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Bold plans from CIoJ to reform media contempt law

By Prof Tim Crook

The Law Commission has urgently opened a further consultation on media contempt law. This is in light of the row over what was released to the public about the perpetrator of the murderous mass-stabbing attack on the children's dance class in Southport on 29 July last year.

Axel Rudakubana killed three children and injured ten others at a Taylor Swift-themed yoga and dance workshop.

There's been an intense political debate about the lack of accurate information released by the authorities at the time of his arrest and how this contributed to the public disorder that unfolded across the UK in the days afterwards. Government Ministers, the Crown Prosecution Service and Merseyside Police have all argued they were constrained by media 'contempt of court' law on what could be said after a suspect has been arrested. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said these limitations ensured the surviving victims and relatives of those murdered could be sure the person responsible stood trial and faced justice.

Rudakubana was arrested at the scene and charged with three counts of murder, ten counts of attempted murder, and possession of a bladed article. He could not be named because at the age of 17 he was still a youth in law.

These reporting restrictions were lifted on 1 August by Liverpool Crown Court because it was thought the misinformation about his identity had been fuelling the developing riots. He would have also turned 18 six days later and as an adult defendant would have been fully identifiable.

The news media portrayed him as a British-born Christian schoolboy involved in acting and drama, and he was represented in a widely-used photograph when younger in his school uniform. The police did not release his custody photograph, offering a much more realistic and menacing depiction, until he pleaded guilty on 20 January 2025.



Three newspapers depicting Axel Rudakubana as a young boy in school uniform on 2 August 2024 after he could be named and 4 days after his attack and arrest.

The public were not told that detectives had found that he was producing ricin, a deadly poison often used as a terrorism agent, and was in possession of an Al-Qaeda training manual.

He would not be charged under the Biological Weapons Act 1974 and Terrorism Act 2000 for possession and production of ricin and a PDF copy of a military study of an al-Qaeda training manual, until October 2024.

The public were not informed until after Rudakubana's guilty pleas in January 2025 that he had a history of violent and concerning behaviour and that he had been referred to the anti-extremism programme Prevent three times between 2019 and 2021. Or that he was not accepted into the scheme because the authorities had been unable to associate him with a terrorist ideology.

The Home Secretary, the Justice Secretary and the Attorney General all asked the Law Commission to expedite its reporting on the parts of their review looking at the powers of government and law enforcement agencies to counter misinformation and disinformation, including where there were possible national security or public order consequences of failing to do so.

The case for liberalisation

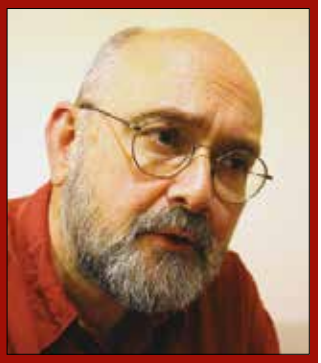
The CIoJ has urged the Law Commission to liberalise media contempt law and adopt the American approach where police and authorities reveal as much as they can because by experience their jury trial system can easily counter serious media prejudice.

The Institute argues that in the context of the third decade of the 21st Century, the UK constitution needs to adopt a much more mature and pragmatic approach to balancing the right to a fair trial with freedom of expression and the media. We believe that the retention of a strict liability criminal offence for media contempt infantilises professional journalism and the administration of justice.

The consultation response drawn up by the Institute's Professional Practices Board argues that there has to be a requirement of intent in media contempt – a conscious desire or purpose to cause a particular result – or the criminal threshold of recklessness – a conscious disregard of a substantial risk of serious prejudice, and

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Andy Smith
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Editor's Comment

"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." – George Orwell

"A week is a long time in politics." So said Harold Wilson in a briefing to journalists in 1964. I wonder what Wilson would think of Donald Trump. Since 'The Donald' returned to the White House, US policy has been changing daily, sometimes hourly. On both sides of the Pond, we've found ourselves on a political rollercoaster ride, waiting and watching for the next Presidential pronouncement. This is the new reality.

In October 1938, during his 'wilderness years', Winston Churchill broadcast a powerful message to the people of the United States. In the wake of the Munich Agreement, his broadcast was an attempt to alert Americans to the true nature of Hitler's Germany, and urge them to reject any accommodation with Nazism. "Dictatorship – the fetish worship of one man – is a passing phase," he told his US audience. "A state of society where men may not speak their minds … such a society cannot long endure if brought into contact with the healthy outside world."

Churchill's optimism about the long-term prospects for Western democracy could not disguise his fears for Europe, and his concerns for the survival of liberty in Britain. "The stations of uncensored expression are closing down," he said. Churchill was conscious that Appeasement also increasingly meant what we would now call 'cancel culture'. How much longer would he be able to write and broadcast his warnings about the Nazis? The clock was ticking, he said. "Let me, then, speak in truth and earnestness while time remains."

We remember the words of this greatest of Britons – and most distinguished of Institute members – when we look across the Atlantic Ocean today and ponder on "the fetish worship of one man." President Trump's Cabinet looks and sounds more like the court of a medieval king, or a Latin American military junta, with cronies eagerly leaping at the chance to praise the autocrat and bask in his words of approval. Meanwhile, the public humiliation of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy by Trump and his sidekick J.D. Vance showed all too clearly to a horrified world that the USA was most definitely 'under new management'.

Authoritarian regime

Bizarrely, Vice-President Vance poses as a champion of liberty and free speech. He even threatens Keir Starmer that securing a UK-US trade deal will be reliant on repeal of current British 'hate speech' legislation. But if we follow Vance's lead, we would merely be swapping one form of authoritarianism for another. For the Trump Administration, freedom is something that should be extended only to its supporters and acolytes.

Since the new regime took office, journalists have been abused and 'cancelled', and mainstream news agencies have been banned from the White House, while deranged bloggers, social media 'influencers' and assorted conspiracy theorists have been given privileged access to the President and his circle, and Russian narratives have been pushed by the United States government in order to cajole and bully allies into submission. Meanwhile, US policy across every area of government is enacted by Presidential executive order, with Trump signing each decision into law at the stroke of a pen.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy invited Winston Churchill to the White House to confer Honorary US Citizenship on the former British Prime Minister. Aged and in poor health, Churchill was too ill to make the journey to Washington, instead deputising his son Randolph to accept the certificate from JFK on his behalf. Paying tribute to Churchill, Kennedy said: "Whenever and wherever tyranny threatened, he has always championed liberty… In the dark days and darker nights, when Britain stood alone, and most men save Englishmen despaired of England's life, he mobilized the English language and sent it into battle."

Kennedy, like Churchill, understood the meaning of freedom. In Runnymede, Surrey, on a wooded hillside above the Magna Carta Memorial, is a monument to JFK, erected there after the President's assassination by Russian-trained Lee Harvey Oswald. This little acre of England is actually US territory, given in memory of the murdered President, so when you pass through the gate at the foot of the hill and ascend the 50 steps to the memorial (representing the 50 States of the USA) you are passing from British to American soil.

The simple Portland stone monument at the summit is inscribed with words from President Kennedy's inaugural address: "Let every nation know whether it wishes us well or ill that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty."

Whatever happens in the coming months and years, those of us who cherish our hard-won rights and liberties must stand firm against authoritarianism, whether it's dressed up as left-wing progressivism or as right-wing populism. Never has the fight to defend democracy and freedom of the press been more important.

Andy Smith

BBC's Riz Lateef hosts Young Journalist Awards

Over 80 young journalists, CIoJ members and guests gathered at the end of the Society of Editors' annual conference for the presentation of the Institute's inaugural Young Journalist of the Year Awards hosted by BBC London News presenter, Riz Lateef.

CIoJ President Gerald Bowey (right) said: "The Institute has upheld journalistic integrity and excellence for over 140 years. The Young Journalist awards enable us to continue to champion these values while embracing the opportunities and challenges of the digital age. The awards show that the CIoJ is fully committed to advancing the interests of journalists across print, broadcast, and online platforms."

Gerald Bowey continued: "Young journalists bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and an unyielding passion for uncovering the truth. The 2025 winners all share a dynamic and diverse dedication to excellence and integrity and deserve the full recognition that these awards give to their work."

The judges described the entries as exemplifying the highest standards of journalism:

"The high quality of entries showed an impressive and impactful investigative journalism across national, regional, specialist media and platforms."

"A very high standard of entries from many sectors of the industry including national and regional newspapers, magazines and the digital sector of online only publications."

"The depth of research and analysis and the seeming ease with which these young journalists tackled difficult and sometimes complex subjects were to a high standard."

"The entries had merit and if this standard can be maintained in future it augers well for these awards as a valuable part of the journalistic year."

"The best of the submissions were outstanding, and while national newspapers are well represented, the judges were pleased to see entries from local-media journalists."



Gerald Bowey



Riz Lateef

Jeremy Bowen, who had been presented earlier with a Fellowship of the Society of Editors, graciously accepted the Institute's invitation to say a few words of encouragement to the finalists. (pic of Bowen at lectern/CIoJ awards backdrop)

Bowen chose the theme, of being in one room, in his career path, and moving to the next room, and the next room, until you are producing the sort of work you are ambitious to achieve. To illustrate his comments, he related the following: he was working as a reporter in London on the night of the BBC News Christmas Party, it was a bit of a damp squib to start with, like a funeral, and he was sneaking away when at that moment one of the producers from the newsroom came tearing down the corridor. "Haven't you heard?" he said. A jumbo jet had crashed in Scotland. It was the Lockerbie crash, in 1988.

While he wasn't working that day, he went up to the newsroom and Chris Cramer, who was one of the big cheeses in news at the time saw him and said: "What are doing here? Get to Lockerbie."



Jeremy Bowen drops-in to encourage entrants with a pep-talk

He was in the right room, at the right time. It was a very important breakthrough in his career.

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The winners are:

CATEGORY: Young Arts Journalist of the Year 2025

- The arts category was always going to be a broad one and the entries comprised a wide spectrum of subjects, styles and approaches. The judges were impressed by the overall quality of the pieces submitted and the depth of research which had gone into many of them. The entries clearly demonstrated the volume of rising talent within this sector, with several distinctive and original voices emerging from the group.

WINNER: Jennifer Hahn, *Dezeen*.

Jennifer's submissions, covering a range of topical issues, displayed a nuanced interview technique, polished writing and an eye for impact. Several of the judges noted that they had been thinking about the content of the pieces days after the first judging round had concluded, and it was no surprise to learn that one of her submissions had been Dezeen's most-read piece that year. Jennifer's writing style is elegant, concise and accessible. She has a talent for letting her interview subject shine, while not flinching from difficult topics and layering context in a way that draws the reader in to the story. The judges were impressed by the depth of both research and subject matter knowledge that was evident throughout her work.

CATEGORY: Young Political Correspondent of the Year 2025

- A high standard of entries with some hard-hitting and well-researched journalism that exposed a wide range of important issues. All the entrants were accomplished and making genuine contributions to their field – the future of political journalism seems to be in good hands.

WINNER: Shehab Khan, *ITV News*

Shehab's submissions all demonstrated an assured, informed and nuanced approach to journalism, with a keen eye for the emerging story. He approached sensitive topics firmly but sensitively, and his interview style was well tailored and detailed. He also demonstrated an aptitude for explaining complex topics straight to camera in a clear, concise and engaging manner.

CATEGORY: Young Campaigning Journalist of the Year 2025

- The judges were impressed with the high quality of entries showing impressive and impactful investigative journalism across a wide and diverse field of national, regional, specialist media titles and platforms. The content on occasion was innovative with multimedia journalism, authoritatively sourced information, written with clarity and holding powerful people and government bodies to account. Many of the stories had impact and brought about change and reaction from those responsible for problems and issues exposed. Overall, all the entries are a credit to the profession and show that young journalists in Britain are at the cutting edge of questioning and thought-provoking journalism.



On the left: Toby Lewis, CEO, Live Group, sponsor of the Young Journalist of the Year Awards. The Winners, extreme right: Riz Lateef, Journalist, BBC Newsreader and Deputy News Manager.

WINNER: Anna Colivicchi, *Pulse*.

Anna submitted an outstanding portfolio of stories constituting a superb campaign of investigative journalism with original content and sophisticated data journalism illustration. She began with "How undelivered hospital letters have caused chaos for GPs" and developed this with the follow-up "GPs left to deal with more than 700,000 unsent hospital letters" then completed it with "Hospital trust failed to send another 30,000 patient documents to GPs." There is a narrative arc of beginning, development and more revelation. It is a crucial subject which many of the magazine's readers (GPs and the medical profession) and a wider readership were not aware of and is explained with clear, lucid and informative writing. The articles show an intelligent and impressive progression of the theme. The journalism here is the overall winner because of its detailed and precise content inviting follow-up by the rest of the media. It is a major campaigning story affecting many people and inviting a clear response and demonstration of accountability from regional health trusts.

CATEGORY: Young Business/Financial Journalist of the Year 2025

- All the entries in this category had merit and if this standard can be maintained in future it augers well for establishing these awards as a valuable part of the journalistic year. The best submissions covered a diversity of subjects, demonstrating the writers' breadth as well as their depth. Also standing out were those entries that regarded good writing as important as strong content: despite the pressure of deadlines, it pays to spend a few minutes polishing copy, removing the repetitions, unnecessary words and cliches!

WINNER: Alys Key, *Digital Frontier*.

Alys submitted three articles on how IT can improve the coffee, wine and payments businesses. Those are popular subjects and she described the technology without getting technical. She has an easy style with good use of quotations that makes articles appeal even to readers not expecting to be interested in the subject. A worthy winner.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Madeleine Knight, *Property Week*.

Unlike many writers, Madeleine is not afraid of numbers. She crunched data on property executives' pay, housebuilders' shares and mezzanine debt in her submissions – letting the findings speak for themselves rather than forcing her opinions onto readers. The hard work that went into these pieces was rewarded with a 'Commended' by the judges.

CATEGORY: Young News Reporter of the Year 2025

- The best of the submissions in this category were outstanding, but while national newspapers are well represented in our winners, the judges were pleased to see entries from local-media journalists. Writers with a good nose for news stood out, even when the stories were small. If these awards help some young writers onto national media, good – but

we should remember the importance of regionals, not least in training talent.

WINNER: Constance Kampfner, *The Times*.

If young journalists think magistrates' hearings a tedious duty, read Constance Kampfner's report on court appearances following the riots provoked by last year's Southport killings. Without purple prose or cliches she provided a first-class colour piece – grass-roots news reporting with real impact. An interview with a relative of the teacher stabbed in Southport was a strong exclusive, but an equally-clearly written story on police indifference to museum thefts showed her versatility.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Natasha Livingstone, *Mail on Sunday*

Much royal reporting relies on speculation (or worse) but Natasha submitted three fact-based stories that were well researched and well written. They ranged from royal warrants to Mau Mau regrets. Commissioning her own AI work on the King's cancer might seem a good stunt but it provoked a palace condemnation of similar fake books. The judges were impressed.

CATEGORY: Young Environment Journalist of the Year 2025

- We were impressed by the high standard of the features we reviewed, the depth of research and analysis and the seeming ease with which these young journalists tackled difficult and sometimes complex subjects. It was a satisfying challenge to review these articles, but a difficult choice to be made because of the excellent quality of the submissions. We feel all of them have a great future in journalism.

WINNER: Tessa Dunthorne, *Country and Town House Magazine*.

Tessa has produced copy that is accessible, readable, not weighed down with too many statistics and well targeted to its audience. The pieces are not overloaded with quotes and there is a strong sense of authorship. The style is clear and fluid and the features well-structured. There is a good mix of stories, and the submission demonstrates great versatility and an ability to tackle unusual subjects. There is plenty of evidence of in-depth research and the features are packed with information – delivered in a lively and snappy way – much of which would be new to the readership. Throughout all the examples, Tessa has shown a genuine passion for disseminating environmental issues in a non-preachy, informative way, giving readers the tools they need to make positive changes and think mindfully about their consumerist choices. The submission demonstrates conversation-starting subject matter about being more



sustainable and environmentally aware in everyday life, while conveying important facts.

CATEGORY: Young Feature Writer of the Year 2025

- There was a very high standard of entry for feature journalism from many sectors of the industry including national and regional newspapers, magazines and the digital sector of online only publications. Many of the entries investigated something new and surprising for the reader, pursued the public interest with determination, questioned and interrogated important issues with writing which had style and individuality. The judges were impressed with the professionalism and quality of this country's young feature journalists. They are a credit to the industry.

WINNER: Tessa Dunthorne, *Country & Town House Magazine*.

Tessa is an outstanding magazine journalist producing consistently stylish, well-written and impressively researched features. She demonstrates journalistic self-assurance with good, well-flowing English and a natural understanding of what her readers will want and enjoy. The judges were impressed by her versatility. The "good death" story is brave and daring in a magazine like this and very well handled. She covers the subject of death with thoughtfulness and sensitivity with lots of fascinating information as well as excellent quotes and sources of advice. The link with nature enhances the elegance of this piece. Her exploration of the difficulties of running a pub and the threat to this British social institution has a fresh feel. Her feature on the fractional ownership of collectible assets reveals and explains something new to most readers and is topical and informative.







Photos

Above: members, guests awards entrants and winners enjoy the prize presentation evening.

Above left: Vice-President, Caroline Roddis, outlines more CIoJ initiatives, and invites the awards nominees and finalists to get involved.



The Institute wishes to acknowledge and thank the following for their support: Live Group, South West News Service and the Society of Editors.

Event photography:
Jules Annan and Andy Barker.

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these have to be proved beyond reasonable doubt. The Institute PPB recommends removing the word "impeded" from the statutory definition.

In our submission, the concept of contempt was discredited in the case law from 2011 when two newspapers were successfully prosecuted for contempt by vilification of a suspect in a sensational murder case. The court erroneously misapplied the serious libelling of a crime suspect by two national newspapers to constitute a level of vilification which might have prevented him from being able to assemble a defence case.

The Institute submission contended: "This was a classic example where UK law inappropriately fantasises media publication risk and damage and makes decisions on hypothetical notions that have no root or basis in reality and empirical evidence. The suspect concerned was properly de-arrested."

The police were interested in him as a result of malign information generated by the individual eventually convicted of the murder allegation; not the surrounding media coverage of his alleged background.

The innocent suspect collected substantial libel damages from news publications for content about him which constituted the 'vilification'. The suspect was never charged, never went to trial, and there was absolutely no cogent evidence that his right to a fair trial had ever been interfered with. He was fully exonerated on multiple levels of public and private communication and in the media-sphere. There was no need for this issue to have been framed by a media contempt prosecution.

The CIoJ argues that "impeded" needs to be deleted because it is anachronistic, superfluous and unnecessary law. Any conduct which impedes the administration of justice whether by action or communication is already covered at common law by the criminal offence of perverting the course of justice.

We support the Law Commission's proposal for a public interest defence which covers the necessities of public safety and national security and 'ensures that public discussion of matters of public interest is not unnecessarily or disproportionately restricted where proceedings are active. An existing defence under Section 5 of the 1981 Contempt of Court Act depends on the public debate being merely incidental to active proceedings.

The phrase "merely incidental" served the purpose of protecting publications from being able to discuss public interest issues and debate that coincidentally happened to be the subject of criminal proceedings. Hence the acquittal of the *Daily Mail* under this defence in 1982 for a Malcolm Muggeridge article which did not reference the trial in any way and the conviction of the *Sunday Express* for an editorial which did. We do not think a distinction between media communication 'merely incidental' to active proceedings and "directly related" to active proceedings needs to be retained.

The Institute has put forward a radical and far-ranging defence which specifically protects the public interest for the publication of information in good faith of anything concerning active proceedings. And for any future court determining whether a substantial risk of serious prejudice had occurred, that court is required to take into account how the eventual trial dealt with the "serious prejudice issue". This would be by:

1. Minimising or removing the risk of "serious prejudice" by moving the trial to another location in the England and Wales jurisdiction;
2. Recognising the delay in holding the trial between arrest, charge and jury adjudication providing a fade factor in respect of potential jurors' memories of past media coverage;



Still from CCTV footage of mass-murderer Axel Rudakubana walking to a bus stop on Hoole Lane, Banks, Lancashire on 29 July 2024. Image: Merseyside Police



Police custody photograph of Axel Rudakubana released by Merseyside Police after his guilty pleas 20 January 2025.

3. Minimising or removing the risk of "serious prejudice" by appropriate directions of the trial judge to the jury;
4. Minimising or removing the risk of "serious prejudice" by the holding of a voir dire- the questioning of potential jurors to ensure those selected had not been seriously prejudiced by the media publication;
5. As a last resort, and should the court not be satisfied that the risk of serious prejudice has been avoided by any one or combination of 1-4, holding a jury-less criminal trial so as to eradicate the presence of serious prejudice on the part of any determination of the verdict in respect of the facts in the criminal case.

The Institute proposes that any court determining the media contempt issue must accept the defence should it be satisfied that the alleged serious prejudice had been abrogated by any one of, or combination of 1 to 5.

No communication of factual information concerning Axel Rudakubana at the time of his arrest and charge should have risked denying his victims and their families justice through a future criminal trial. The very idea that any amount of media prejudice should provide any legal system the right to halt or cancel a criminal trial process is, in our opinion, unconscionable.

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Government says no to SLAPPs reform

By Prof Tim Crook

When in opposition, the Labour Party promised to advance legislation to tackle 'Litigation against public participation' primarily in the civil arena of libel law. Now in government, Labour has performed a U-turn and decided against reforming SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation). This is despite the fact that Heidi Alexander, who served as Labour's Justice Minister for four months before being promoted Secretary of State for Transport last November, had praised the previous Conservative government for introducing a limited anti-SLAPP measure in its 2023 Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act.

The Government has since cited what they call "unresolved issues" with proposals for more focused and all-encompassing legislation which could check the abuses of oppressive media lawfare and at the same time ensure access to justice. They say they are concerned not to legislate "in haste" with the risk of "unintended consequences". This is a major setback from a professional journalistic point of view. The problem is that, for all Labour's pre-election promises, most of the UK's media laws are still intact in 2025 and remain available to the rich and powerful to protect their reputations.

Media lawyer David Hooper has brought out a revised edition of his book Buying Silence, which now includes a new chapter telling the inside story of the Mohamed Al-Fayed case. (The first edition was reviewed in the last edition of *The Journal*.) Al-Fayed had been the owner of Harrods Department store in Knightsbridge, and Fulham Football Club, and was the father of Dodi Al-Fayed, the film producer with whom Diana, Princess of Wales had been having an affair when they died together in the notorious road crash in Paris on 31 August 1997.



MohamedAl-Fayed

The new chapter title is "Mohamed Al-Fayed: Lies were the truth and the truth was a lie."

Aggressive lawyers

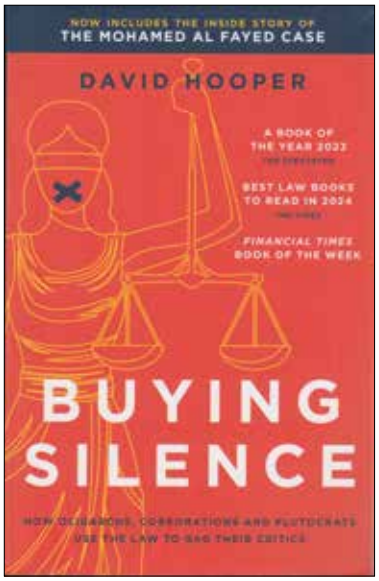
Hooper's 412-page book is the clearest, most powerful and shocking indictment and document that Parliament could ever rely on in order to appreciate how the power of money enables the super-rich to destroy their critics through litigation. Al-Fayed and his enablers used the law to cover up his horrific campaign of abuse. Hooper explains: "Fayed had a series of aggressive lawyers ... there was no shortage of those willing to join the payroll – and skilful public relations advisers. They proved all too successful in suppressing broadcasts and articles exposing Fayed's conduct."

Hooper outlines what the government urgently needs to do to stop the abuse of media law. He wrote (somewhat optimistically, before Labour U-turned): "At the centre of the legislation should be an expanded concept of what kind of information is in the public interest. It is also crucial that we legislate against allowing every allegation which could arguably be said to be defamatory to proceed to trial. The courts should balance the public's right to receive information on a matter of public interest and the writer's right to freedom of speech against the need to bring the claim and the damage that could be likely to be caused to their reputation or privacy."

Hooper's thoughts on this are similar to the long-established position of the Institute. We have consistently argued that the burden of proof in libel and privacy actions should be reversed from defendant to claimant, and a 'public interest' defence for public figures, and for anyone becoming protagonists in public interest events, should have a much higher threshold. The claimant would need to prove actuated malice and/or a reckless disregard for the truth. The law needs to stop destroying the lives of people who may have made a mistake in public communication, apologised and deleted or retracted their wrongful allegations. Such litigation should not cost people their livelihoods and homes.

Damage to reputation always needs to be proved materially and quantified; not presumed, or hypothesised.

In the Commons debate last November, Labour MP Lloyd Hatton used parliamentary privilege to outline details of alleged SLAPPs. He criticised the culture of some law firms choosing clients "based on profit over professional standards," and highlighted the inadequacy of the Solicitors Regulation Authority only being able to impose a maximum fine of £25,000 on offending law firms.



The revised edition of Buying Silence including the new chapter on the Mohamed Al-Fayed case.

Lords' inquiry

The Labour government's inaction has also been criticised by a House of Lords inquiry into the future of the news industry which said ministers had failed to give SLAPP legislation necessary priority and political will. The Lords observed that this was "troubling and has serious potential consequences for press freedom and the future of the news industry."

Financial penalties for legal firms deploying SLAPPs should be 10,000 times higher, the Lords argued.

While journalists have the Media Lawyers Association on-side, there is also a Society for Media Lawyers which argues that the complaints about media lawfare are "overblown". However, the CIoJ argues that the most pernicious effect of SLAPPs is "the chilling effect" which is very hard to measure because self-censorship by its very nature is absent from the public record.

English libel law and the disputes engaged in it remain notoriously precarious and expensive. A recent example reported by *Press Gazette* and PA Law has been that of Guido Fawkes website owner Paul Staines who agreed to pay the 'Green' industrialist Dale Vince £75,000 towards legal costs as well as £9,950 in damages in settlement and "to avoid 'ruinous' future costs." Dale Vince claimed that Paul Staines had libelled him by falsely accusing him of having expressed support for Hamas during a Times Radio interview.

Mr Staines was reported as saying: "It has cost some £250,000 to fight this case, which has not been a bit of fun for me..." Mr Vince has maintained that "This was never about the money – which I've donated to charities working in Palestine. It's about free speech and being able to exercise that right without a right-wing pile-on."

CIoJ members hear lecture on threats to free speech

In February we were delighted to welcome Freddie Attenborough, Communications Director of the Free Speech Union, as guest lecturer at one of our series of our online Learning & Development courses for CIoJ members. Freddie explained that the FSU exists to "defend the speech rights of our members" and assured us that "as long as it's lawful, we'll defend you." The FSU has five core principles, he told CIoJ members: "these are: freedom of speech, freedom of expression, academic freedom, religious freedom, and freedom of the press (including 'citizen journalism')."

The FSU was formed in 2020 and in the last five years has then taken on more than 3,600 cases. Its success rate, said Freddie, is 74%. Some are relatively minor, such as an event that's been cancelled, and some are more serious, such as disciplinary actions and sackings. The FSU is willing to take a member's case to an Industrial Tribunal and, when necessary, the High Court. Some, he said, are "life-threatening situations, often because of criticisms of Islamic religion which have resulted in death threats, and where, in addition to giving legal support, we have also sometimes had to arrange protection for people whose lives are in danger."

The FSU has defended "everyone and anyone, of all politics," said Freddie, "including trade unionists, Reform party councillors, Palestine protestors." This willingness to take on every case has led to a steady growth in membership – currently standing at 27,000.

Increasingly, the FSU has found itself dealing with cases involving 'Hate Crimes' and so-called 'Non-Crime Hate Incidents', with NCHIs frequently leading to police contact and investigations. It's worth remembering that NCHIs are recorded by the Police, even if the investigation leads nowhere, and that they appear on enhanced DBS checks, so could affect someone's employment prospects. "You have no right to see the record yourself, only the organisation running the DBS. The Police are required by law to disclose whether an NCHI has been logged against you but not to release the actual information."



Freddie Attenborough, Communications Director of the Free Speech Union

Section 5 of the Public Order Act is increasingly being cited by the Police, with the threshold for launching investigations being lowered, meaning that Police are "increasingly taking seriously any and every complainant who 'feels' offended by something in print or broadcast."

There are also, said Freddie, a number of "classic 'cancel culture' cases where minority activists, 'the usual suspects', who know how to pull all the right levers, are getting events cancelled, boycotted, and disrupted." Venues give in easily when threatened in this way, Freddie explained, but the FSU is fighting back, starting with "a stiffly worded legal letter pointing out to the venue managers that they are in breach of the law because free speech is actually protected by the law! In most cases, venues that initially gave in to the mob tend to back down when get a solicitor's letter."

Andy Smith

The King defends a free press as a "cornerstone of democracy"

The King has made a strong statement in defence of a free press. In a statement released before a reception for local journalists from all over the UK, the King said that the "regional media, in all its forms, has a unique and vital role to play in society, perhaps even more so in these uncertain times."

Around 400 guests attended the event hosted by the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace to show their support for local journalism. The Queen is Patron of The Journalists' Charity as well as the Guild of St Bride's, based at St Bride's Church, Fleet Street, known as the journalists' church.

"A free media is one that will, and does, make mistakes," the King said. "But at its best, it is a cornerstone of our democracy. It is in everyone's interests that you should succeed. For without a thriving and financially robust regional media, we would all be the poorer."

King Charles recalled a speech he had given in 2002 to mark 300 years since the first issue of Britain's first daily national newspaper, the *Daily Courant*. "Two decades on, when too much focus is given to that which divides us, that role for your whole industry is more important than ever — and it starts from the ground up, at local level, in your hands," he said.

"Your reporting, and the work of all those who support you, helps amplify and reaffirm the rights and responsibilities we all share. It shines a light in dark corners, exposing injustice and wrongdoing. Above all, it helps strengthen our communities, in times of joy and at moments of sorrow."

Gregor McCulloch

FSU threatens judicial review over Telegraph takeover by Abu Dhabi

The Free Speech Union (FSU) has told Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy that it's prepared to launch judicial review proceedings unless she fulfils her statutory duty to intervene in the blocked takeover of the *Telegraph* by an Abu Dhabi-linked investment fund.

In April 2024, following fierce opposition to the takeover from politicians and journalists of all stripes, RedBird IMI was prevented from completing its purchase of the newspaper and required to sell it on: something it still hasn't done. In a detailed letter to the Culture Secretary, the FSU highlighted clear evidence of RedBird IMI urging senior executives to implement significant staff cuts and scale back editorial investments so as to facilitate the sale. But in her reply Lisa Nandy refused to act on the issue. The FSU says this is in direct contravention of the government's legal obligation not to allow any foreign state-backed vehicle to "direct, control or influence" a British newspaper.

In a debate in the House of Lords in April, Lord Toby Young, the FSU's General Secretary, described Ms Nandy's response to the FSU's letter as "wholly unsatisfactory", warning peers that her continued inaction threatens the future of the *Telegraph*.

"Legislate AI to augment – not replace – journalists' work": Advice from an interview with ChatGPT

By Hamish Monk

The term 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI) was coined in an August 1955 study proposal by a group of academics and technology developers from Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, United States. This seminal moment, and the workshop that followed, is considered to be the foundation of AI as a field of study. By 1956, American computer scientists Herbert Simon and Allen Newell, had written 'Logic Theorist' – a program capable of performing automated reasoning. And so, into humble beginnings, AI was born.

Since the middle of the 20th century, the horizon of AI has grown exponentially, in terms of its public recognition, capital investment, process development, and application. In the creative sector, which contributes £125 billion GVA to our economy annually, the merits and hazards of AI deployment are being fiercely debated – with the interests of creators, governments, and technology firms often coming into conflict.

This is a story that is developing at breathtaking speed. In the first quarter of 2025 alone, *The Independent* announced it would be publishing condensed AI versions of its own stories; *The Guardian* struck a partnership with OpenAI to make its reporting available as a news source within ChatGPT; a report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism that audience-facing format transformations are to be expected this year; and, in turn, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) released a manifesto calling for more action to protect creators.

To ensure AI is rolled out in a manner that is constructive to writers, governments must legislate to augment, not replace, human work – and, most importantly, be guided by the research. Accuracy, independence, impartiality, accountability, and humanity are the founding principles of journalism – and by extension, democracy. Only humans can guarantee these principles endure.

Government's stance on AI

Given the inevitability of AI's integration with every facet of our lives and work, it is incumbent on the industries and governments it impacts to ensure the technology's development is informed, unbiased, and supportive of human-made content.

The UK government, for its part, launched on 17 December 2024 an AI and Copyright consultation – essentially a tender for opinions on proposed major reforms to the country's copyright framework. Alongside the launch, the government expressed its partiality for a potential 'opt-out' system, whereby copyright holders would need to pro-actively register their works to avoid them being used by AI developers for training purposes. This measure would run against the legal principle of automatically granting choice and control to authors under UK copyright law. As such, it is not just unworkable but of little benefit to both copyright holders and AI companies.

Formally, the government argues that its 'opt-out' proposal seeks to balance the needs of AI developers with creative industries. Informally, it supports Labour's mission to boost business investment into the UK. While this is a necessary ambition, growth should not come at a cost of failing to holistically protect creators and journalists.

The industry response

On 25 February this year, the consultation was closed, and – according to the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), which supported its 13,500 members in submitting responses – received a "huge reaction" from the creative sector. Before the deadline struck, Baroness Kidron stated in an article for *The Bookseller* that the government was positively "overwhelmed", having by 19 February received over 2,500 submissions – a figure bound to have increased in the final six days.

Barbara Hayes, ALCS CEO, has remained vocal on this matter beyond the consultation deadline, highlighting three key action points for UK regulators:

1. Reconsider the copyright exception and opt-out model, which is unfair, unworkable and will likely result in prolonged legal challenges;
2. Ensure transparency around which works have been used and by whom. This is an essential first step for any progress on the issue; and
3. Develop an AI Copyright Hub (an adaptation of a government proposal from 2015), which would link rightsholders with users and make use of emerging tools to streamline transparent licensing.

Clearly, given its potential, authors and journalists are not opposed to AI – as long as copyright laws and the dynamic licensing market are upheld, and the transparency obligations of AI developers are observed. At the time of writing, sources close to Whitehall indicate that the upcoming vote in Parliament on copyright law (scheduled to take place the week commencing 5th May) could, in fact, land more in favour of creators than AI firms, thanks to the concerns raised by the consultation.

How does AI think it should be regulated?

As a highly analytical, data-aggregating, 'impartial' ocean of resource, might AI itself be able to offer some advice, or perspective, on how it can be most safely utilised? Here are the results of an 'interview' *The Journal* conducted with OpenAI's AI-powered chatbot, ChatGPT, on the technology in question and the ethics surrounding journalists' work:

Question 1: "How will AI impact journalism in the long-term?"

ChatGPT spat out a generous, A4-long response to this question, pointing to the automation of routine tasks, the personalisation of news content, enhanced investigative tools, improved audience insights, global reach and localisation, as well as new kinds of journalism – such as "immersive news experiences using virtual or augmented reality (VR/AR), and narrative structures driven by AI's understanding of individual readers."

Nota bene: Enhanced investigative tools could be a double-edged rapier – particularly if the bias and prejudices of AI creators are, like Descartes' *manufacturer's stamp*, baked into the models that power them. VR and AR may also necessitate tighter data protection laws.

Question 2: "In what ways might AI be good for journalists in the future?"

The predictably bounteous response to this question discussed improvements for "data journalism, fact checking and credibility assessments, research and information aggregation, visual content creation, bias mitigation, audience engagement, personalisation," and more.

What the chatbot did not acknowledge – perhaps restricted by the question's parameters – was the social implications of continually feeding readers the content

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and opinions they want to believe. There has already been plenty of warning around the creation of media echo chambers, and how they can result in polarised, extremist views.

Question 3: "In what ways might AI be bad for journalists in the future?"

Characteristically thorough, structured, and suspiciously toady, ChatGPT, offered seven ways that it, or its successors, will be bad for journalism.

These were "job displacement, loss of human perspective, a proliferation of misinformation, quality dilution, erosion of trust, consolidation of media power, and lack of accountability." Though, with contemporary geopolitics in mind, it seems we do not need AI or machines to give rise to such trends.

Question 4: How should governments manage the development of AI so that it does not harm journalists?

The 10-point strategy concocted by ChatGPT involved promoting transparency and accountability in AI development; supporting reskilling; encouraging collaboration between journalists and developers; guarding ethical standards; supporting independent journalists; fostering public awareness and digital literacy; ensuring fair labour practices; regulating the use of AI in news generation and distribution; investing in AI research; and, most importantly, encouraging the development of AI to augment, not replace, human work.

ChatGPT added: "By managing AI development with a clear focus on supporting journalists and their work, governments can create a future where AI complements rather than competes with human-driven journalism." Perhaps this should be the starting point for Labour. We've been warned.

Question 5: Thanks for the interview. Would you like to write a title for the piece?

After a series of prompts to help rationalise the request, ChatGPT provided the very title of this article. It's not bursting with originality, but it wasn't unusable either.

A final note of warning for journalists: We cannot rely too heavily on AI to write our headlines (just yet). Apple's generative AI tool was recently found to have been putting inaccurate headlines on curated news articles – leaning on both false information and context omission. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism said of the story: "All of this points towards the start of a new era of disinformation, where it will become increasingly hard to tell fact from fiction."

AI's energy footprint

With the ChatGPT interview for this article concluded, it came to the Journal's attention that the very act of deferring to AI in this manner may have cost a surprising amount of water and energy.

In terms of processing, a ChatGPT query requires significantly more energy compared to a standard web search, due to the complex language models involved. According to RW Digital, ChatGPT uses (at the time of writing) up to 10 times more energy than a standard Google search. Sustainability News claims ChatGPT's monthly carbon footprint is equivalent to 260 flights between New York and London. Forbes, meanwhile, says the water consumption required to handle 5-50 prompts on ChatGPT (our interview falls within this bracket) is around 500 millilitres per interaction. Evidently, regulation of AI is not just an ethical pursuit – it is an existential one.

In a recent interview with *The Guardian*, novelist William Boyd prophesised: "It will become more efficient, of course…The only straw to clutch at is the sheer complexity and randomness of human individuality."

The secret inquest and journalists' rights

by Charlie Moloney

I am sad to report that a secret inquest has taken place, one which I will not be challenging, for reasons which have left me with some disquiet.

Recently I have been raising concerns about the open justice issues posed by inquests in writing (IIW), a post-2022 regime which allows coroners to conclude inquests without a public hearing. With IIW, because there is no public hearing, the public and the press are totally reliant on the coroner telling them what was decided in the paper inquest. If a coroner refuses to tell a journalist about their ruling in an IIW, then it is de facto a secret inquest.

I previously successfully challenged the Senior Coroner for Buckinghamshire's decision to attempt to hold a secret inquest in writing into the death of a 38-year-old man called Graham Whelan, after sending a pre-action legal letter with support from the Media Lawyers' Association. But the same coroner also refused to disclose the outcome of a different inquest into the death of a 16-year-old boy.

Though I initially challenged this move, last week I withdrew my application after speaking on the phone to one of the boy's parents – who the coroner's officer informed me wished to speak with me. I will not go into the details of what was said, because it was off the record, and the family details are not relevant to the procedural issues which I will shortly get into. Suffice to say, following the conversation, I decided to withdraw my application.

Moral decision-making

I do still feel I was legally entitled to obtain those inquest documents. But sometimes insisting strictly on your legal rights is not an adequate substitute for moral decision-making. In this very unique case, pursuing my application would not have been the right thing to do.



Charlie Moloney

The situation I faced here, where I was made to argue my case for open justice directly to the grieving parent of this boy, seems to be very likely to have a chilling effect on journalism. It does seem to me to be completely inappropriate that the Court effectively abrogates its duties to decide these issues and creates a situation where the burden is put on the journalist to persuade the family of the deceased.

I think this outcome demonstrates what I ultimately feared, which is that IIWs are now used as a means to hide from public view things that, prior to the introduction of the IIW, would have been aired in public in the usual way. Regardless of what parliament intended to do when it introduced IIWs, their introduction has made a significant inroad into the principle of open justice in the coroners courts.

It is something that may cause further problems somewhere down the line unless Parliament introduces a statutory right for journalists to have the ROI and ruling following IIWs, as was called for by the Chartered Institute of Journalists before the regime was introduced. Unfortunately, the CIoJ's warning went unheeded.

Judiciary and Open Justice – CIoJ sends supportive consultation response

By Prof Tim Crook

In April 2024, the Lady Chief Justice of England & Wales, Baroness Carr announced the creation of a new Transparency & Open Justice Board that would examine and seek to modernise the judiciary's approach to open justice.

Baroness Carr said the Board would "set objectives for all Courts and Tribunals, focussing on timely and effective access in terms of listing, documents and public hearings.' She added: 'It will engage with the public and interested parties to make sure that these objectives properly reflect what should be delivered by a modern justice system."

The Board does not include any representatives of the journalism and media industries but it has drafted four objectives and sought consultation. The objectives are:

a. **open courts:** that the public (including representatives of the media) can access court and tribunal hearings – this includes physical access to court and tribunal buildings administered by HMCTS (His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service) and (where the facilities are available) remote access to hearings;

b. **open reporting:** that the public and media can freely report on proceedings held in open hearings, and that any restrictions imposed by the court or tribunal preventing (or postponing) reports of proceedings (including anonymity orders) must (1) have a statutory basis; and (2) fulfil a legitimate aim, be necessary, proportionate, and convincingly established by clear and cogent evidence:



The Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand, London. Photograph by Tim Crook

c. **open decisions:** that the decision of the Court or Tribunal (and the reasons for it) should be publicly available; and

d. **open documents:** that the core documents relating to proceedings, particularly the evidence and submissions communicated to the court or tribunal, should be available to the public so that they can make sense of proceedings and the decision of the Court or Tribunal.

The importance of this factor is greater in modern litigation because of the increased reliance, in many jurisdictions, upon written witness statements (often standing in place of a witness's oral evidence) and written submissions.

The Board echoed the words of the 2022 ruling in Hayden -v- Associated Newspapers Ltd:

"The availability of skeleton arguments, and witness statements, deployed in open court hearings is essential to any meaningful concept of open justice."



The Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, Baroness Sue Carr. Image Judicial Office, England & Wales, Open Government Licence v3.0

The CIoJ's consultation response endorsed the Board's draft objectives, with the Institute recognising that both the judiciary and the journalistic profession have been undergoing significant pressures and change. Indeed, there has been an implosion in journalism infrastructure in respect of front-line public interest reporting of the legal system. At the same time, there has been a substantial reduction in economies of scale in terms of income and audiences/readership.

Transition

The Institute estimates that, over the last 15 years, journalism has lost about half the number of journalists reporting courts, crime cases, public incidents and democratic, civic and political institutions. The transition from an analogue publication and reception world to the digital equivalent has generated multidimensional deficits as well as some advantages.

Journalists are generally remunerated proportionately less than equivalent professions and the workload and demands in terms of productivity are much greater in a multimedia digital world. We are aware of the substantial reduction in the funding of the judicial system, the closure and centralisation of court centres, and the substantial increase in the workload of judges and judicial staff.

The CIoJ's submission acknowledged that judges can be subject to the contemporary problem of mob or pile-on criticism sometimes verging on abuse through social media, but added: "This unhappy phenomenon is outside our professional platforms and boundaries within which we aspire to full compliance and respect for the rule of law and high professional standards of regulation."

The Institute made recommendations to the Board which it believes would help it achieve its proposed aims. These include the installation of remote audio-visual facilities in as many courtrooms as possible

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to enable as much remote access as possible for accredited professional court reporting journalists.

Since fewer professional journalists are being trained with shorthand, the Institute thinks there should be consideration to courts giving permission to accredited reporters to use sound recording programmes on their smartphones or laptops which can transcribe speech into text.

We recommend careful consideration for more audio-visual broadcasting of more types and content of proceedings. For example, this could include the potential broadcast of prosecution opening speeches, final speeches, and summings-up of judges in criminal trials. While the CIoJ appreciates the courts have to follow statutory and case-law in media law, it highlighted a growing problem of anonymity extending beyond youths and sexual offence complainants to adult witnesses and other crime victims.

In the balance between privacy imperatives, the willingness of witnesses to give evidence and open justice, if the former predominates over the latter, this will undermine the ability of journalists and their publications to report narratives with human interest linked to their catchment areas, readership and audiences. We are worried that the threshold currently engaged for making decisions in favour of anonymity may not be high enough to protect the public interest of Open Justice.

This is particularly the case where restrictions prevent the reporting of the identity of murder and manslaughter victims, and adult witnesses who engage in public criticism and debate following the end of criminal trials.

Doctrine of anonymity

The Institute said in its consultation response that it was very concerned that the legal doctrine of anonymity extended to a recent decision and support for the anonymity of judges that was successfully appealed, but at great cost to media publishers. We advised the Board to ensure the separation of accredited journalists and members of the public in courtrooms. There is an increasing problem of journalists being threatened and intimidated by supporters and family relatives of criminal defendants.

The CIoJ also emphasised the need for digital reporting of all media restriction decisions by all forms of courts and tribunals into a central database managed by HMCTS and/or Ministry of Justice. This would support accurate and effective research on how restrictions impact the extent of reporting.

It was pointed out that the Law Commission currently investigating contempt law in England and Wales did not request and most probably did not have access to this data. The Institute thinks it is important to quantify decisions made under Sections 4(2) and 11 of the 1981 Contempt of Court Act and all other types of reporting restrictions. Otherwise encroachments on open justice cannot be properly assessed.

The Institute recommends a process of appealing reporting restrictions in Crown Courts and other courts which is more streamlined with greater speed and with each side paying their own costs. We also encourage regional courts liaison between judges and editors of local publications, similar to the bench media committees in US states jurisdictions.

The liaison should also include NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists) and BJTC (Broadcast Journalism Training Council) accredited course leaders in universities and colleges which train journalists in order to facilitate access to court hearings whether physically or remotely to promote real court reporting experience.

The CIoJ also brought to the Board's attention longstanding concerns about decisions being taken by Judicial Commissioners over state investigation bodies seeking access to the electronic communications of journalists and their sources under the 2016 Investigatory Powers Act. The Institute believes there is a need for more transparency and quicker reporting of these decisions, which lack the openness of court hearings held under the 1984 PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) for production orders.

NOW, more than ever, is the time to be able to demonstrate your professional credentials as a journalist...

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If you have any queries or need support, please get in touch with head office on 020 7252 1187 or memberservices@cioj.org .

New literary magazine launched

Actor and philanthropist Michael Sheen is supporting the founding of a new literary magazine for working-class writers, *The Bee*, edited by Richard Benson, former editor of iconic 1980s and '90s magazine *The Face*.

The Bee aims to fight what it calls "the increasing marginalisation of working-class writers, and of working-class people in publishing." In 2014, 43 per cent of people in publishing came from middle-class backgrounds, with 12 per cent being of working-class origin. Since 2019, the former figure has risen to 60 per cent, and as recent news stories about access to the arts have shown, the barriers for the less well-off are increasing.

Benson said: "Justice and fairness demands that people from the less well-off sections of society have the chance to tell their stories, and to get them heard. But it's also about common sense. Much of the important writing being done today, and so many of the best-loved stories come from ordinary working people. So often, it's stories from the working classes that express what's really happening in the world."

Benson grew up on a small farm in Yorkshire and began his writing career as a reporter for the *Beverley Guardian*. After editing *The Face* magazine in the 1990s, he went on to be shortlisted for the *Guardian* first-book award for his bestselling 2005 memoir, *The Farm*. In 2016 his memoir *The Valley*, about a Yorkshire mining family, won the James Tait Black prize for biography, and the Portico prize.

He said: "Class has always been hard to define precisely, and it can mean different things to different people. But what is clear is that in 2025, your background can still affect your life chances and career prospects. It's not just about your income or job, it's also about family, upbringing, education, opportunity and lived experience. As society changes, we need a grown-up, nuanced debate about class, which will be an important subject for us.

"Readers want this. In our survey of working-class readers, 63 per cent said it was important to them to see people of their background represented in books – and not just represented, but represented accurately. There is a market for this, but to meet that demand we need more people from working-class backgrounds working in publishing and making key decisions."

The Lady vanishes

By Derek Turner

In April 2025, staff and writers for *The Lady* were told that that month's issue would be its last. It was an abrupt if not entirely unpredictable ending for what had been the longest-running women's magazine in British history, and a distinctive presence in national consciousness – mentioned in *Coronation Street*, *Downton Abbey* and by Terry Pratchett, and affectionately caricatured as *Milady's Boudoir* by P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves.

The first issue of *The Lady* appeared on 19 February 1885, and it immediately developed a cachet, reportedly read by royals, as well as middle-class women in search of highly respectable butlers, governesses, maids, nannies, and secretaries (and those seeking such employments). These advertisements, which exemplified the concerns of an England of comfortable assumptions and ample means, would become *The Lady*'s most famous feature (for many years, they appeared at the start of the magazine), but it also developed a reputation for good-quality writing.

During the course of the twentieth century, cultural commentators would increasingly see *The Lady* as stodgy, antediluvian in its style and tone – its 'out-of-touch' quality suggested by the journal's very name, as refined 'ladies' became egalitarian 'wimmin' in the sociopolitical lexicon. What is possibly most surprising is not that *The Lady* finally folded, but that it lasted as long as it did.

Yet its founder, Thomas Gibson Bowles, had been a truly innovative journalist, first famous for *Morning Post* dispatches from the Siege of Paris, transmitted to London by balloon and pigeon. In 1868, he founded *Vanity Fair*, whose pungent articles and distinctive caricatures made it one of the most influential magazines of its time. Bowles would also forge a career as an outspoken 'Tory Radical' politician attracted to free trade and small state ideas, and notorious for vitriolic speeches against everyone from his fellow Tories Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour to the Liberals Joseph Chamberlain and David Lloyd George.



Thomas Gibson Bowles

Bowles was incidentally also grandfather to the Mitford sisters, and gave their father his first job as *The Lady*'s general manager. Nancy Mitford would later write for the journal, and Lewis Carroll, while Princess Diana, Margaret Thatcher, Audrey Hepburn, Judi Dench, Helen Mirren, Nicole Kidman, Helena Bonham Carter, Sheila Hancock, and many other world-famous women would feature as cover stars, interviewees or writers.

The Lady was always about more than just advertisements for servants, or expansive estates, or handsome townhouses. Successive capable editors (including Rachel Johnson) devoted countless pages to the arts, books, crafts, décor, etiquette, classic fashion, food, health, history, household management, and legal advice. It also stayed in the family; its last publisher, Ben Budworth, is Thomas Bowles' great-grandson.

Numerous attempts were made to refresh the magazine, and in 2019 the magazine's landmark Regency-era headquarters in Bedford Street, Covent Garden was sold for £12.4m to realise cash. The magazine's offices were moved to a less elegant if possibly more practical industrial estate near Watford, to the chagrin of its shrinking number of staff. There were occasional fillips throughout the last few decades of the journal's existence, with industry awards, and even increases in circulation – but the latter were always short in duration. The proximate cause of the magazine's closure was an unpaid tax bill from 2024, of around £360,000. Perhaps nothing would have worked, in a winnowing world for magazine publishing, and perhaps especially a magazine so at odds with the cultural climate.

The holding company has said it will continue the journal's employment side online. Budworth has even mooted the idea of opening a school for butlers on his extensive Suffolk estate. But even if these ads continue to appear, they will be hovering in internet insubstantiality, shorn of their unique ambience of good sense, quiet restraint, and solidity. It is goodbye to one of the last holdouts of gentility on the nation's newsagents' shelves, yet another casualty of our growingly grungier era.







Economic pressures harm press freedom, says RSF

Although physical attacks against journalists are the most visible violations of press freedom, economic pressure is also a major, more insidious problem, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The economic indicator on RSF's 2025 World Press Freedom Index now stands at an unprecedented, critical low, and as a result, the global state of press freedom is now classified as a "difficult situation" for the first time in the history of the Index.

"At a time when press freedom is experiencing a worrying decline in many parts of the world, a major — yet often underestimated — factor is seriously weakening the media: economic pressure," says RSF Director Anne Bocande. "Much of this is due to ownership concentration, pressure from advertisers and financial backers, and public aid that is restricted, absent or allocated in an opaque manner."

The data measured by the RSF Index's economic indicator clearly shows that today's news organisations are caught between preserving their editorial independence and ensuring their economic survival. "Guaranteeing freedom, independence and plurality in today's media landscape requires stable and transparent financial conditions," Anne adds." Without economic independence, there can be no free press. When news media are financially strained, they are drawn into a race to attract audiences at the expense of quality reporting, and can fall prey to the oligarchs and public authorities who seek to exploit them. When journalists are impoverished, they no longer have the means to resist the enemies of the press — those who champion disinformation and propaganda."

She believes that the media "must urgently be restored to a state that is conducive to journalism and ensures the production of reliable information, which is inherently costly. Solutions exist and must be deployed on a large scale. The media's financial independence is a necessary condition for ensuring free, trustworthy information that serves the public interest."

According to the findings of the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, the overall conditions for practising journalism are poor (categorised as "difficult" or "very serious") in half of the world's countries. When looking at the economic conditions alone, that figure becomes three-quarters. RSF believes that firm commitments are urgently needed "to preserve press freedom, uphold the right to reliable information, and lift the media out of the destructive economic spiral endangering their independence and survival."

RSF is proposing a "New Deal for Journalism", with a series of recommendations on protecting media pluralism, committing to common standards, regulations online gatekeepers, ensuring that "tech giants" are properly taxed, improving "media literacy" and using development aid to combat "news deserts". For further information please go to www.rsf.org

OBITUARY

Michael Jack 'Mick' McGough (1949-2025)



We are sad to report the death of the Trustee and former Treasurer of the Institute's Orphan Fund, Mick McGough. Many members of the CIoJ will remember Mick's dedication and enthusiasm for journalism and the cause of press freedom. A true Eastender, born and raised in Walthamstow, he became a Chartered Accountant before starting a printing and stationery business which he ran for many years. Active in politics, he served on the management committee of The Freedom Association, the libertarian pressure-group, and was a perennial 'Eurosceptic' candidate in local, national and European elections. Despite his staunchly right-wing and pro-Brexit views, Mick was inveterate international networker whose contact list included numerous European diplomats and politicians of all political stripes; his charm and his 'clubbable' manner allowed him to easily move in a variety of circles and to befriend people across the ideological spectrum. A longtime resident of Loughton, Essex, Mick had only just arrived in Barcelona for a holiday in Spain with his wife Sally when he suffered a heart attack and died. He will be greatly missed by family and friends, not least by his colleagues in this Institute.

Andy Smith

E-mail address

If you are not receiving regular messages from us via e-mail it is likely we do not have your up-to-date details. Don't miss out. Update your details today - memberservices@cioj.org .

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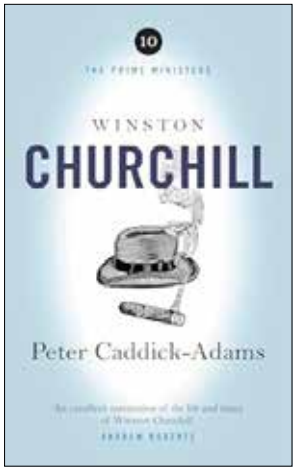
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Churchill has had many biographers over the years – Martin Gilbert, Roy Jenkins, Max Hastings and Andrew Roberts among the more authoritative and readable – which must make the task of any 'new' biographer of the great statesman all the more daunting. Military historian and broadcaster Peter Caddick-Adams has picked up the gauntlet and produced a concise but highly engaging Churchill biography as part of the Swift Books series on British Prime Ministers.



This new addition to the vast body of 'Churchilliana' naturally concentrates on Sir Winston's political career and accomplishments, but also gives the reader some valuable insights into Churchill's personal life and his extraordinary talents as an artist, author, broadcaster and journalist. We rightly remember Britain's wartime leader for his oratory, but his most memorable speeches were written, re-written and rehearsed before being delivered, as Churchill was, first and foremost, a man of the written word. Indeed, as Caddick-Adams writes, "most of his long life revolved around words and the use of them."

Sir Winston was a member of our Institute – joining in 1900 and remaining a card-carrying member until the eve of the Second World War – and during this time he wrote thousands of articles for the press, as well as dozens of books, and broadcasting regularly on the BBC. So there is a very good case for seeing Churchill as a journalist as much as a politician. Certainly, Caddick-Adams sees him this way, recounting Churchill's early decision, aged 20 and only recently commissioned into the Hussars, to take extended leave from the Army in order to report on the war in Cuba for the *Daily Graphic*, as a result of which he developed a life-long love of Cuban cigars!

After service on the North West Frontier of India, young Lieutenant Churchill wrote his first book, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, the success of which led to his being allowed to write despatches from India for the *Daily Telegraph*. Later, while attached to the 21st Lancers in Lord Kitchener's reconquest of the Sudan, he provided reports for the *Morning Post*, and went on to write another book, *The River War*, detailing the campaign leading up to the Battle of Omdurman. He continued to combine service as an Army officer with a career in journalism during the South African War, and his capture by the Boers and subsequent ingenious escape led to his next book, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, which Caddick-Adams describes as "some of his best writing".

Following these exploits in far-flung corners of the British Empire, Churchill was elected to Parliament as a Conservative, before defecting to the Liberals just a few years later and embarking on a Parliamentary career that saw him advance rapidly in the Asquith government (as Under Secretary for the Colonies, a Privy Councillor, then President of the Board of Trade, Home Secretary, and, on the eve of the Great War, First Lord of the Admiralty), and benefiting from a close working relationship with Liberal rising star David Lloyd George. Often seen as pushy, Churchill was definitely "a young man in a hurry," perhaps prompted by the premature demise of his politician father Randolph, whose death from a brain tumour, cutting short a promising career, had perhaps sparked Winston's drive and ambition. At the same time, he was still writing – producing regular articles for *The Strand Magazine* and writing books such as *My African Journey*.

Journalism continued to be a big part of Churchill's life, but this was interrupted by the First World War, which Caddick-Adams sees as Churchill's "dress rehearsal" for his WW2 role, especially his service as a senior officer with the Royal Scots Fusiliers, fighting in the trenches of the Western Front and gaining real experience of battlefield command. Between the wars, Winston was as prolific as ever in his writing, producing a stream of articles for the press, and authoring *The World Crisis*, *My Early Life*, *Thoughts and Adventures*, and his masterful biography of his ancestor John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, as we as beginning work on his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, which he was not able to complete until after WW2.

There is, of course, much more in Peter Caddick-Adams' *Winston Churchill* than just the great man's journalistic and literary career, but, by highlighting these aspects of Churchill's life, this book is an undoubted 'must read' for every journalist!

Andy Smith

A Wilder Wales – Travellers' Tales, 1610-1831

By David Lloyd Owen

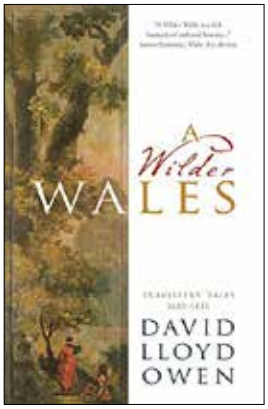
Published by Parthian Books

Hardback £15.99

A former Mayor of the West Wales town of Cardigan, writer David Lloyd Owen is a scion of an old Welsh family and has enjoyed a varied and illustrious career. He was once a water industry analyst in the City of London and an expert, too, on corvid behaviour, having written in his Oxford days a doctoral thesis on that rare member of the crow species, the chough.

Continuing a tradition begun most notably by *Wild Wales* author, George Borrow, Mr. Lloyd Owen has devoted much energy and research to an anthology which embraces writers of such stature as William Camden and Daniel Defoe, taking the reader into the mists of old Cambria; along pathways from St. Davids to Radnorshire — by way of inns (some more comfortable than others), remote towns and villages, and the quirks, characters, customs, idiosyncrasies and industries of a people.

Camden is the anthology's earliest visitor to the black-mountained land beyond the Severn, first coming here in 1590 to add to his survey of this island, *Britannia*; and as Lloyd Owen points out, was in fact correct when he wrote of Wales as part of the Kingdom of England. However, the 16th century was the age of Tudor monarchs, whose ancestry arose in the halls of Pembroke Castle: could it be that the Welsh did, in fact, turn the tables on their larger neighbour — a fascinating point of discussion, no doubt, for local nationalists and historians!



By the late-18th century, Wales had come to represent a romantic ideal; a mythical, craggy land — as Scotland was to be in the 19th century for Victorians — the ideal terrain for a grand tour. Daniel Defoe marvelled at the wild summits of Snowdonia, declaring in 1724 that even Hannibal would be obstructed by these British Alps. Fifty years later, in the June and July of 1774 and '75, Oxford-educated H.P. Wyndham, Mayor of Salisbury and High Sheriff of Wiltshire, took to the highways and byways, employing local guides — some *blundering*, others 'more intelligent', an example, perhaps, of the haughtier type (then as now) finding fault with conditions which were not quite as convenient as familiar home-surroundings. (Incidentally,

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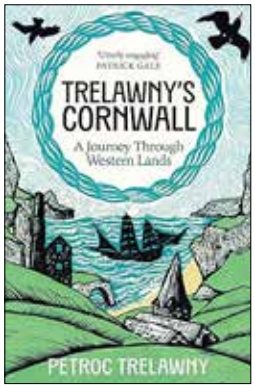
Continued from 15

the honour of those guides of old Wales is triumphantly defended and restored in the final chapter, as David Lloyd Owen deploys cutting responses to the country's more delicate, fussy and critical visitors…)

Another 18th-century visitor, Mrs. Mary Morgan, was surprised by her first sight of coracles and spent much time observing the fishermen grappling with, what was in those days, a plentiful supply of salmon. William Bingley in 1804, on the other hand, took pleasure from churches, stone, town walls and in — of all things — the 'fine, healthy situation' of Flint's gaol. Elsewhere, the uninhibited joy of country folk flinging themselves into the sea on warm days raises the eyebrows of the prim and proper, the anthology certainly highlighting how times have changed.

Numbering just over 450 pages, *Wilder Wales* is much more than just a pasting together of the picturesque. In the numerous extracts from writers and diarists, a carefully-curated tapestry of topography, curiosities and superstitions provides much inspiration for the geographer, social historian or researcher — yet the general reader will still delight in descriptions of the 'extensive, variegated and fertile' land that is the wilder Wales.

Stuart Millson



Trelawny's Cornwall: A Journey Through Western Lands

By Petroc Trelawny

Published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson,

Hardback £22.00 (ebook £12.99; audio £24.99)

Well known to BBC Radio 3 listeners, Petroc Trelawny has become the voice of classical music in Britain, presenting the network's early-morning programme, Proms concerts galore, and some fascinating 'Down your Way'-type features in which he travels to rural Ulster or Hadrian's Wall to find the spirit of a place.

Growing up in the western extremity of ancient Cornwall, imbibing the spirit of the coast and country of The Lizard peninsula, inspired those twin phenomena: a love of home and comfort, but also a youthful desire (common enough) to break away from constraining, everyday things — "Sunday lunch at 1pm on the dot" — to leave and seek one's fortune. This the author did, but as he explains, his first such foray resulted in a swift return to Cornish familiarity!

Trelawny's survey of his homeland beyond the Tamar, however, is not simply a descriptive journey taking in harbours and history. The book turns out to be an intensely personal portrait — not least in the passage where the author relates how, at what should have been a pleasant social occasion, his very name and pedigree were questioned and challenged. A horrible encounter! There is also the moving description of the loss, during boyhood, of his mother — his widower-father (a military man) dispensing 'tough love', and a period for the author of uncertainty and questioning.

But whether it be the autobiographical side of his story, or the history of Wesley and Methodism; the unexpected operatic heritage of Truro; local customs, language and dialect; gravestones, wrecks or wreckers, Petroc Trelawny's book is a firm recommendation for your summer-holiday stack of reading material.

Stuart Millson

125 years of the Daily Express

The first issue of the *Daily Express* was published a century and a quarter ago, on 24 April 1900. Every page of every issue of the Express, from 1900 to 1999, is now available to view at the British Newspaper Archive, which is home to more than 90 million digitised newspaper pages: a unique collection tracing the history of British newspaper publishing.


THE WAR.

ANOTHER DIVISION TO AID RUNDLE.

ATTACK NEAR BLOEMFONTEIN.

MISHAP TO THE WORCESTERS.

ROBERTS'S NEXT MOVE.

CLEARING THE FREE STATE.

THE SHELVING OF WARREN.

The *Daily Express* was the brainchild of journalist and publisher Sir Arthur Pearson (1866-1921).

The Archive has released images from the front page of the very first issue if this trailblazing newspaper, which, with its seven densely packed columns, appears completely different to the publication we know today.

That first issue of the *Express* reported how Queen Victoria had won "Ireland's Love" during her fourth visit to the country, with the elderly monarch being described as looking "wonderfully well… fresh and bright and alert."

The paper's front page also contained news of another European monarch, the German Emperor, or Kaiser, Wilhelm II. The *Express* even published the Kaiser's best wishes for the success of the new publication, in which he wrote: "I offer my good wishes for the success of the *Daily Express*, which, as I understand, proposes to foster that most excellent of missions – the promotion of international goodwill. Tell the British people that my first hope now and always is the preservation of good relations between Germany and Great Britain."

While the First World War was 14 years away, the conflict that preoccupied the *Express* in 1900 was the South African War,


THE QUEEN WINS IRELAND'S LOVE

AND BETTER HEALTH THROUGH HER IRISH SOJOURN.

ERIN'S BRIGHT HOPES

FOR A ROYAL RESIDENCE AND YET ANOTHER VISIT.

"EXPRESS" DUBLIN CORRESPONDENT.

DUBLIN, Monday.

Ireland certainly suits the Queen. Everybody is saying how wonderfully well she looks—fresh and bright and alert, with a quick eye for every peasant who stands bareheaded by the roadside, and a sympathetic interest in the welfare of all the homely warm-hearted folk who, for the first time for so many years, are taking care of their Queen.

for example reporting in its first issue on the progress of Field Marshal Lord Roberts' 60,000-strong army which had just taken Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, with the newspaper giving news of British casualties and Boer prisoners-of-war.

To view the first issue of the *Daily Express*, or any of the Archive's other 91,824,631 newspaper pages, please go to: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk .