care to journalists and journalism at the centre.

"The practice of fire and rehire has been roundly condemned by trade unions and politicians, has no place within Newsquest and should be banned.

## Oxford Mail

"We also note that chief executive Henry Faure Walker was awarded an MBE in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to 'regional journalism and charity'. In accepting the award, Mr Walker said: 'The real recognition should go to the amazing people that work in local news publishing across the UK.'

"We believe that the actions of Newsquest in Oxford are detrimental and damaging to regional journalism and that Mr Walker should practise 'charity begins at home' and immediately end this

unethical employment practice in his company."

The chapel is pressing the publisher to withdraw dismissal notices and work with the union to resolve the dispute and also address staffing and workload issues in Oxford.

Chris Morley, NUJ Northern and Midlands regional organiser and Newsquest group chapel coordinator, said:

"Our members throughout Newsquest are appalled and also bemused as to why the company is choosing to take such an extreme measure as fire and rehire against their Oxford colleagues for such a small saving.

"The company is risking its reputation with the local community by deploying disproportionate measures to achieve so little and the fact that this controversial action is being taken against hard-working local journalists sullies the award made to the chief executive for his services to regional journalism.

"There can be no legitimate place for fire and rehire tactics and our group chapel urges the company to engage in proper negotiations to resolve matters honourably rather than using this depressingly mean-spirited action."



**The fact that this action is being taken against local journalists sullies the award made to the chief executive for his services to regional journalism**

**Chris Morley  
NUJ organiser and  
Newsquest group  
chapel coordinator**



## New home for Hebrides history

**RETIRED** freelance journalist Bill Lucas of Stornoway in the Hebrides, an NUJ life member, made the local headlines when he donated his extensive Hebridean Press Service archive to the Stornoway Historical Society.

For 50 years, Lucas covered the Western Isles from the

Butt of Lewis to Barra – an area of 1200 square miles – by car, ferry and air. He provided a news service to all the national and regional papers, trade and technical journals, magazines, and radio and television stations.

The archive contains more than 3,000 images –

photographs, negatives and transparencies – as well as tapes for the BBC. Major stories as well as official reports of some major inquires are also included.

Malcolm Macdonald, chair of the Stornoway Historical Society, said: "This is the most remarkable

collection we have ever received. We are overwhelmed with gratitude to Bill."

Lucas started his journalistic career on his home town's paper, the Hamilton Advertiser. After national service, he moved to the Stornoway Gazette, then spent three years on The Scotsman before returning the Stornoway in

1961 to set up his freelance agency. In 2005, he was awarded the Barron Trophy, which recognises a lifetime achievement in journalism.

## 'Endemic' abuse leads Reach to create safety editor role

**NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER** Reach is searching for an online safety editor, a new position believed to be the first of its kind in Britain. The remit will be to tackle 'endemic' abuse and harassment of its journalists.

Reach, which publishes the Mirror, Express and many regional newspapers and websites, said the appointee would liaise with social

media platforms about cases of abuse and campaign for action to address the problem in general.

The editor will ensure Reach's online abuse policies are followed and also support staff who are victims. They will also develop training for employees on how to deal with online abuse.

Reach's management decided to create the role after a survey of more than 550 staff showed the extent of online abuse.

The move came as the Media Lawyers Association published Online Harassment and Abuse: a Legal Guide for Journalists in England and Wales, which can be downloaded from <https://medialawyersassociation.org/news-2>.

# Auction block beckons for Channel 4 after 40 years

**CHANNEL 4's** near 40 years in public ownership appears to be nearing the end after the Government announced plans to sell the broadcaster.

Oliver Dowden, the culture secretary (pictured right), said there would be a consultation on proposed privatisation, in a move that would mark the end of an era in British broadcasting.

Paul Siegert, NUJ national broadcasting organiser, said:

"It's hard to see any justification for privatising Channel Four other than ideology. Channel 4 has achieved what it was asked to do and has proved a hit with viewers. So, if it isn't broke, why is the government proposing the fix of privatising it? Four years ago, the Government said it would continue to be owned by the public and it should honour that promise."

Channel 4, which broadcasts its own news, is editorially independent but has been owned by the state since it was established created in 1982. It operates with a remit to commission



distinctive programming and serve diverse audiences across the UK. Unlike other broadcasters it is required to reinvest its profits in new shows.

Mr Dowden said that privatisation would ensure Channel 4 kept "its place at the heart of British broadcasting" and allowed it to adapt to audiences drifting away from traditional television channels in favour of streaming services.

A swift consultation period could mean draft legislation on privatisation being published by the autumn.



**It's hard to see any justification for privatising Channel 4 other than ideology**

**Paul Siegert, NUJ broadcasting officer**

LUWE DEFFNER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

## inbrief...

### SUBSCRIBERS TO THE ECONOMIST RISE 9%

The Economist has reported a nine per cent increase in subscribers in the year to the end of March. The rise takes the total to 1.12 million. However, revenues at the Economist Group fell three per cent to £310.3 million partly because of the decline in events revenues.

### BUZZFEED LISTS ON US STOCK MARKET

Buzzfeed is listing on the US stock market through a merger with 890 5th Avenue Partners, an acquisition company. BuzzFeed is valued at \$1.5 billion. As part of the deal, BuzzFeed which also owns the HuffPost, is to buy the speciality publisher Complex Networks. This year, BuzzFeed forecasts that the combined group will have a turnover of \$521 million.

### KEVIN PALMER AND DERBY BRANCH

In the last edition of The Journalist the reporting of the union's delegate meeting accidentally assigned Kevin Palmer to the new newly created Leeds and West Yorkshire branch. Kevin is in fact chair of Derby and Burton branch. Kevin had spoken in support of a motion tabled by Leeds and West Yorkshire. We apologise for the mistake.

## Kidnap attempt on Iranian journalist

**THE ATTEMPTED** kidnaping of an Iranian-American journalist in New York has increased fears for the safety of the Iranian press in the UK, particularly those reporting for the BBC

Persian service. The intended target of the kidnaping plot was Masih Alinejad, who reports and campaigns on human rights issues in Iran. "Everyday, Iranian

journalists based in this country live in fear that what happened in New York could happen to them," said the NUJ's broadcasting organiser, Paul Siegert. "That's on top of the daily

harassment and abuse they have to live with. Their families are also constantly targeted and used as weapons against them. And all just because they are journalists doing their job."

## TUC call on Long Covid

**LONG** Covid should be recognised as an occupational disease to give workers access to legal protections and compensation, the TUC has said.

Its call came after more than 3,500 workers responded to its survey on the impact of long Covid on daily working lives.

The survey found that:

- Nearly three in 10 (29 per cent) have had symptoms lasting longer than a year.

- More than nine in 10 (95 per cent) have been left with ongoing symptoms.

- A majority had experienced side effects including brain fog (72 per cent), shortness of breath (70 per cent), difficulty concentrating (62 per cent) and memory problems (54 per cent).

- Over half (52 per cent) had experienced some form of discrimination or disadvantage due to their condition.

### The Sun sees its value drop to £0

News Group Newspapers, publisher of The Sun titles, has reduced the balance sheet value of the news paper to nil, down from £112 million in 2019. The group reported a loss of £201 million on sales of £324 million for the year ended June 2020. Damages and legal fees for claims of phone hacking at the now closed News of the World cost £52.3 million last year which was nearly double the amount in 2019.

News Group Newspapers is part of Rupert Murdoch's News UK, which publishes The Times stable of publications.



# Clicking into action

The pandemic has led to better use of technology and this is bringing us together, says **Chris Merriman**

**A**s we crawl, blinking, back into the light after two years of restrictions that have, at times, proved more difficult to follow than the instructions for an Ikea Wørrdrobe, the world has been transformed. It's time to take stock.

It's not that there's been a quantum leap in technology since 2019 – it's us who have changed, forced to embrace technology that passed us by before. In 2014, I wrote an article about the 50th anniversary of the first video call, and questioned society's reluctance (at that point) to embrace it. How things change.

The pandemic has proved to the rest of the world what journalists have always known – you don't need to be sitting in an office to do a brilliant job. Whether it's conducting on-air interviews over Zoom or an editorial meeting on Slack, we've been forced to rethink our processes and it hasn't turned out nearly as bad as it seemed when we were first being told to stay at home.

The NUJ has also been forced to adapt. I'd be the first to put my hand up and say that I've not always been the most active union member over the years and generally only pipe up if my boss tries to pull a fast one. Yet, since the first lockdown, we've been holding branch meetings over Zoom. Voting has been possible through the magic of the interweb. This should be our legacy of the pandemic, because it has seen engagement with the NUJ growing steadily.

Mark Fisher, secretary of the Edinburgh freelance branch, shares his experiences, which are echoed in branches up and down the country: "Going online has had two clear advantages. It has encouraged attendance from members who live further afield and it has made it

convenient to invite speakers from all over the UK and, in a couple of cases, abroad. In both cases, it's much easier for people to commit an hour of their time when they don't have to factor in travel and accommodation."

"Edinburgh freelance attracted several new regular attenders during the pandemic, in part because we've upped our frequency from monthly to weekly, something that would have been too costly and inconvenient if we weren't online. On many occasions, it also seems to have encouraged a better gender balance."

Training too has moved online to great success. Rachel Howells, training project manager for NUJ Wales explains: "We found traditional geographical barriers, such as the additional expense and time it takes to travel from north Wales to south, were eliminated, and we appealed to a much wider group of learners from across Wales, including people of colour and those with disabilities. We are now building on these successes and beginning to offer our first courses delivered in the medium of Welsh."

Our recently elected vice-president Natasha Hirst, who has a hearing disability, agrees: "I've also been able to

**//**  
**Geographical barriers, such as the expense and time it takes to travel, were eliminated, and we appealed to a much wider group of learners**

update and support branches about the delegate meeting and what's been going on with motions. In that respect, it has enabled me to be more accessible to members, which is important to me.

"In-person meetings fatigue me far more quickly than online ones, so I can participate and follow much better online, as well as fitting more in, because I don't need to travel.

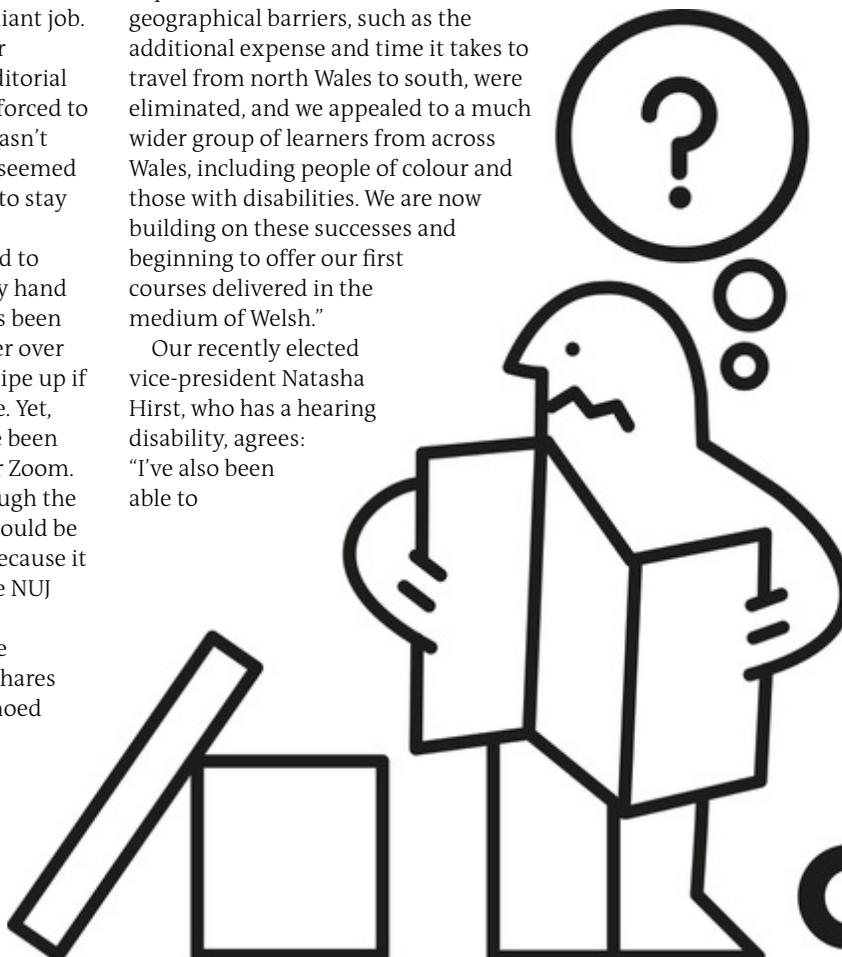
"The opportunities to engage more, on councils and committees and with members directly put me in a better position to be elected as vice-president.

"As someone who advocates for more disabled people being in leadership roles, it's really important for me to have this platform to do more for our disabled members and challenge the inequality that disabled people experience."

Some of our number have always been happy to travel from wherever they're based down to 'that' London for meetings but many more people are able to take part in union activity online. That matters. We're stronger together, especially given the variety of issues facing our profession and the range of people affected.

By moving online, we've taken away the biggest obstacles to engaging members – time, distance and the human condition (the part that says that the spirit is willing, but there's something good on TV later). Zoom and its ilk have their own challenges but, in 2021, things are advanced enough for us to consider a hybrid future.

In these interesting times, where outlets are closing or slashing their roster, the role of the NUJ has never been more important, and we should all be glad that we live in an age where technology has advanced enough that we've not only survived but have actually become stronger as a result.



# CÖVID

# When stealing your own words can be a minefield



We should be able to copy not waste, says **Rahila Gupta**

**B**efore we consider the ethics of self-plagiarism, we need to ask whether such a thing even exists, given that plagiarism means theft and, in theory, you cannot steal from yourself.

If I had any doubts, they were soon put to rest when I was accused of self-plagiarism recently. My cheeks burn with shame even as I recall it.

I wrote a 4,000-plus word article in 2019 for a digital magazine on whether ‘crip’ theory – riding on the coattails of queer theory – empowered disability activism or not, using my personal experience of bringing up a disabled child.

In it was a 400-word section on my battles to get my son into mainstream school. I lifted it from an article with a completely different angle that I had written in 2012 for openDemocracy, which was about the difficulty of expressing grief publicly over the loss of ability, when disability politics requires you to value disability at all times.

A few days after the article was published, the editor contacted me to say that this act of self-plagiarism had been brought to their attention.

I went through a mental list of enemies who had enough time and vindictiveness to trawl the internet and report me.

I felt so humiliated that I could think of nothing else for the next few days.

To add insult, the editor then rewrote that section by changing a few words here and there as if I couldn’t be relied upon to rewrite it myself. Did those cosmetic changes make it OK to repeat the substantive content?

She then expressed the hope that those changes would be enough to pacify the senior editor who had been considering taking the article down.

I was told that up to 200 words (of self-plagiarism) would have been acceptable. Surely this is an arbitrary number? In the article of 800 words, that would be nearly a quarter, which would surely be too much.

As Christine Buckley, editor of *The Journalist*, notes, if she is paying good money for an article she expects a journalist to produce fresh material not simply regurgitate copy published elsewhere. I get that. But what are the boundaries?

It is a particular problem for campaigning journalists like myself, if I want to spread the word and reach new audiences for an issue that I am passionate about.

Ever since I visited Rojava in 2016 in Northeastern Syria where a women’s revolution is taking place behind the battle lines with ISIS and now Turkey, I have been writing about it as extensively as possible to counter what appears to be a deliberate silence.

While the angle may be different in each article or be pegged to some newsy development, there is a core part of it that needs to be repeated.

A different readership needs the facts: the structure of democratic confederalism; direct democracy from the neighbourhood commune up to city level with a co-presidency rule that gives equal power, presence and opportunity to women; the raft of women-friendly laws; the commitment to ecological sustainability; and equal representation for racial and religious minorities.

If I have already crafted a succinct paragraph about the ‘facts’, why can I not copy and paste it? Why reinvent the wheel?

It is not something I would put in quote marks because it is not an opinion where I need the precise wording of the speaker.

I could insert a hyperlink to another article I have written about it but that is only useful when I am referring to something in passing and I want to give readers the opportunity to find out more.

If my current article is focused on, say, the restorative principles of their justice system, I need to provide a description of the political structure so readers can follow my argument.

Self-plagiarism seems, unfairly to me, to apply more to the act of writing than speaking. I use my articles frequently as the raw material for my speeches in public debates about the subject and nobody raises an eyebrow.

There are two further compulsions that make self-plagiarism so attractive.

First, I hate waste of all kinds (I put that down to my Indian upbringing): old clothes are torn into kitchen rags; elastic bands from store-bought spring onions are used as stationery; and I reuse words that may otherwise vanish into obscurity.

Don’t we all use secondhand words? Is self-plagiarism simply an argument about syntax, about recycling the same order of words?

Second, I can’t let go of my faves. They have to be born again. My twitter bio says, ‘I wring the fabric of my life to produce words. They could so easily have been tears.’

Remember, you didn’t read it here first.

“  
If I have already crafted a succinct paragraph about the ‘facts’, why can I not copy and paste it? Why reinvent the wheel?  
”

# Exeter

## Ruth Addicott talks to journalists about what it's like to live and work in Exeter

**A**

cream tea one minute, a grisly murder the next... it might sound like a scene from Agatha Christie but, for journalists in the West Country, it's not far from the truth.

As an ITV regional reporter, based in Exeter, Richard Lawrence has covered it all from the collapse of Flybe to unexploded Second World War bombs to Dartmoor ponies.

Lawrence moved to Devon from the Midlands in 1991 and is one of two ITV reporters in Exeter, based in the same building as the Met Office.

"Devon was always a holiday destination for us so, in some respects I've always felt I'm on holiday down here, whether that's doing something hideous or something of interest," he says. "We try and celebrate the region – all the colour and life in the West Country, from your Dartmoor ponies to murders and arguments over cream teas."

While the West Country escaped the worst of the crisis, the pandemic still brought new ways of working.

"The NHS weren't very cooperative to our requests, even simple answers to simple questions, so we did very little intensive care unit type stuff," says Lawrence.

Some interviews were done over Zoom, but he also got out and about, looking for light-hearted stories as well to balance the doom and gloom. The difficulty was trying not to alienate the viewers by being in too many locations. "You don't want to be stood there talking about the beach when your viewers are stuck at home," he observes.

Although Exeter is a rapidly expanding city, jobs in journalism are in steady decline. The local newspaper, the Express & Echo (published by Reach), moved from daily to weekly in 2011 and is now based in Plymouth. Around

15 journalists work across the print edition and website DevonLive.com, around 10 of whom live in Exeter or just outside. All staff are now working remotely.

It was the cuts in local newspapers that prompted former Express & Echo editor Marc Astley to look for other revenue streams when he left the paper in 2011. "I spent the last three years of my career making people redundant and that made me miserable," he says.

Recognising the situation wasn't about to change, he set up independent crowdsourced website The Exeter Daily as 'an antidote to hard news' and the 'courts, crime and crashes' covered by DevonLive. He now has 12 websites under the Daily banner, covering Devon and Eastbourne, as well as lifestyle, travel, property, parenting and pets sections.

Eighty per cent of the content comes from people who use the sites – the rest they curate from sources such as press releases or write themselves.

"On an average day, there will be at least six stories written to be published and photographs sent too. I give it a check, hit the publish button and up it goes," he says.

"They may not be Pulitzer prize winning but they're perfectly well written and legible and, most importantly, it's good local community grass roots content."

The pandemic worked in his favour. With a lot of advertising moving online and people taking more of an interest in their local community, revenue increased by 10-15 per cent, prompting him to launch six sites in the last year alone.

"It took a while to get the model right – we tweaked it as we went along – and we're now in a position where the Exeter site is a strong revenue generator, Devon is coming up close behind and the lifestyle sites are generating cash as well," he says.

Astley absorbs the initial costs and the website editors work for free until their site starts to generate an income and they do a revenue split.

His biggest decision now is whether to grow organically, albeit slowly, or look to invest. (He has already had

## Local opportunities

### BBC goes to college

The BBC is opening a newsroom inside Exeter College this year. Mark Grinnell, editor of BBC Radio Devon, says: "BBC journalists working in the office will

produce output for BBC Spotlight on BBC 1, Radio Devon and the BBC News website. Journalism and media students at Exeter College will also pitch story ideas and have mentoring sessions

- that's part of the BBC's commitment to encouraging and developing new talent."

### Independent films

Preston Street Films is one of a number of small independent companies creating videos, documentaries

and content for corporate clients. They work with the BBC and charities such as the MS Society and hire freelancers on a project basis.

### No limit to community news

Marc Astley, founder of The Exeter Daily and

several other crowdsourced websites, believes there is "a massive opportunity" to take the model further. "In terms of subject matter and geography, there is absolutely no limit to what we can do, but each site takes investment and a while to generate money."

approaches.) "I'm surprised not more people are doing what we're doing," he says. "It's a no-brainer."

The appetite for local news is also driving Radio Exe, the only commercial radio station broadcasting from Exeter.

Managing director Paul Nero describes the impact of the pandemic on Radio Exe as 'catastrophic'.

The station launched a crowdfunding campaign and BBC Radio Devon (based in Plymouth) stepped in to provide news bulletins. All the staff, bar one presenter, were furloughed and the station relied on volunteers and freelance help to maintain the service.

"This is a team of eight people producing a 24/7 radio station," says Nero. "We don't get any public money - our advertising funding is all we have and most of our clients were in the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors so, as soon as the pandemic came on, just about all our revenue disappeared."

Having said that, Nero is hopeful for the future. The station has just hired three local democracy reporters and there are signs the audience is growing.

"Local content is what drives this station," he says. "We can see the importance of news through the readers on our website - we actually have more readers on our website than listeners. That shows it's driven by news."

Exeter has been chosen as one of 25 locations in the UK to get new 'small-scale DAB' radio stations, which could see the launch of 25 radio stations for the city by the end of the year.

Radio Exe has applied to run the network as part of a consortium called ExeDAB with community stations Phonic FM and Riviera FM, and hopes to set up a station called Devon20Twenty ('everything you need to know in Devon in 20 minutes, every 20 minutes').

"People can enjoy that rare thing - a work/life balance. Meetings are a cup of coffee on the quayside, weekends are spent walking along the River Exe, taking in a pint along the way, and beaches and green countryside are nearby."

**Harriet Noble,**  
**Exeter Living**

"There is never any shortage of stories."

**Richard Lawrence,**  
**ITV**

"Diversity and opportunities are limited but, if you have a young family, it's a nice city to be in."

**Guy Natanel,**  
**Preston Street Films**

"It feels like a city on the up."

**Paul Nero,**  
**Radio Exe**

The move would enable services like XpressionFM, the Exeter University station, and Spark Radio at Exeter College to go digital too.

So what is Exeter like as a place to live? Lifestyle magazines Exeter Living (owned by Bath-based publisher Media Clash) and Exeter Life (published by Archant) offer a glimpse of not only the scenery but also the sense of community.

Although the pandemic has seen some big restaurant chains collapse, it has paved the way for independents.

"The entrepreneurial spirit in Exeter runs deep and innovative indies are popping up all the time," says Harriet Noble, editor of Exeter Living. "Businesses like Sacred Grounds, the hi-end vegan eatery, Pura Vida, the cool cafe with eye-popping interiors, and Bookbag, the city's newest independent bookshop."

As well as the university, the city is home to Premiership and European rugby champions the Exeter Chiefs, and football club, Exeter City, one of the few clubs to be owned by its supporters. The city is also a big shopping destination with a John Lewis and an IKEA; it has a good range of bars and restaurants, including The Ivy, which has recently opened opposite the cathedral.

Guy Natanel, a documentary filmmaker and co-director of Preston Street Films, moved to Exeter from London in 2016. One attraction for him was the open space.

"You have the hills, rivers, moors, beaches and that's amazing," he says. "After I moved here from London, I understood green space a bit differently."

"When you're in the city, especially during the pandemic, the parks and green space are like islands within the city where people find refuge. I see Exeter as the opposite - an urban space within a green landscape and that's really good for work-life balance."

# All well on the ho

Remote working is welcomed by some but tough on many, finds **Gill Oliver**

**T**here are always winners and losers in any situation and working from home provides the perfect example. After more than a year of staff being encouraged not to go into the workplace, there is a growing gulf regarding the experiences and prospects of publishing professionals whose homes have had to become their office.

Working from home has upsides, such as saving time and money from not commuting and the opportunity to live further away. It works better for some, particularly those with a dedicated working space.

But younger and earlier-stage career employees have been hit hard, with many frustrated that those making the decisions appear to have little or no understanding of their situation.

These findings are from a national survey carried out by the Oxford branch of the NUJ working with the Oxford Publishing Society (OpUS) and the Oxford branch of the Society of Young Publishers (SYP). Almost 1,000 publishing professionals took part in 'Beyond lockdown – does working from home work for you?', representing academic books and journals and schools/educational publishing, through to trade publishing, children's books and magazines and newsletters.

The majority (87 per cent) work full time but the survey also included part-time, freelance and short-term contract workers.

From the outset, Oxford branch felt it crucial to allow respondents to add comments throughout the questionnaire and as follow-up. Nothing could have prepared us for the outpouring of heartfelt insights about a lack of suitable equipment, unreliable broadband, childcare problems, impossibly cramped working conditions, isolation and longer working hours.

But back to the positives. Just over half of respondents said their working from home environment in terms of space, lighting, heat, noise and less interruptions was 'slightly better' or 'a lot better' than their usual office. Workers with disabilities, such as anxiety and ADHD, particularly valued being away from the workplace.

However, the picture is far less rosy for younger and earlier career staff. Home working requires space, so those sharing flats or houses often struggled with difficult conditions.

Many just did not have the space for equipment that complies with health and safety regulations, such as a properly adjusted screen, separate keyboard and mouse, supportive chair and suitable desk. More than half (57 per cent) were managing with 'slightly worse' or 'a lot worse' equipment while working from home.

A significant number were suffering back pain, eye strain, shoulder and arm tension, wrist pain and even sciatica.

There was a degree of exasperation. One wrote: "While my

boss has converted a spare room into a lovely office at her house, I am stuck working from home in a studio, so no divide between work and personal, on a desk barely wider than my computer and a chair that isn't very supportive, both of which I had to purchase myself specifically for WFH and not even storage for work documents, meaning I have piles of work and magazines on my floor."

Some felt the need to move – decamping to parents' homes or renting or buying a bigger house in another (cheaper) area.

The erosion of boundaries between home and working lives and an inability to switch off were also major source of stress. This has led to 'accidental overworking'. One in three respondents were working more hours than before and a significant number were doing unpaid extra work.

One wrote: "Far easier to work overtime without the prompt of getting a train or seeing everyone else put on their coats."

Another said: "Without having to commute, I start earlier and tend to get carried away at the end of the day so finish later as well, without having a deadline to stop such as train to catch/office closing."

Other issues included the feeling of being expected to be 'always on' and Microsoft Teams and Zoom 'fatigue'.



# me front?

“We’re always at work – meetings are arranged for all hours of the day to fit global timetables and now there is no ‘home time’ and no need for commuting. There is an unspoken expectation that we are available,” one reported.

Anxiety over not being able to read colleagues’ and managers’ body language during video calls was coupled with a fear of interrupting when direct messaging with a query.

Perhaps most concerning is the large number of respondents who felt isolated. This often affected confidence, relationships with colleagues and mental health.

Asked what were the key stresses, one respondent wrote: “Confidence – you feel like you’re on your own so attending/presenting at meetings can be more overwhelming somehow.”

Another commented: “Isolation – this has led to me second-guessing a lot of my decision making and my self-confidence has taken a hit. I feel less self-assured.”

Pamela Morton, NUJ national organiser for magazines and books, says: “This survey brings into sharp focus how working from home impacts people differently and the difficulties individuals are facing. While it works for many, lots of members are having to work in unsuitable accommodation and work environments, with inadequate space and equipment.”



**They are losing opportunities most of us took for granted to listen to and learn from those around them**



She adds: “Members tell us they are struggling with musculoskeletal and mental health issues and feelings of isolation. What was coped with because we knew we were in an emergency situation is now becoming a long-term requirement with companies closing offices. We’re seeing members leave jobs because they don’t want to work in this way any more.”

So, where do we go from here? Oxford branch, with OPuS and SYP, aims to open up an inclusive, national conversation about how we all want to shape the home/office balance in the future.

Anna Wagstaff, Oxford branch secretary, explains: “While some of us have enjoyed working from home, others have found it highly stressful. The survey’s value has been to shed light on the reasons behind these different experiences.”

And spare a thought for those just starting out in their publishing career, since opportunities for informal teaching and learning and networking are lost when working remotely.

Wagstaff says: “The survey reveals they are being particularly hard hit because they are losing opportunities most of us took for granted to listen to and learn from those around them, and meet and interact with people beyond their immediate team.

“This poses a question about not only the development of the next generation but also how the industry will deliver on its commitments to become more diverse and inclusive. These and other issues are going to be a huge issue across the publishing industry as we move towards a new normal.”

She adds: “As a publishing union, it is up to us to take a lead in arguing for companies to carry out meaningful and transparent impact assessments before introducing major changes to how we work, and to monitor the impact to ensure new arrangements don’t disadvantage those who are already struggling the most.”

It is a view shared by Morton, who adds: “Companies should be consulting and making sure they do impact assessments, looking at the impact on those with protected characteristics, regularly checking how staff are – and companies need to be flexible and offer individuals choice and control.”

## Too little help, too low pay

**OVERALL**, the ‘Beyond lockdown’ survey shows that many employers provided support that was too little or too late – one year into the pandemic, in some cases.

Some respondents had to buy or borrow equipment, and many could not take up offers of workstations owing to cramped living conditions.

“It’s a small flat, it’s not designed to be lived and worked in at this level. There are four of us squashed in, all needing tech and broadband access,” one wrote.

Another said: “Don’t have space for a desk, so work area is a combination of side table, small chest of drawers and knitting machine table.”

Employees allowed to collect office equipment were often left to arrange transport but, without a car, this was not feasible.

Many feel strongly that salaries needed to be increased – especially at early career level.

One asked: “How can the publishing industry pay entry level staff £23,000 and expect them to have a comfortable work from home

setup?” Another wrote: “The last year has thrown into sharp relief how awful salaries are in publishing and how little sense it makes to expect us to live in one of the most expensive cities in the world on such little money.

“I didn’t mind my rubbish flat when I had an office to work in but now I’m trapped in it, unable to afford to rent anything better but also unable to take the plunge and leave London because we might be back in the office at some undetermined point.”

# Remembering their lives

The pandemic has highlighted the work of obituary writers, says **Simon Creasey**

**O**ne group of journalists who have been busier than others throughout the pandemic are the obituarists. In 2020, the UK experienced an estimated additional 85,000 deaths, many as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. And 2021 is shaping up to be another year that will see a high number of additional deaths. How have obituary writers and editors coped with these pressures and how has the way they work changed?

The biggest and most obvious change obituarists have experienced over the past 12 months is the sheer number of deaths that have been recorded on a daily basis, month after month. For freelance obituary writers such as Tim Bullamore, work has felt 'relentless' at times.

"As soon as one obit is written, another is waiting to be started," says Bullamore. "That's not unusual in the winter months, but it has been like this for a long time now. There has been little time to write advance pieces and even less time to spend hunting down fascinating stories of people who are not famous, which in quieter months is one of the more interesting parts of this job."

Chris Maume, deputy editor at The Telegraph, reports a similar situation. He says the paper has had more obituary pieces to contend with because of the pandemic.

"At the end of the year, we did a gallery of all the Covid-related deaths we'd covered – and there were 53," says Maume.

While the number of additional deaths in the UK over the past year has been high because of Covid-19, for some obituarists it has not turned out to be as torrid a period workwise as they had initially feared.

"Last March, I was prepared for the worst, thinking I would be snowed under with candidates," says Ann Wroe, obituaries editor at The Economist. "I remember a week when Tom Hanks caught Covid, and I imagined a long queue of famous names all jostling for my single weekly slot.

"But it hasn't worked out that way. The great majority of the people I've covered – perhaps 90 – didn't even die from Covid but from something else entirely, usually just the wear and tear of old age."

She adds that this might be because the people she covers in the magazine "predominantly fall into the middle- or upper-middle classes – that is true of all obituary pages in the national press – and people in that demographic haven't been so susceptible to the virus. That may explain why nothing seemed to change".

Although Ben Cooke, an obituary writer at The Times, says the past year has been challenging in many ways, his workload as an obituarist has not been more demanding than usual.

"I haven't been much busier or had to work to tighter deadlines because we haven't actually increased the page count of the obituaries section," says Cooke. "So the increase in the death rate this year hasn't translated into a higher number of words to write."

Although The Times did not increase the pagination of their obituary section, some rival publications did to ensure they were in a position to cover additional deaths.

"When the Journal section was reorganised at the start of lockdown a year ago, our pages went up from 10 to 14," recalls Robert White, obituaries editor at The Guardian. "Our previous space had been rather cramped, with single pages on three days of the week, and we now publish an Other Lives spread every week, as opposed to fortnightly previously."

Bullamore believes that some editors missed a trick and that more publications could have set aside additional pages to cover obituaries.

"In the early days of the pandemic, when arts and sports news all but evaporated, I made what

I felt was a convincing case to my editors to expand the obituary pages, but to no avail," he says.

"Maybe it was considered in poor taste, or perhaps it was felt readers would tire of too much death. There certainly have been the candidates to fill additional pages.

"There's always a backlog of obits in winter, but the backlog never eased up in the summer months and I'm sure some excellent stories have never been told."

When it comes to editorial decision-making around who is to be included in the obituary pages, White says he has been applying the same criteria as he always applies throughout the pandemic – "the useful difference a subject made, expressed in terms that readers will find interesting. It's always difficult, but the last year hasn't been any worse."

It is an approach shared by Cooke, who says that, when writing an obituary, you have to choose a lens through which to view someone.

"For instance, I've just been writing an obituary of a physicist and theologian," he says. "In so doing, I had to decide whether to see his story through the lens of his scientific or his theological work. Was he a theologian who happened also to be a scientist, or a scientist who happened also to be a theologian?"

"For a few people, Tom Moore included, Covid has become that lens. Another example would be Li Wenliang, the Chinese doctor who tried to warn people about Covid before falling victim to it himself.

"For many other people, Covid hasn't had quite such a defining effect on their legacy, but it has impinged upon it. For instance, I mentioned Covid in my obituary of hygiene expert Val Curtis even though she didn't die of it, because it illustrated, in the last year of her life, the importance of her work."

Maume says that decisions on who to cover and who not to cover in the obituary section of his newspaper did not change as a result of the pandemic. "If they're worth doing a piece on, it doesn't matter how they died," he says.

However, he adds that towards the end of last year "we were asked by the back bench if it was

DAVID HUMPHREYS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



LEFT: RICHARD LEVINE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

feasible to run a gallery of 'ordinary' people who had died of Covid but, to be honest, we just didn't have the manpower to take that on. I don't think The Times or Guardian have done that either although the bigger American papers have done so".

Wroe says that she did contemplate doing a series of obituaries on 'ordinary' people – in the past she has written about victims of terror attacks in Paris and in Christchurch in New Zealand.

"For a while, I planned to do the same with Covid and find just one victim – a London bus driver was my first thought – whose life I could write," she explains. "But to gather enough details of any one driver's life – without contacting the family, which I don't do on principle – proved impossible. And, as the numbers of dead grew and grew, it looked increasingly odd to focus on merely one of them."

While the way some obituary writers and editors work may not have changed significantly since the start of the pandemic, Cooke says it

has, nevertheless, changed the way some obituaries are written up.

"Covid has quickly taken its place among a handful of historic events that crop up again and again in our obits, the Second World War being the prime example," he says. "These are events of such import that they change the direction of people's lives."

"The best example of Covid's power to do so is probably Captain Tom Moore. Moore would probably not have got an obituary had he not become, in the last year of his life, a national symbol of fortitude in the face of the pandemic and, had he got one, it would have read very differently."

Maume highlights another key difference in the way obituaries are written up at his paper

## Captain Tom was the very best of us

Judith Woods



In a national crisis in which heroism has sprung from many places, and in many guises, Captain Sir Tom Moore's contribution struck a unique chord with the British people.

Within a few months he became a symbol of steadfast endurance; a household name; a bona fide national treasure. He drummed up more than £32 million for the NHS, an unprecedented amount. Yet that alone does not explain the remarkable way in which he captured our imagination.

Captain Tom's original aim was to raise £1,000 by completing 100 laps, each a 25-metre loop, of his garden in Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire, before his 100th birthday last April.

He used a walking frame, campaign medals catching the light as he purposefully, effortlessly, put one foot in front of the other, day after day. Soon a nation under lockdown was looking on, mesmerised and moved by his unshowy display of resolve.

Among the battle metaphors, it seemed fitting that a Second World War veteran should command such admiration for stepping up, especially after recovering from skin cancer and a broken hip.

At a time when the world

because of the pandemic. "We don't normally give a cause of death for over-70s, but we took a decision at the beginning of the pandemic to state the cause of death, if Covid, whatever the age, simply because it was the issue dominating everything so seemed newsworthy," he says.

As for Bullamore, he says the biggest shift he has detected for obituarists is that some deaths have been politicised by members of the public.

"Increasingly, an obit that says 'died of Covid-19' will generate comments such as 'died of or died with?' as if we are intentionally trying to portray an exaggerated picture of the pandemic," he says. "It is not a comment that I recall being made about other causes of death. We are not looking to provide a medical report or an autopsy but just to give the reader an idea of what happened, especially in the case of younger deaths."

It is too early to say if the way obituarists work will change indelibly because of the pandemic but their work has become higher profile and more mainstream than before.

**Jonathan Sale** travels back in time in the outside broadcast van

# INSIDE OUT

**A**lthough he was only eight at the time, Richard Whiteley never forgot his first glimpse of an outside broadcast van. On the way home from school, he saw it parked on a road on the Yorkshire Moors. His father asked if his little boy could have a look inside.

“By all means,” said the technician, who then went back into the van and shut the door in their faces. For years, little Richard wondered what lay inside.

Although we were on the same corridor of the same Cambridge college, reading the same subject and both working on Varsity, the student paper, he kept quiet about his ambition for a job in TV. Finally, after graduating, he joined ITN and discovered what lay on the other side of the door. He soon moved to Yorkshire TV and Countdown.

For many in the real world – ie not the media – an OB may be the nearest they get to the workings of the TV world. It is television’s great selling point: it brings us something happening far away – at the very moment when it is happening.

There are several milestones marking the development of live transmissions outside the security of the studio. The first OB ‘high-definition’ broadcast in Britain – ie you could make out what was on the screen, as opposed to a few ghostly lines waving about – in Britain was one of the experimental transmissions at Alexandra Palace on its hill in north London.

On 5 September 1936, a few weeks before the official launch of the BBC, comedian and singer (‘Let’s All Sing the Lard Song’) Leonard Henry left the building, got into his car and drove away round the corner. OK, not much of itself but someone from The Daily Telegraph, who chanced to be popping into the studios, suggested that a camera be pointed at this little scene. It was the lift man who realised the significance of this historic event: “Blimey, we’ve made an OB!”

The fact that he used that handy abbreviation instead of the full ‘outside broadcast’, suggests that the concept was not a totally new one and, blimey, it wasn’t. The Germans had beaten the Brits to it by a month. The Berlin ‘Nazi’ Olympics had boasted live coverage from three cameras

with two mobile television vans; the audience might not have had their own sets but a total of 150,000 watched in 28 special viewing rooms.

‘Mobile’ is not quite the word for the BBC cameras in those early days. There were two designs in use. The John Logie Baird variety involved two types of picture-making; close-ups were shot in a darkened studio with infrared lighting, which prevented performers from reading the script; long shots came courtesy of 17.5mm film (35mm cut in two) which was rapidly processed and scanned to be turned into a television picture.

Then, presumably, everyone would lie down in a darkened room to recover from this technical fiddle-faddle. If so, they got up when it was time to make another of their pioneering programmes, some of which were outside – or fairly outside – broadcasts, limited by the

short length of the cable between camera and transmitter.

“At present, the camera is tied to a huge cable as thick as my wrist,” explained Cecil Lewis at the time. A pioneer of radio who had now moved to television as director of outside broadcasting, he added: “We can only go as far as the cable can stretch, a few hundred feet round the Palace grounds.” Surveying London spread below, he added: “Look at all those outside broadcasts waiting for us to get to them!”

He prophesied a time when London would be equipped with a network of ‘special co-axial cables’ into which the mobile cameras of the future would be plugged. Looking even further ahead, he said: “You could take a ‘young’ transmitter about with you in a van and send a wireless signal to the main transmitter... Then the world’s your oyster.”

## Simpson’s world of war broadcasting

“**SOD’S LAW,**” declares BBC World Affairs editor John Simpson, “means that, directly you start filming, the firing and bombing always stop and you make yourself look an idiot to the newsroom: Why is this man making such a fuss?”

On the other hand, he continues: “There was one time, 20 years ago, when my cameraman and I were recording a programme for Simpson’s World.

“We happened to be in a gun battle between the Taliban

and the mujahideen forces. Bullets are small and go terribly fast and you can’t see them – fortunately, both sides had tracer bullets which shone very clearly through the evening light.

“We did an entire programme without any let-up. As far as I know, it was the first time anyone had recorded anything like a full battle.



“In the first Gulf War, every time the ‘coalition’ forces started attacking – one of the bombs hit our hotel – the cowardly Iraqi police would come in for shelter and so we were able to get on to London, only to be told, ‘We’re doing an interview with the LibDem education spokesman. We can’t possibly interrupt.’”

In the second Gulf War, he was blown unconscious in a US plane’s ‘friendly fire’ bombing which killed 18 US soldiers and mujahideen allies,

including his young translator, who was next to him.

Coming round, Simpson contacted London on his satellite phone: “Within five minutes, they cut me straight into the live broadcast.”

During this OB report, an American paramedic, concerned about the blood coming out of Simpson’s ears, came to his aid.

“I was a little bemused and got it into my stupid head that, as he was American and it was an American plane, he was trying to stop me. Something about being a journalist – you always think someone is trying to stop you reporting.”

# Looking back to: OBs

HO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



SUEDDEISCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Until the oyster opened up his world, the handful of BBC viewers had to make do with OBs of assorted activities in the grounds of Alexandra Palace. There were model aircraft in flight and 'simulated sheepdog trials' (sadly, no footage remains of simulated sheep). Sir Malcolm Campbell – yes, the Malcolm Campbell, holder of the land and water speed records – showed off the new models coming to the Motor Show; a Major Faudel-Phillips gave a riding lesson. Another snippet made the comedian-in-car episode seem positively action packed: a camera placed on a Palace balcony showed a selection of nearby trees and was itself filmed, with its cameraman, by another camera inside the building.

As you may have gathered, like 'steam radio', steam television took a little while to come to the boil and may have given sceptics the impression that this new-fangled device would never catch on. Fortunately, less than a year later, the BBC was able to achieve its first far-flung outside broadcast, the coronation procession of George VI. Not the whole procession, but the bit visible from Apsley Gate on Hyde Park Corner, where the mobile units were very stationary at the time. A month

later, tennis at Wimbledon got the OB treatment. So, later, did two of the pre-war FA Cup finals, although the scarcity of TV sets meant there were more people in the stands than watching at home.

The next major OB event came in 1938: Neville Chamberlain's return by air from his meeting with Hitler. The BBC was able to act with a speed that would be impressive even today. The decision to cover the landing was made on the morning of September 30 and off the OB van raced to Heston airport. It carried two cameras: one on the roof provided the mid-shot and the other focused on the aircraft steps for the interview with the prime minister.

"We saw, and heard, the machine circle in the air, land and taxi up to the waiting group of cabinet ministers," enthused *The Listener* magazine. Viewers could even read scraps of the

writing on the (worthless, as it turned out) agreement signed by Chamberlain and Hitler. They could hear the PM declare that he had brought back 'peace in our time'.

Unfortunately, the time was not peaceful – not, at least, until seven years later. The failure of the trip, and the ensuing hostilities meant that OBs and all the rest of BBC TV transmissions were off air until 1946. Apart from a Mickey Mouse cartoon, an outside broadcast was the last item transmitted in 1939 (as a rival cartoon creation would put it, 'That's all, folks') and, in 1946, it was an OB – of an announcer going into Alexandra Palace – which, in a pleasing echo of the first OB, started the BBC cameras rolling again.

Incidentally, technology cannot conquer everything, as war baby Richard Whiteley was to learn when trying to conduct interviews on a state-of-the-art satellite OB truck in Westminster after the 'resignation' of Margaret Thatcher. This sent its signals 26,000 miles into space to reach Yorkshire TV in Leeds but the vehicle could not be parked on the green opposite the Houses of Parliament. No parking permit, declared the traffic wardens.

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## STEVE BELL



# Liars, damned liars and Boris Johnson



## Raymond Snoddy ponders terminological inexactitudes

**W**hat on earth should we call Boris Johnson? No, not that – at least not on this occasion. This is a serious question and one that most of the media, particularly television, has failed to address properly or resolve.

Is Boris Johnson a liar and, if so, should he be called out unambiguously as one live on air?

Perhaps the softer description as someone who has sometimes told lies would suffice.

Or does Johnson simply make up or totally mangle numbers because of a marked distaste for the hard work of preparing and absorbing briefs and does not care? Could it also be that he simply uses preposterous streams of words to bamboozle his opponents rather than lying?

The BBC's political editor Laura Kuenssberg has uncovered another theory about Johnson's casual relationship with the truth.

A former minister told her: "The problem is that it's becoming clearer that the PM treats facts like he treats all his relationships – utterly disposable once inconvenient."

Does making misleading statements count? If so, a large number of politicians would be caught in that net.

In the case of parliament, where honourable members are not allowed to call other honourable members liars, is there any life left in Churchill's famous 1906 coinage – terminological inexactitude?

Labour MP Dawn Butler blew such niceties apart recently when she called Johnson a liar on the floor of the Commons, adding that "We get into trouble in this House for calling out the lies rather than the liar". Ironically

Butler was expelled from the House for a day for this.

To qualify as a full-throated liar, two conditions have to be met. Repeated offences are necessary because a single lie hardly qualifies a person for the enduring status of liar. There should also be deliberation – the person involved absolutely knew that what they were saying was false at the time they said it.

That, unfortunately, can be a difficult one to prove either way, although Johnson came close to meeting the criteria when he called true allegations of an affair 'an inverted pyramid of piffle'

There is the additional problem of different types of lies and lying – pathological and narcissistic as well as bog standard lying for advantage.

You might think Johnson fulfils some of the definitions of a pathological liar – someone who tells stories that fall between conscious lies and delusion, and who may even believe their own lies. Narcissistic liars emit blatant lies, spin the truth and try to distort your sense of reality, a syndrome that has a somewhat familiar ring to it.

You can take your pick but the media overall has to find better ways to expose the many things Boris Johnson says that are demonstrably untrue.

Political commentator Peter Osborne did not hesitate to denounce prime ministerial lying in his book *The Assault on Truth*, complete with examples including Johnson's claim that there would be no border controls between Britain and Northern Ireland. This was repeated even after he had signed the protocol making them inevitable. Johnson's biographer Andrew Gimson has attributed such an outrageous claim to 'wishful thinking'.

Calling out Johnson may be easier to do in print and online than on live

linear television.

Campaigning lawyer and film-maker Peter Stefanovic created a video of "provably false" Johnson statements in the House of Commons and challenged broadcasters to show it.

For months, despite the video eventually having more than 25 million views on Twitter, none did.

Then, in early July, *Good Morning Britain* ran part of the video and interviewed Stefanovic, as it happened, when former Labour spokesman Alastair Campbell was presenting alongside Susanna Reid.

Apart from the border in the Irish Sea, the exhibits against Johnson include the claim that the pre-Covid UK economy had grown by 73 per cent under recent Conservative governments. The true figure is around 20 per cent and the 73 per cent figure includes 15 years of Labour government. Is this a Johnson lie, just more Johnson wishful thinking or making things up as he goes along?

In most cases, it may be near impossible to tell and the standard of evidence needed to call the prime minister of the UK a liar, as opposed to lying, is high.

In the end it may not matter too much what the media actually decides to call Boris Johnson. What matters mightily, however, is that he be held to account for the many provably false statements he has made from the dispatch box and never corrected as the rules require.

As the work of Stefanovic and Osborne (whose book has largely been ignored by the main media outlets) demonstrate, there is still much work to be done.

For democracy can barely function when governments have only a loose attachment to the truth.

**“The media overall has to find better ways to expose the many things Boris Johnson says that are demonstrably untrue”**

by **Tim Lezard**

# arts

## Film >

### Profile

*Released August 6*

How far would you go for a story? French journalist Anna Erelle's book *In The Skin of a Jihadist* has been turned into a mystery thriller, *Profile*, which details her undercover investigation into the recruitment of young European women by ISIS. She creates a fake Facebook profile, pretending to be a recent convert to Islam and, against the advice of her news editor, plans to join her terrorist contact in Syria.

<https://tinyurl.com/zbzysupb>

### The Last Letter From My Lover

*Released August 6*

Ambitious journalist Ellie Haworth discovers a trove of love letters from 1965 and becomes determined to solve the mystery of the forbidden affair at their centre. Based on the novel by JoJo Moyes, this stylish romance flits effortlessly between decades.

<https://tinyurl.com/94ttvtj7>

## Exhibition

### For Those That Tell No Tales

*Crawford Art Gallery, Cork and online*

*Until August 29*

Dara McGrath focuses on Ireland's War of Independence when, between 1919



and 1921, approximately 1,400 people died. Cork city and county saw the bloodiest of the fighting. More than 60 photographs and accompanying text by McGrath reveal the full extent of the lives of the people and the places in the city where they perished during the struggle for freedom

<https://tinyurl.com/d6ubat9b>

## Comedy

### Sarah Millican: Bobby Dazzler

Sarah has spent the last year writing jokes and growing her backside. She tells you what happens when your mouth seals shut, how to throw poo over a wall and how truly awful a floatation tank can be.

<https://tinyurl.com/68uj85d3>

### Jonny and the Baptists: Dance Like It Never Happened

*On tour throughout August and September*

This is a show about grief and loss. In their most honest and personal show yet, the musical duo learn to accept

and engage with their grief, telling the story of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance through their trademark blend of silly, joyful songs, deadpan stand-up and riotous storytelling. The production shows how they find meaning, humour and beauty in the hardest part of life.

<https://tinyurl.com/p7a9rbhy>

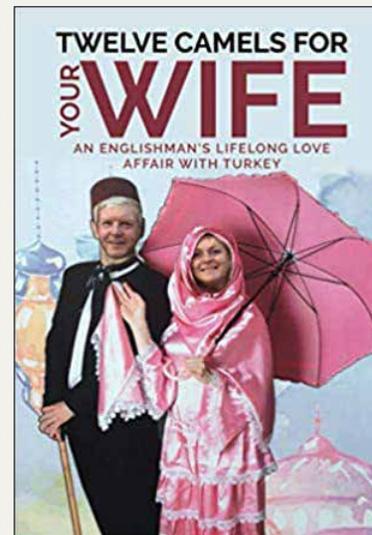
## Books

### Geordie Plays (Volume One)

*by Ed Waugh*

Ed Waugh has published a collection of his plays about three Geordie heroes: *Carrying David* (about Glenn McCrory becoming the first world champion boxing from the north east), *Hadaway Harry* (about former Durham miner Harry Clasper who invented the sport of rowing as we know it) and *The Great Joe Wilson* (about the bard of Tyneside).

<https://tinyurl.com/4weyvm5>



### Twelve Camels For Your Wife

*by George Dearsley*

NUJ life member and former stringer

George Dearsley writes about his 49-year love affair with Turkey, including being arrested as a spy, watching a man swallow a snake, judging a beauty contest, being given a front row seat at a circumcision and seeing Turkey's most famous criminal crash a plane.

<https://tinyurl.com/pp29j5n3>

## Music

### Edinburgh Summer Sessions

*August 6-15*

Veteran knicker-receiver Tom Jones headlines twice during this year's event. Other stars include Aussie rockers DMA's, London indie/folk/rock/soul singer Michael Kiwanuka, Scottish rockers Simple Minds, funk legend Lionel Richie and Glasgow bore-rockers Travis.

<https://tinyurl.com/kpudevpe>

### Alabama 3

*On tour in the summer and in spring next year*

There's not three of them and they're not from Alabama, but don't let that put you off. The Brixton-based blusters hit the road to play sweet pretty country music all night long.

<https://tinyurl.com/5h4cmb65>

## Theatre

### Oleanna by David Mamet

*Arts Theatre, London*

*Until October 23*

Set on an American campus, a seemingly innocuous conversation between a college professor and his female student leads to a claim of sexual harassment. With its take on the corrosive excesses of political correctness and exploration of the use and abuse of language, this is the ultimate drama of pupil power and student revenge.

<https://tinyurl.com/8fmwnrcc>

## Spotlight >

# Pandemic lives of the 'low skilled'

What's the difference between a low-skilled worker and a key worker? About a month, according to comedian Mark Thomas.

His new podcast project, *Key Words*, draws on nearly 100 hours of

interviews with workers who kept everything going during lockdown.

From bus drivers to cleaners, from care home workers to bin collectors, they talk about what working through the

Covid-19 pandemic meant for them, their struggles and how they continued to work while the government failed to get to grips with the crisis.

The podcast asks what changed for workers and

what stayed the same, what they had to change and what does the future hold for them.

"For the first time in a long time, the rich seemed to realise that they needed the 'low-skilled' more than they needed the rich," Mark tells Arts.

<https://tinyurl.com/nctxmsve>





# TechDownload

**Chris Merriman** on technology for journalists

## byte size...

### ANTIBACTERIAL LINT-FREE CLOTH

It's a universal truth that you never have a lint-free cloth when you need one. Smart Screen comes in a protective bag attached by a handy popper and, as it is impregnated with silver ions and an antibacterial agent, its makers claim it removes 99 per cent of bacteria. It can be washed up to 15 times without losing that coating. You can pick up a Smart Screen in six colours from £9.95.

[www.smartscreen.store](http://www.smartscreen.store)

### EVERNOTE GETS MAJOR UPDATE

Evernote has recently received its biggest updates in years. The note-taking app integrates with most major apps and services. Additions include a dashboard, a spell-checker and printing from mobile. That's just scratching the surface and it's well worth a look. If the free version isn't enough, subscriptions start at £4.99 per month.

<https://evernote.com/>

### MOTIVATION WITH INSULTING APP

If you need some help with self-discipline, the Productivity Challenge Timer app is your friend, albeit one that believes in tough love. Based on the Pomodoro technique, which divides your day into 25-minute bursts of work, it gives some fairly colourful insults if you slack off and a rating that starts at 'unrepentant slacker'. I won't spoil the others - earning them is part of the fun - but 'resigned attendant' is halfway up the list. It's free on Android, with some optional paid extras.

<https://productivitychallengertimer.com>

## PRO SOUND FOR PODCASTS



**A**nyone who is anyone seems to have a podcast these days (hence I don't) and they're not all created equal.

Fortunately, the Shure MV7 podcasting microphone is here to give a professional edge to your musings, even if you don't have a full-on home studio.

Based on the popular professional Shure mic (the hallowed SM7B), this version adds a USB connector so you can plug it straight into your computer without lots of faffing around with mixing desks - though it does have a proper XLR connector too, studio geeks.

The MV7 has a few more tricks up its sleeve, thanks to a glut of extra controls in the bundled app. For example, if you're trying to record from the kitchen

table, it can compensate for background noise or if you're sitting too near (or far) from the microphone.

Most importantly, it can adjust your voice to give it those warm rich radio tones, and you don't have to know a thing about sound engineering.

It's not just for beginners, however. It has all the specs of a studio mic, so it will meet your needs as your skills and confidence grow. You can order one from Shure's website, starting at £259 if you already have a mic stand. If not, add £30.

<https://tinyurl.com/edayrvf>

## > TV monitoring in a box

**I**f, like me, your work involves a lot of media monitoring, the value of a separate set-top box cannot be overestimated. Smart TVs tend to have a

limited services, and software updates stop before the set reaches the end of its useful life.

Fortunately, the Humax Aura does it (almost) all. It combines a Freeview Play recorder and

an Android TV box into one 4K-ready box. It can take you from BBC News HD to a (legal) stream of an NBC affiliate in the US with a few clicks.

It supports pretty much any service although, at the time of going to press, Netflix was

still 'coming soon' for boring licensing reasons.

It has a 1TB/2TB hard drive. The 4K will make films 'pop' and offers some future-proofing for when 4K TV channels become more prevalent.

<https://tinyurl.com/v8sutx7t>

REMOTE BY RETRO FIT

Control your space, including the curtains

Switchbot has taken a new approach to automating your home or office. The original Switchbot was a tiny robot arm that stuck to your switches and pressed them on or off for you. The latest addition - a bot that sits on your curtain rail and opens and closes them for you. The optional hub doubles as an infrared remote controller, which you can teach to control your products. Retrofitting devices can be a bit fiddly, but the results work brilliantly. Bots start at around £25. Curtainbot is around £90.

[www.switch-bot.com](http://www.switch-bot.com)

## SPEAK WELL ON THE ROAD

**W**hether it's to take with you on assignment or for presenting to an audience, once in a while you need a good speaker. There are so many on the market that it's tempting to assume that they're going to be much of a muchness.

The truth is there are some terrible ones that cost twice as much as the Anker Soundcore Motion Boom, which is among the best I've tested. Anker products have always been a cut above, and the combination of rich, room-filling sound, intuitive set-up and keen pricing sets a new bar.

Add the fact that it's incredibly light, has a moulded carry handle and the option to connect two together for a bigger stereo sound, it's hard to find a reason not to recommend this.

They are £89.99 on Amazon - but look out for offers.

[www.link.com](http://www.link.com)





## George Makin

George Makin, an 'old school' Black Country local democracy reporter and dedicated NUJ member, has sadly died.

The 62-year-old, who had been covering the Sandwell and Dudley areas as part of the BBC-funded scheme, said in April that he had incurable cancer. He succumbed to the disease on June 15.

George worked as a freelance photographer and as a production assistant for a video production company for a number of years.

He embarked on a career change in 1998, when he earned his NCTJ pre-entry certificate from Sutton Coldfield College to complement the City and Guilds radio and journalism qualification he had completed five years earlier.

He was a journalist in the West Midlands for more than 20 years, having started his journalism career at the Walsall Advertiser in 1999. Here, he spent a decade first as a senior reporter and worked his way up to become deputy chief reporter.

He was also the lead reporter on politics in the borough, where he built a reputation for being dogged and determined in holding those in power to account.

His flair and skills saw him scoop a clutch of awards, including the Central Independent Newspapers Story of the Year in 2005. He was also honoured at the Newspaper Society awards for his feature writing in 2007 and 2008.

After leaving the Advertiser, George became a freelance journalist and public relations officer – one of his major clients was the Walsall Labour Group.

His vast experience covering politics meant he was the ideal candidate to fill one of 150 new local democracy reporter roles when the scheme was launched in 2018.

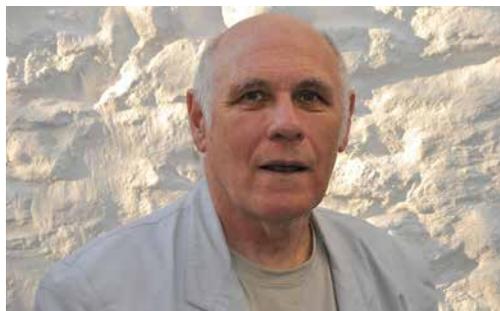
Away from work, he was a doting husband to Deborah and a loving father and grandfather. He loved wildlife and nature and was a keen bird spotter.

Chris Morley, NUJ Northern and Midlands senior organiser, said: "George was a solid and popular NUJ member who took to the new local democracy reporting scheme with a passion.

"He very much stuck to the essence of the job, finding stories of public interest and reporting without fear or favour.

"Despite his distressing circumstances when diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, George did not hide away but was open about his feelings. The Black Country has lost a top-notch journalist and champion in George."

## Gurdip Thandi



## Brian Morgan

Brian Morgan, a longstanding secretary of Cardiff and South East Wales branch and member of the Welsh Executive Council, has died at the age of 81.

Although he was an NUJ activist for many years, few realised that he had had a career in industry before he became a journalist in his 40s.

Born in Swansea, Brian was the youngest of four brothers, one of whom – the late John Morgan – had at one time been the highest paid freelance journalist at the BBC, working on the Tonight programme and for Panorama. He later worked at ITV for This Week.

Previously, Brian pursued a different route, studying maths and physics at Swansea University before working in a variety of roles, eventually becoming managing director of the company that ran what was known as the Jam Factory in Ledbury, Herefordshire.

He became interested in marketing and in the early 1980s set up a local community magazine called Letterbox with his daughter Ruth.

It was at this time that Brian pursued his interest in photography too.

A few years later he moved to Cardiff, where his journalism went in two directions.

His strong sense of social justice led him to investigate a series of cases relating to child abuse and irregularities in child custody cases.

He forged a strong relationship with a small team of investigative journalists working for HTV Wales on the Wales This Week programme.

Brian's enquiries resulted in some strong, hard-hitting programmes.

At the same time, he met and fell in love with Mo Wilson, a talented photographer from Scotland who had moved to Cardiff and became his partner.

Brian and Mo became closely involved in two local communities – the Riverside district of Cardiff, where they took countless documentary photographs of local people, and Rhondda, where they helped young mothers create their own annual magazine, called Teen Mams, for distribution across Wales.

In both communities, Mo and Brian became greatly loved figures.

Very sadly, Mo was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2008 and died two years later.

Always a stalwart member of the NUJ, Brian took comfort from his membership of the union, to which he devoted a great deal of energy and time in his final years.

At a time when persuading members to attend branch meetings could be a daunting challenge, Brian was a constant presence, his contributions always valued.

He had a famously booming voice and enjoyed singing with the Canton Chorus choir in Cardiff.

During the pandemic, his health declined and, after being admitted to hospital, he was diagnosed with cancer.

He spent his last two months in a hospice at Penarth, where it was difficult to visit him because of Covid restrictions. A little over a week before he died, some of us were pleased to be able to speak to Brian from a park on the other side of the hospice fence.

## Martin Shipton



## George Kiely

George Kiely's crowded career spanned journalism, sales, public affairs, industrial development and the study of bioethics and embraced far-flung corners of the globe, where this son of Liverpool proudly flew the flag for industrial development in Ireland.

At the time of his untimely death on July 15 following a brief illness, George was vice-chair and treasurer of Dublin press and PR branch and had been working on a part-time basis as an organiser attached to the NUJ's Irish office. That description scarcely does justice to the scale of his contribution to the union.

George had a well-deserved reputation as a tenacious negotiator with finely honed skills allied to a deep commitment to social justice.

On his retirement from a senior post in Enterprise Ireland, he accepted a part-time contract with the NUJ and embraced with energy the duties of organiser, handling with sensitivity a range of personal cases across all sectors, north and south.

George and his wife Sheila had decided to move from their home in Dublin to Strokestown, County Roscommon, for a quiet life but George immediately threw himself into his new role. Supported by Sheila, he became an indispensable member of the Irish office team, working remotely but always available to travel.

George graduated in modern languages, philosophy and ethics from King's College London and business studies from the University of Liverpool. He also took an MSc in science communication (ethics) jointly at Queens University Belfast and Dublin City University.

George brought a depth of knowledge, experience and wisdom to his branch and to his work as an official. He served as a senior adviser in the entrepreneurship division of Enterprise Ireland, the state economic development agency.

A member of the Irish union SIPTU (as well as the NUJ) George served as chairman of the Forfás/Enterprise Ireland/IDA section committee in the state and related agencies branch of SIPTU from 2003 to 2006 during a critical time in the sector.

Always self-effacing, George wore his learning

and expertise lightly. I still recall his amusement when a regional newspaper company declined to provide criteria for redundancy selection. When George doggedly insisted that the company was obliged to justify its decisions, the HR manager told him with an air of disdain that a union official could hardly be expected to understand the business case.

George – who had represented Enterprise Ireland across India and Asia and served on two enterprise boards – replied that not only could he understand their problem but also he might be able to find a solution that did not involve redundancies or layoffs.

He was widely respected by both members and management representatives, who came to respect his integrity and solution-focused approach to what often appeared intractable problems.

George joined the Irish state economic development sector in 1980 and worked in several capacities including two overseas postings in Iraq and Singapore. He also carried out a variety of assignments for the World Bank in Asia.

A lifelong Liverpool FC supporter, he became most animated when talking about his days as a freelance sports reporter on the Liverpool Evening Echo.

A former member of the NUJ ethics council, he worked extensively in the field of bioethics and took a year's sabbatical in 2005 to work in Dublin City University as a visiting researcher in bioethics.

His untimely death deprives the NUJ of a champion, but the greater loss will be felt by Sheila, whom he married on St Patrick's Day 1986 in Singapore.

It is a cause of great regret that George and Sheila will never get to host his long-promised Dublin press and PR outreach meeting in their west of Ireland home of which they were so proud.

## Séamus Dooley



## Neil Smith

Neil Smith was the chief reporter at the Cumbernauld News.

He retired from the paper back in 2017 and had gone to live in the Charente-Maritime in southwest France with wife June after selling

their property in the Laurieston area of Falkirk.

It was a testament to Neil's great practicality that he was undaunted by the prospect of taking on an extremely run-down property which lacked the basics – and he expertly set about restoring it.

It was first a holiday home, then a permanent bolthole when Neil and June left Scotland for good to live the life they had long dreamed of.

Former colleagues have paid tribute to Neil including his one-time boss Jack Shennan.

Jack said: "Neil was a huge help to me when I was appointed editor of the Cumbernauld News and his knowledge of the area and vast array of contacts were invaluable.

"He had previously worked in the case room – where the company's newspapers were formerly prepared for publication – and I could always count on him for help with pages as the news deadline hurtled towards us.

"What I will miss most is his dry-as-a-bone sense of humour – sometimes mistaken for taciturnity by those who didn't know him – and his stories of his case room days which would often leave me helpless with laughter. In newspaper parlance, Neil was 'a good operator' and I can think of no finer tribute to him."

Another former editor, Jackie Mitchell, said: "Neil was an extremely capable colleague, an old-school journalist who shared his local knowledge with generosity. He will be much missed."

I worked with Neil for more than 15 years. He had a very forthright nature – he just said what he thought. He had a gruff exterior. Yet he could be suave and capable of sensitivity, generosity and a kind word in the bad times.

Neil was very well known to a lot of our Kilsyth readers as well, as he had worked in the office in Market Square before coming to Cumbernauld.

I see Neil as a very big part of the fabric of our newspaper on which he has left an indelible impression.

## Clare Grant

### Mike McKeand memorial service



Mike McKeand's family invite former colleagues to a memorial service at noon, Friday October 1, at Bosham church in West Sussex, with food and drink afterwards. Contact [nigelmckeand@gmail.com](mailto:nigelmckeand@gmail.com)

Four billionaires controlling the press (l-r): Rupert Murdoch (News Corp) Sir Frederick Barclay (Telegraph Group), Lord Rothermere (Daily Mail), Evgeny Lebedev (Evening Standard, The Independent)



# Story behind the picture

Extinction Rebellion's Free the Press march 27/06/2021  
By Andrew Wiard

**Get the picture? Or a picture, anyway. Two protest marches starting at exactly the same time nearly two miles apart. Time to place your bets.**

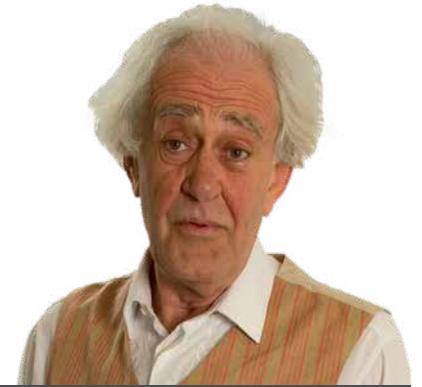
Extinction Rebellion on the Free the Press march – they always made pictures. But I'd seen all that before and, besides, the news picture of the day was already over and gone, everywhere. Early in the morning, XR had dumped manure outside the Mail. Two problems with that picture. One – you couldn't get it, they'd kept it quiet and the pic appeared bylined 'Extinction Rebellion/PA'. Two – it was just a news pic. Not too much anyone could have done with that.

Freedom to Dance, now, that sounded new, and costumes, colour? So – off to see the dancers. Only to find not what I'd imagined at all, just a small group of people outside the BBC – wrong call. No doubt many more later and later so there were, ravers on parade, but later was too late and I had to get down to Extinction Rebellion fast on the off chance that march had not already started. Which it hadn't. Saved by the speeches – they do have their uses.

And then – there they were in Parliament Square. A rogues' gallery on stilts. Murdoch, Barclay, Rothermere, Lebedev. Four spitting images of the media moguls, ready for the off. That really was new. I wanted Murdoch – target number one and by far the best caricature – central, but you get what you're given and I wanted Lebedev's forked tongue. Really shouldn't go for the colour red, but it was a grey day...

The result is nothing special, and too dependent on the work of others. However, it does capture the spirit as well as the 'message' and it says it in one, without any banners or placards. And it has a life beyond the day.

# Are you sitting comfortably?



## Ergonomics should begin at home, says **Chris Proctor**

**I** loathe being told I'm doing something wrong when I am. So, it's been very trying of the union to keep reminding me of how I should sit when I'm working, how my screen should be positioned and where to place papers I'm looking at.

It worries me.

When lockdown began, it was a bit of a novelty to work at home, like going on a picnic. I scattered stuff around the living room table, plugged in the laptop and started scribbling. Six months later, I felt twinges in my back. I panicked and arranged my first-ever appointment with an osteopath.

He told me he'd been to see his GP the previous day. He said he went in, took one look at the medic and said, 'Are you having back pains?' The doctor confessed she was. It seems she was sitting at the front of her chair, bending into the screen, had no footrest and was generally behaving like me. He straightened her up, adjusted her workstation and left. He said it was only later he remembered his ailment.

He says we have all developed a collective notion that ergonomics are only for offices, just as dogs are only for Christmas.

At work, we need eye-high screens, document holders, detachable keyboards and comfortable mice (it might be 'mouses' but I can't bring myself to type 'mouses', although I just have, twice). Working at home, standards drop. It's a fact. I always deteriorate if no one's looking.

I've been spoiled by health and safety reps over the years. I've always been lucky enough to suffer the attentions of a pedant. I used to stroll into the office and, without thinking, plonk my posterior on a pew before sipping a coffee and checking the odds on a racing site. (I think this should read 'beginning immediately with the work I was being paid to perform'? Ed.)

Next to me, I would discover a frowning figure, tutting over a clipboard. After an initial cry of woe, he would fluster round my buttock area like a distracted hornet, adjusting levers like a steam-train driver. Wooden chairs were replaced by seating that moved up and down, forward and back. There were rumours of a de luxe model that went from side to side.

The process of sitting became a controlled descent into a state of relaxed positioning, conducted with the precision of a space tourist's return to earth. I settled into my workstation chair with a convenient keyboard and a tranquillised spine. Before me shone a nexus of angle-poised machinery that looked like an advert for a Meccano Super Construction Set.

At home, at the start, the Dunkirk spirit asserted itself. I kept calm and carried on. But then again, I wasn't doing badly: at least we had a semi-spare room. My neighbours are a young couple in a one-bed flat. Or, as it became, their two-office, one-bed flat. Becky sat on a kitchen stool leaning into a laptop on the work surface. Tom flopped in bed with his laptop propped on a pillow. They spent most of the day Zooming, taking notes and

inadvertently building up an expanded clientele for my osteopath chum.

And it's clear that, if we carry on working at kitchen work surfaces on stools with screens jostling for space with the ketchup, we will end up dreadfully knackered.

Recalling the union's home working inspection checklist is one of the good things to come out of the lockdown, like not having to visit in-laws or watch Arsenal. It's the first time for ages I've looked at it – and I've not come off all that well.

It asks some embarrassing questions. Is all wiring adequately covered? Gulp. Hand and wrist support? Absent, miss. Do windows have blinds? Sort of. Is the screen shielded from natural light? I must do something about that...

If home working becomes the norm – and to some degree it probably will – employers are going to save a lot of cash on rent, tools, service charges, power costs and security.

It's not unreasonable that some of these savings are used to provide us with adequate working conditions.

No one's doing us a favour: we're lending them a bit of our house. It's more than I care to do for the children, to be frank.

And for freelancers, it's even more important. If we don't take this as seriously as our health and safety people urge, we'll end up with spines that look like longbows.

We'll be able to moonlight as props for productions of Henry V. We'll all have horizontally inclined necks, and shoulders that join in the front. We'll all look like Quasimodo on a bad day.

**Next to me would be a frowning figure. After a cry of woe, he would fluster round my buttock area like a hornet, adjusting levers like a steam-train driver**

# FREELANCE RIGHTS CHARTER

## FAIR DEAL FOR FREELANCES

**The Covid-19 crisis has further marginalised already vulnerable freelances working across the media industry - this NUJ Freelance Rights Charter demands improved protections and benefits regardless of employment status.**

**Support our call for a Fair Deal for Freelances, where all freelances have the right to:**

- 1** Trades union collective bargaining to improve terms and conditions for freelances side by side with staff
- 2** Fair written contracts free from the threat of disadvantage for asserting their rights
- 3** Respect for their creators' rights and unwaivable moral rights
- 4** Equalised rights with employees including; sick pay; maternity, paternity and parental leave; unemployment benefit; full access to benefits and social securities
- 5** Choice over how they freelance and are taxed, with an end to advance tax payments
- 6** Work free from pressure to operate on a PAYE basis, or to incorporate, or work through umbrella companies
- 7** Equal health and safety protections including parity of training, insurances and security provision
- 8** Fair fees and terms, and prompt payments
- 9** Dignity and respect at work, free from bullying, harassment or discrimination, with parity of access to grievance procedures
- 10** Equal professional rights, including the right to protect sources, seek information and uphold ethical standards

**#FairDeal4Freelances**

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