Local newspapers in crisis, MPs are told

The crisis facing local newspapers is a cancer threatening the nation’s democracy and system of justice, the Institute has warned a parliamentary inquiry.

“It is probably the greatest crisis ever to hit our profession, and will have far-reaching consequences long after Lord Justice Leveson has put down his pen,” the IoJ’s Professional Practices Board chairman Amanda Brodie said.

Giving evidence to the all-party parliamentary group on the local and regional press, Amanda Brodie said that a fifth of the UK’s 1,100 local titles had closed in the last seven years, a loss of more than 240 papers, and many jobs.

Speaking at a hearing at Portcullis House, on July 4, she told a panel of MPs and their advisors: “If we lose our local papers, it will be a loss for the community, a loss for society and – ultimately – a loss for democracy.

“Democracy is not only the right to vote, but the right to know.

“Our councils and courts need to be covered, authority needs to be challenged, press offices need to be bypassed. This cannot be left to so-called ‘citizen journalists’.

“Both the Local Government Association and the Magistrates’ Association have expressed concern that local councils and courts are no longer being covered properly by their local papers.

“This is because the papers simply do not have the qualified staff to do these jobs.”

Ms Brodie cited Johnston Press as symptomatic of what was happening in the industry.

The company has announced that it will halve the number of journalists it employs by 2020, after which content will be produced 50/50 by journalists and ‘community contributors’, most of the latter untrained and unqualified.

“Our industry has relied on its journalists and the quality of its editorial content to pull it through difficult times in the past,” she said.

“But this requires experienced journalists to provide the content which newspapers need, to maintain the trust and loyalty of their readers.”

Amanda Brodie, a former assistant editor in local press, blamed the crisis on several factors:

• A fall in advertising revenues due to the economic situation;
• The rise in use of the internet, with a resultant expectation of free content and a migration of ad revenue from print;
• The advent of local authority publications (so-called ‘town hall pravdas’), funded by taxpayers’ money, which take ad revenue away from local newspapers and hit their circulation;
• The merging of many local independent newspapers into big groups, resulting in cost-cutting on an unprecedented scale driven by a desire to return higher dividends to shareholders, or the need to pay off huge debts, and
• Poor senior management, with decisions often taken by people with no feel for newspapers who saw them as mere ‘products’ and qualified journalists and investigative journalism as an unnecessary expense.

“They are using the economic situation as an excuse to take a filleting knife to our newsrooms,” Ms Brodie said. “They are systematically denuding our local papers of the very people the industry vitally needs.”

Local journalists were much more likely to adhere to high professional and ethical standards, because they live in the communities in which they work, and are
Editor’s Comment

A letter came into the CIoJ Head Office recently from a longstanding member of the Institute. The member is known to your Editor and to the General Secretary but for reasons that will become apparent from the letter he wishes to remain anonymous. However, he has given permission for me to reproduce the main points from the letter here:

I joined the Institute more than 25 years ago. When I joined it was just because I was working for a local paper and I wanted to join a journalists’ organisation - and I didn’t want to join the NUJ because it was so political and faction-ridden. Looking at the NUJ’s decline since the 1980s and its current precarious financial state I’m mightily glad I didn’t join!

The reason for writing this letter, though, is not to criticise the NUJ, much as I’d like to! The reason is this. When I saw the ad for the Institute of Journalists in Press Gazette, or UKPG as I think it was then called, there was a statement to the effect that joining the Institute would be an insurance policy. I didn’t take much notice at the time because, as I’ve already said, all I wanted was to join an association for professional journalists, and the chance to meet other journos. Since then, the ‘insurance’ aspect of the CIoJ has become clear to me - and I have considerable reason to be grateful to the Institute for coming to my rescue on no fewer than three occasions.

One of these was when the trade union side of the Institute helped me through a very difficult legal problem with a former employer (and forced the former employer not only to pay what he owed me in unpaid salary but also to repay funds he had taken from my pension fund). The Institute’s General Secretary gave advice and I also had the benefit of advice from the CIoJ’s lawyers, without which I could not have got through this difficult patch, let alone come through the other side - and won my case, hands-down!

Another instance of CIoJ support was the assistance that I received from the Institute’s Benevolent Fund when, as a result of losing a job through no fault of my own, and having received duff advice from one of the so-called ‘counselling services’, I found myself in very serious financial difficulties. The Benevolent Fund helped me out at a crucial time and its support was absolutely vital in getting me through that terrible period in my life.

The third, more recent, incidence also involved the Benevolent Fund, and came about when I had a long bout of illness and was unable to work (unable, in fact, to do pretty much anything at all!) and, being nowadays self-employed, had no income whatsoever to get me through this period of incapacity.

So, all told, the CIoJ has come to my rescue three times when serious health or financial problems have threatened to sink me. For this I shall be eternally grateful! Institute members - and prospective members - need to know about the help, including financial assistance, that the CIoJ Head Office and its various committees and charitable funds can provide.

Joining the Institute of Journalists was one of the best moves I ever made!

Please go out and tell all the journalists you know about the CIoJ, and tell them if they join the Institute they will be joining a professional institution, a trade union, a legal support network, and an extremely valuable insurance scheme, all in one!

Now get on and read the rest of The Journal!

Andy Smith
Institute commemorates ‘pioneer’ W.T. Stead

Members of the Chartered Institute of Journalists gathered at the W.T. Stead Memorial on London’s Embankment on Sunday April 15, the anniversary of Stead’s death aboard the Titanic.

They were joined by several members of W.T. Stead’s family. CIoJ President Norman Bartlett gave a speech about Stead, “the greatest journalist of the Victorian age”, and laid a wreath on behalf of the Institute.

“William Stead was powerful because of his effective pen,” said Norman Bartlett. “But he was a big man. A big man is one who uses his power in the interests of those who are weak. He campaigned for the poor. He campaigned for women and their rights. He campaigned against the abuse of children.”

After the wreath-laying ceremony, CIoJ members attended a service at St Bride’s Church, Fleet Street, in which the vicar, Rev David Meara, paid tribute to the work of the CIoJ and to the journalistic profession.

He said it was important to maintain “the finest tradition of vigorous and fearless investigative journalism” of which W.T. Stead had been ‘a pioneer and champion’.

Brown: “We need a strong local press”

Britain needs a strong independent local press, and we should “defend the freedom of the press and the right of the press to have the powers that they have… [to shine] the light on potential corruption or maladministration or the abuse of power.” That was the message from former Prime Minister Gordon Brown when he gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry.

Mr Brown told the Inquiry that his local newspaper in Fife, Scotland, had just had its editorial staff merged with those at a neighbouring title, and this, he said, was a problem throughout the country and even across the world: “As you know, there’s a debate about whether the BBC should be in local radio, whether it should simply be commercial radio, and how the integration of local newspapers with local broadcasting, with local television and local radio should happen. It’s clear to me, however, that without some underpinning — and it may be financial — then there is a market failure here.

“There are not enough resources now to support the quality journalism that you are talking about. My own local newspaper has just had its editorial staff merged with the next door newspaper. They’re running down the numbers of staff that are providing this local service and I think you would find this in every part of the country that you go into, and more than that, you’re finding it all across the world now, because an internet journalist, who is someone who’s sort of doing their own, if you like, self-journalism, can put their views up on a screen and put their views across the world, but if they’re not resourced and they’re not doing proper research and there’s no investigative journalism, then we’re diminishing the quality of the output that is available to us.”

The model used by the BBC could be used to fund quality journalism in the future, Gordon Brown said. “I would think that if we are genuine in trying to root out the bad but also trying to encourage the good, I think we have to have to say something about how quality journalism in this country can be financed, supported and really sponsored in the future.”

Continued from page 1

accountable to readers in a way which the national paper journalists are not.

“Local papers are not just in the community, they are part of it,” she added.

Local newspapers are the training grounds for national journalists of the future and their duty to educate, inform and campaign sits well with granting charitable status - to those which demonstrated genuine commitment to their communities.

Major groups proposing to reduce publication frequency or close titles should first be required to offer those titles for sale, at a fair market price, to local consortia, with the Government possibly providing funding through loans, grants or tax-breaks.

The same help should also be offered to new publications set up to replace titles closed by the big groups.

“Those newspapers which are still independently owned and operated are not experiencing the same difficulties as the big groups, nor have they dispensed with their journalists and quality editorial content,” Ms Brodie said.

“We feel that the conditions for approving future newspaper mergers or takeovers should be strengthened by requiring the potential new owners to provide a statement of intent incorporating guarantees for the maintenance of the acquired titles and that any future departure from this pledge should require the permission of the Government.

“As things stand, a newspaper can be taken over one year and closed down the next, without anyone being able to do anything about it.

“The Chartered Institute of Journalists feels this is a massive betrayal of both the journalists and their readers, for a purpose which benefits only the publisher.”

Self-interest

Closing her submission to the MPs, Ms Brodie said: “Without your support, self-interest will prevail and our local newspapers will be lost.

“We ask you to do your utmost to ensure that quality local newspapers do survive, so they may continue to provide a valued service to their communities, well into the future.”

Ms Brodie, who was accompanied at the hearing by vice-president Charlie Harris, a former local newspaper editor, and was followed by NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanisstreet, whose evidence to the panel echoed the Institute’s on most points.

Also giving evidence was Dr Andrew Williams of Cardiff University’s journalism and media faculty.
Media under attack in Greece

On June 17, as Greeks went to the polls for the second time in six weeks, two hand grenades were found in the courtyard of the Neo Falirio building in southern Athens housing the Kathimerini SA media group, which includes Skai TV and radio. The first grenade was spotted by an employee while the second one was discovered thanks to an anonymous phone call. Neither grenade exploded.

Representatives of all mainstream political parties in Greece condemned the incident. The Vienna-based South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), an affiliate of the International Press Institute (IPI), reports a rise in physical attacks against media outlets and journalists in Greece.

SEEMO Secretary General Oliver Vujovic said: “I hope that the new government, once formed, guarantees media freedom and brings to justice all those responsible for the attacks and threats against journalists.”

Two weeks before the latest elections, on June 4, four Molotov cocktails were launched at the headquarters of the Kathimerini SA media group. Nobody was injured. One month earlier, on May 9, Skai TV and radio presenter Konstantinos Bogdanos was attacked by several individuals in the Athens neighborhood of Exarhia. According to the Athens-based daily Kathimerini, the journalist said that the attackers were waiting for him. “I can say with absolute certainty that they knew I was a journalist. As they were kicking me, they made reference to Skai.”

In separate media-related developments, several journalists have been attacked in the past weeks, especially those covering anti-government rallies or attacks against immigrants. On June 6, an Israeli journalist with the Jerusalem Post, Gil Shefler, was attacked after trying to film a mob of armed, masked men beating a group of refugees and homeless people outside the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. He was treated at hospital for injuries to his head and chest.

On May 29, Greek journalist Lambros Panayiotou, who worked for Star Channel TV, witnessed six municipal policemen arresting a Somali immigrant in Athens. He filmed the scene and was allegedly hit and insulted by one of the municipal policemen who tried to snatch the mobile phone Panayiotou was using as a camera. Panayiotou identified himself as a journalist.

Hit with a baton

Seven weeks before that, on April 5, Mario Lolos, the president of the Greek Photojournalists' Union, was covering an anti-government rally on Syntagma Square, downtown Athens, when a policeman allegedly hit him several times with a baton. Lolos suffered serious head injuries and underwent surgery for a cranial fracture at Hygeia hospital.

“I am very concerned about the media situation in Greece,” said Oliver Vujovic. “Both journalists and media outlets are being attacked. I call on politicians and the police to guarantee the safety of all media, to allow them to function freely, and to bring all the aggressors of journalists to justice.”

He added that SEEMO would be monitoring media developments in Greece and will send a delegation to Athens to address all the attacks against journalists in the past year.

Journalists challenged to expose Sudan conflict

British journalists have been called upon to lift the lid on one the world’s forgotten conflicts at a meeting held to discuss the worsening crisis in Sudan’s Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State, as well as in newly-independent South Sudan.

The meeting, at the Frontline Club in Paddingdon, London, heard Dr Mukesh Kapila, Aegis Trust Special Representative and former head of the UN in Sudan, and Baroness Cox, founder of Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, condemn the British government for drawing a “moral equivalence” that blames both Sudan and South Sudan equally for the conflict.

CIoJ Past President Stuart Notholt, who has worked in South Sudan, was at the meeting. “With over 1,000 bombs dropped by the Sudanese air force since June, 500,000 people displaced and the Khartoum regime blocking all humanitarian assistance, it is simply not acceptable for the British government to claim that it has to be ‘impartial’,” he said. “There can be few conflicts in the world today where it is clearer who is the aggressor and who the victim. Rightly or wrongly, the British government found no difficulty in taking sides in other regional conflicts, such as in Libya or Syria, so why not in Sudan?”

Incredibly, says Notholt, the UK government has even threatened South Sudan with economic sanctions, through cutting DFID aid to some of the most needy communities in the world, if it does not return to the negotiating table with the Khartoum government.

Whilst Notholt accepts that the practical dangers of working in South Sudan, and the near impossibility of getting into the warzones in Sudan, make frontline reporting very difficult, he still believes there is more the international media can do to highlight the nature of the conflict.

“It is as if it’s September 1939 and the British government is holding Nazi Germany and Poland equally responsible for the Second World War. This is an unsustainable and repugnant position that shames our country and our leaders.”

(S Stuart Notholt edits the Ethnic Conflict Information Centre website at www.ethnic-conflict.info and publishes a twitter newsfeed, @SudanConflict, on the conflict in the region.)
From Hero to Zero:
The Rise and Fall of Julian Assange in the Western Media

By Patrick Emek

From being hailed as a hero and champion of free speech, Julian Assange is now persona non grata in much of the mainstream British and American media.

UK media coverage of Assange’s legal fight against extradition is always tinged with dark implications that he has been “indicted” on criminal charges, or that such are “pending” – to leave the reader in some doubt about his credibility.

It is reminiscent to me of the Cold War years in Eastern Europe when blacklisted individuals just ‘disappeared’ – fired from their jobs, losing their homes, deprived of everything except the basic means to survive, perhaps by being allowed to clean public toilets or empty bins. Thankfully Mr Assange has not yet reached this level of descent, but it’s no thanks to his fairweather friends in the UK and US media, most of whom are too frightened to speak up in his defence for fear of being ostracized, sacked or blacklisted, or all three.

Witch-hunts

With the UK media almost totally dominated by big business, and with pressure being piled on from the US, is it any wonder that the knives have been sharpened for the ‘subversive’ Julian Assange? TV coverage of Assange’s extradition hearing in the High Court was almost non-existent. Yet was this not a major news event in its own right, especially in view of his ‘celebrity’ status?

The fact is that Julian Assange was responsible for making available to the world the greatest leak to date of United States classified papers. These papers, the Wikileaks documents, cover everything from US foreign policy to spying and the funding of clandestine organizations to the indiscriminate murder of Reuters journalists. Surely this makes him at least anathema to any journalist or researcher.

Jealousy

I can understand the anger, jealousy and frustration which mainstream media must feel at being bypassed by an individual such as Mr Assange. I felt the same incredulity myself when I cited Pakistan in 2002 as our main problem and a conduit point for Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters exiting from Afghanistan after 9/11. Everyone I knew was frightened to run with this ball as it was entirely contrary to US and Western policy at that time. This included the BBC and CNN.

At that time also, I had occasional access to the US Naval Headquarters in Grosvenor Square, and copies of my book were available to senior staff known to me. But my book was simply ignored by the media and by Western governments. My previous book on the Philippines achieved wide coverage on the BBC and Sky but I became invisible when exposing Pakistan as one of a major danger to the West. In any case, as a ‘fringe’ independent journalist and researcher, I could be easily dismissed.

But what of Mr Assange? The UK and US media appear to have gone apoplectic in response to Assange hosting his own show on Russia Today, which, like the BBC and PBS, is a state-affiliated Russian television network of very renowned standing in its own right.

The answer is quite simple. His deal with the Guardian newspaper (to release extracts from the Wikileaks papers) fell through because Guardian Group wanted to control all of the material, how and which papers would be released, and they also required source material and all copies – always anathema to any journalist or researcher. The end result would have been that, as soon as all materials were turned over to the Guardian, a legal injunction by a QC from an eminent chambers on behalf of the government of the United States would have been placed preventing their publication on grounds of ‘national security’ and the fact that they were stolen and their release was unauthorised.

It could also have been argued that the public interest was best served by preventing the publication of these papers. This is the same public interest which, ironically, Mr Assange says that he is best serving. You may have figured out the ending already. In due course (maybe after years of incarceration of the banned documents and videos) the leaked material would have been deemed by the British High Court to be the property of the US government and an order made that they be returned to their rightful owner – the United States.

Write-off

Making an example of Julian Assange in order to keep the rest of us in line is no answer to the problem, and embarrassment, of ‘leaks’. A better solution would be to write off the loss and move to ensure that further leaks of highly sensitive materials are not so easy to achieve in the future.

If a similar leak of highly classified documents had taken place in Russia, the perpetrator of such a leak would be dealt no less harsh treatment by the authorities than the court-martial Private Bradley Manning is currently facing in the United States.

The contrary argument might be that we are not Russia and, as we purport to champion a system that is better than that of our adversaries, we should be held to higher standards of accountability and transparency.

So, for me, supporting Julian Assange is part of a crusade in support of freedom, democracy, open sources and open electronic frontiers.
Institute must focus on quality

As the Council of the CIoJ considers proposals for the Institute to become directly involved in journalism training, two prominent CIoJ members set out their views.

Training is vital in today’s world for keeping marketable skills pristine – and journalists are no exception. Many members of the CIoJ – like me – started our careers as trainees on established county newspapers with signed indentures. The boss paid for your NCTJ training and the trainee did everything to know the community, learn the rules and pass for seniority and a much needed pay rise. Now journalists face many of the same challenges but in a very different world.

Press Gazette has produced a survey showing many towns denuded of access to local newspapers.

Other reports show reducing staffing levels from sub editors to photographers, and widening geographical areas – all in the name of collective cost savings and debt restructuring.

For individual journalists this means greater pressure to show excellent news sense plus skills as a social networker, photographer and writer with an hourly deadline – and often with no library or colleagues who know the area and local communities.

I do not support a closed shop for training or anything else. But let us be clear about this – the vast majority of ‘community contributors’ do not want to become full-time journalists, they just want to make a bit of money on the side and maybe see their name in print online or to push their particular cause or hobby-horse. Of course we should support people who want to get trained so they can become full-time media workers or journalists – that is very different from the type of people we are talking about here.

Time for a CIoJ Media College?

In considering this proposal, we need to ask ourselves two questions:

1. How will it benefit our members?
2. How will it benefit the Institute as a whole?

Having a training remit is fine, and something I support, but we need to remember we are first and foremost a membership organisation and our primary loyalty is to our members.

If this proposal goes ahead, it can have no other effect than to make citizen journalists more attractive to editors as casual contributors, and will result in job losses, especially on local papers, a cause we have publicly and rightly fought. Our training and/or experience is the only thing which marks us out from the also-rans of the media world. In particular, fear of legal action is what stays the hand of local press barons, who are systematically denuding our newsrooms of the experienced journalists they need.

This is not an abstract concept. Johnston Press says it plans to cut its 2,000 journalists by half by 2020. By then content will be produced 50/50 by journalists and ‘community contributors’. These are the very people we are now proposing to train.

Conflict of interest

Also there is a potential conflict of interest for the IoJ (TU). Where do we stand if we are asked, as a trade union, to defend a member who has been made redundant in favour of one of these citizen journalists – especially if it is someone who we have helped to train? Citizen journalists are very attractive to management – they are not employees and so have no employment rights, and they do not have to be paid holiday pay, sick pay, pensions etc. As a trade union, should we be supporting this move towards a workforce which is so disposable?

Next we ask, how will it benefit the CIoJ?

Will it boost our membership? I struggle to believe that many ‘citizen journalists’ – who earn very little – will be interested in becoming full CIoJ members, and paying the cost of a full subscription out of their meagre wages.

This proposal will have very little effect on those of us who are lucky enough to be self-employed or retired. It will impact most on our members who are right now working in newsrooms, and I strongly urge members of the wider membership – not just Council – to have your say on this matter.

Finally I would say that I am happy for some sort of link to be made with a media training organisation, if it can be of proven benefit both to our members and the Institute as a whole. I do not have a problem with training. I do have a problem with training people who will become a threat to job security for existing CIoJ members.

Amanda Brodie (Chairman, Professional Practices Board)

CioJ TRAINING DEBATE

Short cuts

Sceptics will say that training will add to this deadening of the real ability of a journalist working the ground. It will provide short cuts for citizen journalists or bloggers to get credibility so they can take low paid jobs of ‘real journalists’ who will be thrown on the scrap heap.

Surely that is why the Institute needs to get to grips with training and offer a range of affordable courses which help members and others engaged in our industry to keep ahead of the game?

Whether you want to join or stay in this business, chances are you will expect to confidently talk about copyright and the legal responsibilities at the same time has persuading sceptical employers about the pixels of our jpegs, keyword optimization and that copy is tuned to the various audiences different formats offer.

Members join the CIoJ confident that it adds credibility and professionalism to the word journalist. And once you have joined there is a Code of Conduct which commits members to positive behaviour. The same must be clear for any training course to bear the CIoJ name.

Naturally courses are already on offer from individual journalists through to Universities but many lack either the breath of modern journalism or simply don’t understand the business in today’s environment.

Personally, having worked with Lord Leveson in a previous role, I am in no doubt that his report will set a new pathway of working for all professional journalists.

The CIoJ needs to focus on the fight for quality journalism – and that starts with quality training. Leaving it to someone else means we are not in a steering position to set standards which will be vital in the future.

Whether you are a blogger, a student wanna-be Journalist or an old timer tuning up their skills, adding the CIoJ logo is never a paper exercise. It is the confidence that this training course is backed with real experience of fighting for excellence in the changing world of journalism for more than a century.

Liz Justice (Immediate Past President)
Civil rights in Bahrain

By Shirin Aguiar-Holloway

I grew up in Bahrain. Since coming to the UK as a student, I have described it to the uninitiated as an idyllic combination of sun, sea and sand. Years later, on a three-day trip last month to the archipelago of islands that make up the country, I discovered that in more ways than one this description is no longer quite accurate.

I saw very little sun or blue sky. Mostly Bahrain was covered in a non-descript haze. There was also, more to my consternation, very little of its magical soft sand left. Bahrain’s wonderful beaches have all but disappeared. I was desperate to swim in the bluey-green, wonderfully shallow waters of the Arabian Gulf again, but alas, this was not to be. A lot of Bahrain’s coastline has been sacrificed to land reclamation and the prolific construction of high-rise modern offices and apartments. The once-popular Zallaq Beach is now dominated by a hotel, and the Sheikh’s Beach, once only the preserve of western (white) folk, is no more. A trip to a beach would have meant a long-ish drive to the Hawar or Amwaj Islands south of the mainland.

Finding a beach was not my first challenge however. On arrival in Bahrain, I was detained at immigration. After handing in my passport and having watched the immigration officer disappear inside with it, I waited half an hour before enquiring in the airport immigration supervisor’s office. There on his desk I saw a print out in Arabic with my photo at the top. It was my LinkedIn profile photo and profile which told them that I was a journalist. As I was not visiting as a journalist, and was not in paid employment as one, I did not state this as my occupation on the disembarkation card. I tried to explain to the supervisor that I just wanted to stop off for three days on my way back from visiting my poorly father in Asia. I said that having grown up in Bahrain and where my father used to work, I chatted with other officials about going to school in Bahrain and where my father used to work. The supervisor even arranged for a friend of mine waiting for me in arrivals to send up some Bahraini Dinars so I could wander off inside the airport and buy myself some grub.

This is surely a far better way than acting as a steel-toed journalist who believes they have a God-given right to enter the country and report on human rights.

My feelings about human rights are equivocal. Is controlling protests, bringing order or meting out Arab-style punishments in an Arab country any worse than was, say, continual (often indiscriminate and often civilian) bombing of Iraq or Afghanistan?

There have been complaints that no member of Bahrain’s security forces has been convicted of human rights violations. But how different is that from the ongoing list of black deaths in custody in the UK where those responsible with protecting the public, including its minorities, seem to get away with it? I can’t see that much difference.

Decent hardworking expats, including public relations consultant Ashish Gorde whose family has lived in Bahrain for over 40 years, say Shias do receive fair treatment. Although the ruling family, the Al-Khalifas, are Sunni, the majority of MPs in Bahrain’s Parliament are Shias.

Justice and democracy need time, and don’t always work to the shrill cries of ‘human rights’ and ‘freedom’ of the western press. Bahrain may need to move on in terms of its democracy but should this entail descent into anarchy, as in Egypt and Syria, the loss of hundreds of lives, and ruination of the economy?

I craved for the ‘old’ Bahrain with its simple lifestyle, beaches and warm waters, where a dhow (old Arab fishing boat) could take you to the shallowest and sandiest of beaches around tiny magical islets for a lazy Friday.

But just as the beaches have had to make way for construction projects to boost the island’s economy, Bahrain’s majority Shias rightly seek more power, and change must come. Bahrain is just growing up.

Visa checks

Bahrain tightened its visa rules in 2010. Previously, journalists and others from many Western countries could receive visas upon arrival with no problems, but restrictions are now in place because back then some US and Irish journalists entered the country as tourists and immediately joined the anti-government protests. Thus background checks are now a matter of course for all western visitors, and it is better to apply for a visa beforehand.

The inauspicious start to my visit didn’t end there. Later that day I had my first experience of teargas. During a balmy evening car tour of Budaiya, a suburb, with a friend, I had partly rolled down my window as the air conditioning in the car was over-efficient. It was dark. Suddenly my nose began to sting, I bent my head, trying to shake it off. It was a burning, uncomfortable sensation. Then my friend’s chauffeur exclaimed: “It’s a demonstration!” We had chanced upon a full-blown fracas between Shia protesters and police. It was a battle scene. Police in riot gear were running all over the tiny crossroads, fires burned all around, the air was dark and thick with teargas and roving green laser lights designed to flush out undesirable lit up nearby buildings.

My friend’s chauffeur happened to be a cocky Keralite from south India who was constantly on one of his mobile phones while driving. Not content with happening on this war zone, he chose to halt the car in the centre of the crossroads, assuming that as a journalist I wanted to see what was going on. I didn’t. Just as I was regretting not going on. I didn’t. Just as I was regretting not going on. I didn’t. Just as I was regretting not going on.

Prevarication

Neither this experience nor the delay and detention at the airport spoiled my stay. I went on to have a fantastic weekend with friends as I discovered the new Bahrain with its myriad malls and eateries. I took both experiences in my stride, as part and parcel of Middle Eastern culture, a culture of prevarication and saving face. While in the immigration supervisor’s office, I chatted with other officials about going to school in Bahrain and where my father used to work. Bahrain was covered in a non-descript haze. It was my LinkedIn profile photo and profile which told them that I was a journalist. As I was not visiting as a journalist, and was not in paid employment as one, I did not state this as my occupation on the disembarkation card. I tried to explain to the supervisor that I just wanted to stop off for three days on my way back from visiting my poorly father in Asia. I said that having grown up in Bahrain and where my father used to work, I chatted with other officials about going to school in Bahrain and where my father used to work. The supervisor even arranged for a friend of mine waiting for me in arrivals to send up some Bahraini Dinars so I could wander off inside the airport and buy myself some grub.

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Decent hardworking expats, including public relations consultant Ashish Gorde whose family has lived in Bahrain for over 40 years, say Shias do receive fair treatment. Although the ruling family, the Al-Khalifas, are Sunni, the majority of MPs in Bahrain’s Parliament are Shias.

Justice and democracy need time, and don’t always work to the shrill cries of ‘human rights’ and ‘freedom’ of the western press. Bahrain may need to move on in terms of its democracy but should this entail descent into anarchy, as in Egypt and Syria, the loss of hundreds of lives, and ruination of the economy?

I craved for the ‘old’ Bahrain with its simple lifestyle, beaches and warm waters, where a dhow (old Arab fishing boat) could take you to the shallowest and sandiest of beaches around tiny magical islets for a lazy Friday.

But just as the beaches have had to make way for construction projects to boost the island’s economy, Bahrain’s majority Shias rightly seek more power, and change must come. Bahrain is just growing up.

By Shirin Aguiar-Holloway
The second coming
Preparing for the centenary

By Robin Morgan

The next edition of The Journal passes a significant milestone – it will be exactly 100 years old when you receive your copy! The Institute is already working on a special celebratory issue to mark 100 years of news about news – for in many ways that first edition of The Journal represented a new-look approach to news coverage of our noble profession and can be claimed to be the ‘grandfather’ of today’s trade press and media sections in our daily newspapers.

The Journal represented a coming of age for the Institute in the recognition of the fact that our means of distributing news about the organisation through an irregular publication of the dry-as-dust Institute of Journalists’ Proceedings was totally unsatisfactory for the modern times of 1912! It was, the Council of that day admitted, almost unreadable and certainly could not rivet the attention of our members.

The President of that year, George Hodgson, told members: “It is no disparagement to the Proceedings, as an official record of the transaction of the Institute to say that they did not meet the ‘felt want’ for information published at more frequent intervals, a more prominent and rapid record of the work the Institute is doing, and a convenient medium for the exchange of information within the Institute. That want the Journal hopes to supply.”

Press ganged

Council member George Springfield, whose day job was on the Financial Times, was ‘press ganged’ into being the first editor and a pretty hectic role it turned out to be.

The Institute’s Council met on Saturday, November 16 and decided to go ahead with the new Journal and handed the reins to Mr Springfield. In just one week he managed to put together a 16-page edition which was in the hands of most members on the morning of November 23!

It was, he admitted, a working-on-the-spot job and it showed. He had, he said, enough copy to fill four pages by the Monday evening – provided he used a large typeface! – but as the week moved on more copy flowed in and by Wednesday he could go up to eight pages if he reduced the font size to type on the extra pages. During the final two days an avalanche of news descended on his desk and the move to 16-page was made – shoehorning it all in by yet further reductions in type size!

The Journal hit the streets on Saturday, November 23, and began “a century of devotion to journalists and journalism,” as we have termed the forthcoming event.

A full reproduction of that first edition will come with the bumper special edition we are planning to publish and be in our members’ hands on that November 23 anniversary date.

George Springfield’s first edition was a huge advance in Institute communication but it was still pretty turgid – excusable given the rush job he was asked to undertake.

Subsequent editions became much livelier and newsy as our commemorative edition will demonstrate.

The Journal’s appearance was not without controversy. Some stick-in-the-mud members complained at its cost – about £30! Today, 100 years on, you can multiply that cost by 100 to get close to the cost of this edition of our magazine! To shave pennies off the costs Institute districts were asked to contribute to the cost of postage or take bulk deliveries for handing out to individual members. Subsequent editions managed to attract a healthy proportion of advertisements to further reduce the cost to the Institute and the regular monthly publication of the magazine was established.

Concern over the cost of The Journal’s production has always occupied the attention of the Council which is why, these days, its appearance is confined to quarterly publication.

For that reason there will be a slightly longer than usual delay in the appearance of the next edition, which will be our celebration of the centenary – but it will be well worth waiting for.

Special articles are being commissioned. There will be supplement looking at the news of 1912/1913 – and very interesting and relevant it is to today’s situation in journalism. To give today’s youngsters an appreciation of the history of our profession, we are hoping to distribute copies of the special edition to every student on journalism or media studies courses in the country!

Hopefully – for a lot depends of the Post Office’s ability to deliver mail promptly – that edition will pop through your letter box on the anniversary date... November 23, 2012.

Centenary of Elgar’s ‘The Music Makers’

As a group of writers at the Institute of Journalists proudly set about launching their new Journal in 1912, Britain’s most prominent composer, Sir Edward Elgar, was busy putting the finishing touches to a work for orchestra, mezzo-soprano and chorus, entitled ‘The Music Makers’. Sir Edward decided to set the visionary words of the poet Arthur O’Shaughnessy: “We are the music makers / And we are the dreamers of dreams.” While better known for his Pomp & Circumstance marches, ‘The Music Makers’ represents the more troubled side of Elgar.

A small Cmol group including Past-President Stuart Notholt recently had the privilege to visit Rochester Cathedral for a wonderful centenary performance of ‘The Music Makers’ by Gravesham Choral and Orchestral Society under the baton of local conductor, Alan Vincent – a musician with a lifetime of experience in the field of choral conducting, and a composer in his own right. The dark, rainy night seemed perfect for Elgar’s noble melancholia: the drifiting, shifting textures, and occasional bursts of arduous and world-weary pomp echoing in the reverberant acoustic of the cathedral.

The evening also featured a performance of another English composer’s work. This was Gerald Finzi’s ode to the Patron Saint of music - ‘For St Cecilia’, with tenor soloist, Edward Hughes. The chorus distinguished itself here, pingingly on-the-note, in a work that floats with an uplifting, mercurial spirit, as well as a nostalgic sense of Englishness. Elgar’s Enigma Variations formed the central work in the programme, Alan Vincent taking us on a brisk walk among Elgar’s “friends pictured within” and through Victorian Great Malvern and beyond!

Stuart Millson

(For further details of the work of this exceptionally-talented chorus and orchestra, see the Society’s website: www.graveshamcs.co.uk)

ONLINE JOURNAL

It has been proposed that The Journal should in future be published online only. Would you be happy for this to happen or would you prefer to continue receiving a printed copy? Email your views to editor@cmol.co.uk.
From the President’s Desk

Many of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations took place, and the key events of the Olympic Games extravaganza will be taking place, around the Chartered Institute of Journalists’ head office in London’s Docklands.

The Thames River Pageant was one ingredient in this summer of public entertainment. According to the prior publicity, the event was to set off from Battersea Bridge and continue downstream to Tower Bridge – and that’s it. Except, of course, that there was far more to it than that.

It was not that a thousand boats and ships came on low-loaders to be launched into the Thames at Battersea and be retrieved from the water at Southwark and be whisked away back to their bases. A very high level of organisation was required to make sure all the vessels were marshalled in the correct pattern in holding areas upstream from Battersea. After they passed the Queen on review at the Tower they continued for some miles to Greenwich and beyond or they would have blocked or interfered with the rest of the fleet following behind.

Drowned out

I don’t know the details of how it all happened – I only watched – but I do know that it is part of the back story to the main event. In fact that ‘back story’ was drowned out – literally by the unforgiving rain and metaphorically by the BBC’s notorious dumming down of the commentary about it.

Nevertheless, the simple anecdote illustrates a key element of good journalism: looking for the back story. As Clare Balding has said of her aim in commenting, “I want to tell viewers something that can’t see for themselves.”

Restricted by time and limited resources, too many journalists today are forced to accept press releases at face value or wired stories from agencies. They are denied the opportunity to develop stories by editors who face financial constraints and sometimes advertisers’ pressure.

We all know that digging out the back story is usually worthwhile. It may produce an unusual human interest story. It may lead to the uncovering of dirty deeds. Or it may simply add colour to the narrative and useful experience to the journalist.

This sort of stuff transforms local media from the mundane reports on meetings and fetes. Find out the real reason why a county council has pushed through a planning application against local opposition. Discover why the incidence of parking enforcement notices has suddenly shot up. Investigate a hospital trust that made nursing staff redundant while hiring more consultants. Probe why the local constabulary paid out a large sum to a prominent figure.

Members will be familiar with the constant drip, drip, drip of announcements of regional dailies going weekly, of local titles being merged, of weeklies ceasing to publish. The cause has been laid at the door of the internet or changing demographics. The back story to many of these scenarios is of news groups that used finance to leverage corporate growth then sought production economies to fund the cost of finance. The effect was to lower the quality of the papers, lose readership and so make further retrenchment. Overweening ambition led to overstretch and failure – and journalists paid the price.

Dreadful

The same dreadful effects have been seen in the USA. There a team of redundant newspaper staffers have spent time on a documentary to highlight the loss of investigative journalism due to media cuts. (http://bit.ly/LDNaZ) The documentary will follow three back stories that have fallen by the wayside simply because the people working on them got laid off.

However it does not have to be like this. In many cases, progressive local papers have utilised the internet to develop their local web presence. My own local paper in Chelmsford, the Essex Chronicle, claims to have 100,000 readers a week (the district has a population of 160,000) and that more than 90 per cent of the content is unique and cannot be read anywhere else, either in print or online.

Alan Geere, the editor (sadly not a CIoJ member), accepts that on-line is taking hold of its traditional advertising platforms of jobs, cars and houses but says “… if we continue to serve our communities with news, information and advertising that people cannot find elsewhere our future can still be very bright.”

The Institute’s efforts to try and support – and possibly restore – the role of local journalism to deliver those back stories that matter in towns, villages and districts throughout the land, may have found a champion.

Louise Mensch, MP, has spoken out quite forcefully on the subject of local newspapers. At the end of April she hosted a debate at Westminster on the future of local newspapers. Clearly ambitious (she switched from membership of the Labour party to the Tories in 1997) she is a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Her sympathies for journalism may be reinforced by the fact that her sister is a freelance.

The Professional Practices Board (PPB) is lined up to make a presentation to her in the near future having already written in support of her message. PPB has outlined an approach that identifies community needs as the driver to sustain local media. Too often, positive developments like this have been thwarted by the financial burden imposed by national news groups.

Our back story is to get an advocate in Parliament who shares our vision for local media whether print or on-line. Can she get government interested too?

New Treasurer needed for Orphan Fund

The CIoJ’s Orphan Fund, a registered charity administered by Trustees appointed by the Institute’s Council, wishes to appoint an Honorary Treasurer to take over from January 2013. The role is to exercise a supervisory role over the financial decisions of the Trustees, to prepare reports and make payments. There are four meetings a year, held in London. Travel expenses are paid. Any member who thinks he or she would be suitable for this post, please get in touch with the chairman of the Fund, Michael Moriarty, c/o CIoJ Head Office.

Michael Moriarty says: “As chairman of the Orphan Fund committee, I would like to express my thanks for and admiration of the work of our retiring Honorary Treasurer and President of the Institute, Norman Bartlett. For more than a decade, he combined the task of honorary treasurer of both the Fund and the Institute. From the time he took on these jobs, the fortunes of both have greatly prospered and his astute management of our finances is seen in the greatly increased healthiness of the state of the Institute’s bank balances generally.

“I cannot pay a higher tribute to the work that Norman has done over many years than to say that his brilliant management will continue to shine from the excellent start that he has given to the Institute and I trust and hope that his wise counsel will continue to be available to us all for many years to come.”
New bursaries for science journalism students

The Wellcome Trust is offering financial support for two students per year for three years to undertake a postgraduate qualification in science journalism at City University London.

The Master of Arts in Science Journalism at City University is unique in the UK educational sector and one of a very small number of similar courses across the world. The MA has been running since 2009 with UK, EU and international students. Graduates from City University have gone on work in science journalism or communications for a wide range of organisations including the BBC, CERN, the Science Media Centre, Physics World, and the British Science Association.

The MA in Science Journalism gives students a thorough grounding in the best practices in health, science and environmental journalism, while teaching them to be critical consumers of scientific information.

The Wellcome Trust is providing financial support for one student from the UK or Republic of Ireland and one student from low or middle-income countries with a particular connection to the Trust (India, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, South Africa, Malawi or Kenya).

The bursaries will cover tuition fees and living expenses, as well as a return flight for the international students.

Prospective students can find out more and apply online on City University’s website: www.city.ac.uk.

Sherlock Holmes and the Dead Boer at Scotney Castle

BY TIM SYMONDS

(MX Publishing, 274pp, £11.99)

Sherlock Holmes now lives as a recluse in the Old Weald, purchasing and keeping rare Italian bees (Apis mellifera ligustica). Dr Watson is absent from his life, but hopes and wishes that his great friendship might still be alive. What has caused this great change in the life and affairs of Holmes?

After an invitation to rural Sussex by the influential members of the secretive Kipling League, the great detective and his faithful companion chance upon a conspiracy of brain-needling complexity and mystery involving some of England’s most uncompromising apostles of Empire... and a dead body at Scotney Castle. What is the role of the great English painter, Pevensey, whose landscape scene, originally depicting a human figure, appears to have been altered or tampered with? How does David Siviter, poet, who resides in the Jacobean mansion of Crick’s End, Sussex, come to figure in this curious and sinister saga? And why was Holmes so reluctant for the case to be chronicled by the good Dr Watson?

Longtime CIoJ member Tim Symonds has continued the great Conan Doyle tradition in his wonderfully inventive novel; the author’s plentiful powers of description, and his ability to take the great Sherlock Holmes to the very limits of intellectual stability and sanity, providing the mystery-loving, crime-loving reader with a story of power-politics and curious, even surreal happenings in the remote Wealden countryside. This is the world of country-houses and closed-off, superior social circles; of powerful, esoteric clubs of distinguished, unimpeachable gentlemen; of an England where one carried

G e r m a n - l e a t h e r
G l a d s t o n e
P o s h t e e n
L o n g C o a t s
(e s p e c i a l l y
H o l m e s !)

or bought
M o n k e y
B r a n d
soap, and
travelled in
broughams,
or visited
Russian vapour baths.

It has been said that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories are remarkable for their element of slight absurdity, and the author of this fine new book has captured, bottled and distilled the very essence of the true Holmes story: the sudden, impulsive outbursts of Holmes, the exasperation of the level-headed Watson; their lengthy discussions and enquiries into electrocution, or arcane medical or mystical knowledge, or strange species and points of detail beyond the experience of most human beings.

Clues and connections unfold as Tim Symonds takes us into the secretive world of a league of gentlemen and the motives which compel them to act. Each step of the way is a chess-game, and for the genius of Baker Street every facial expression or comment in conversation is a vital clue. For the author, Tim Symonds, it all seems, well... elementary!

Stuart Millson

Book Review

Dennis Bolton dies

D e n n i s B o l t o n, who was the West Yorkshire District’s first treasurer on its formation in 1979, and who was with the Yorkshire Post for 38 years, has died at the age of 89.

He was believed to be the longest serving member of the Yorkshire County Cricket Club and saw his first county match in 1932. During Headingley test matches he would book a ticket for every day’s play and hope to be able to nip up to the ground to catch some action between reporting jobs.

Leeds born and bred, Dennis started his career as an articled pupil on the weekly Batley News in 1939 but that was interrupted by four years in the RAF during World War II where he served as a wireless operator, mainly at a sea plane base in the Comoro Islands off the east coast of Africa. He often claimed his most important work there was as the camp projectionist.

On his return to Civvy Street he became a sports reporter but as that prevented him watching some of the county matches he wanted to see, he joined the Yorkshire Post in 1949 and subsequently moved into reporting local government affairs. It meant that while covering affairs at the Leeds Civic Hall, he could slip away to the nearby Headingley cricket ground and catch some of the play!

On the day that Geoffrey Boycott scored his 100th hundred in 1977, Dennis persuaded a colleague to stand in for him at the Civic Hall and he got to Headingley ten minutes before Boycott made the significant stroke. Dennis joined the celebrations – and then caught the next bus back the Civic Hall.

He retired in 1987.

A strong Methodist, he served that church in a variety of voluntary positions for more than 50 years.

A memorial service was held at the Burley-in-Wharfedale Methodist church in May.

Don’t forget

You will find many of the CIoJ’s forms, leaflets and guides available as downloads on the members’ area of the Institute’s website, www.cioj.co.uk.
End of an era
A tribute to the late Dennis Signy

By Charlie Harris

I was in the gutter until Dennis Signy dragged me out and made me a star. At least, that was his explanation of my career, although he told the same story about everyone he hired as editor of the Hendon Times Group in north London.

Dennis’s death on June 6 at the age of 85 marked the end of an era.

He was one of the few local newspaper journalists to whom the description “legendary” truly applies. In fact, as he would have been the first to agree, the phrase “a legend in his own lunchtime” could have been coined for him, a lover of a glass or three of Bells and an unashamed smoker.

He was a lovely man, a great editor, and a wonderful boss who was a constant joy to work for. He will be greatly missed, and his exploits will be recounted whenever two or more north London journalists gather for a pint.

He was also a member, and staunch supporter, of the Institute in the dark days of the 70s when the NUJ and the Labour government were trying to impose a closed shop on journalism.

I worked under Dennis for only a year, but I had known him for a lot longer. In 1984 he poached me from the now defunct Harrow-Wembley Independent to become editor of the Borehamwood Post (since renamed the Times), one of four papers which he group edited for 17 years.

New career

The following year, he shocked the world of local papers, and the London Borough of Barnet, by leaving what had become his fiefdom for a new career in football management. It was like the ravens leaving the Tower of London.

I first heard of Dennis in 1973, soon after joining the Palmers Green and Southgate Gazette, in a neighbouring borough, as a junior reporter, and met him the next year when most of the Gazette’s editorial staff resigned from the NUJ over its politicising and support for a closed shop and joined the Institute of Journalists.

Many journalists on the Hendon Times Group made the same move and the two chapters formed both the core of the revitalised Middlesex district.

Many members of the Institute, especially those who had “defected” from the NUJ, regularly faced insults (“scab”, “blackleg”, management poodle” and even “fascist”), intimidation and, in one notorious case, downright bullying.

We had many supporters, but our greatest champion was Dennis. He stood up to the NUJ hardliners, defending his own IoJ staff to the hilt, and offering a job to an IoJ sub who had left another local paper when the bullying had seriously affected his health.

Dennis refused to bow to pressure from other trade unions which demanded that their industrial disputes be covered only by NUJ members (strikes, walkouts, works-to-rule, go-slow, and picketing were a daily occurrence).

When pickets outside a local engineering factory refused to be photographed by an Institute member, Dennis told them that as all his photographers were IoJ members there would be no pictures. The strikers climbed down.

Robust

Dennis argued robustly and publicly that he hired the best people regardless of which union (if any) they belonged to. People who did not want to be interviewed or photographed by a journalist not in a TUC-affiliated union made a choice to forgo coverage in his paper.

Paradoxically Dennis retained membership of the NUJ. There were two reasons, he said: firstly, he needed and NUJ card to carry out his work as a freelance football writer as most national papers had de facto, if not actual, closed shops, and because it “pissed off” the NUJ.

Dual membership was strictly against NUJ rules, but despite many threats to discipline and even expel Dennis, no action was ever taken against him.

As a local newspaper editor, Dennis was one of a breed now all but extinct.

He supported his staff unwaveringly; saw his papers, as much more than mere businesses, with hearts, souls and characters, and believed profoundly in his duty to serve the communities in which they circulated. He was a public figure who lived on his patch and served on committees and boards, and was well respected, but fearless in holding to account those in authority.

As local newspapers face crisis after crisis, mostly caused by appalling managements and bullying, the few who still believe in them are greatly championed and defended by Dennis. His influence was felt far beyond the Hendon Times Group.

We can only pray that his approach survives out there, perhaps among journalists whom he nurtured and inspired.

But Dennis has met his final deadline.

Dennis Signy was born in Hackney. He joined the Ham and High at 16, moving after only a month to the Hendon and Finchley Times as a junior reporter.

Passionate about football, he left the paper to work for the sports agency Hayters and then as general manager of Brentford FC.

He returned to the Hendon Times where he became group editor, a post he held for 17 years.

He reported on football for 50 years, for Hayters (where he became a director), the News of the World, The Times and the Sunday Express.

He rarely got bylines, feeding tips and stories to other reporters, for whom he was one of their best informed sources, with the most comprehensive contacts book in the game. He wrote several books on football.

He left the Hendon Times Group in 1985 to become, in turn, chief executive of QPR; the Football League’s media consultant, and PR consultant and vice-president of his local team, Barnet FC.

He has been hailed by the FWA as one of the finest football reporters of the past 50 years.

He was twice chairman of the FWA, and was made a life member.

He was awarded an OBE in 1983 for his charity and community work.

He was married to Pat for 46 years and is survived by her, five children and seven grandchildren.
Turning Back the Clock

The black hole of Calcutta

By Robin Morgan

The conduct of the Press in India was causing as much concern to the British government in 1912 as the phone hacking scandal and political cronyism is creating a century later. Our colleagues in Calcutta were getting very hot under the collar – so much so that the Institute had to intervene with the India Secretary.

India was still very firmly under British rule but the seeds of discontent and agitation for independence were sown and thriving through a number of ‘native’ newspapers which British politicians thought contained seditious stories.

Penalties

It prompted the passing for the India Press Act which contained severe penalties for newspapers whose behaviour transgressed the Act. Institute members who staffed the English language newspapers in India saw a black hole in the Act – that should they ‘legitimately criticise the actions of government in the sub-continent they could be prosecuted. The fear that the Act covered both English and native titles had been confirmed by the India Secretary, Lord Crewe, in a House of Lords speech. Besides protesting in locally our Calcutta local committee asked our president, George Hodgson, and secretary, Herbert Cornish, to intervene in Whitehall. Our colleagues in Calcutta wrote to the Institute: “The Secretary of State for India, by referring from his place in the House of Lords to the English newspapers of Calcutta in language that implies that they might be classed with seditious prints which had for their aim the abolition of British rule in India, has brought against loyal and reputable English journalists a charge which they can only regard as a most offensive and unwarrantable libel, the more unfair as it is of a wholly hypothetical nature.

“In the circumstances Lord Crewe’s words amount to a threat to proceed against newspapers which venture to condemn the actions of the Government of India and the Secretary of State, and they protest against an invasion of the independence and liberty of the Press which is calculated to injure public interests and to stifle an honest expression of opinion.”

Taking up the cudgels, Mr Hodgson and Mr Cornish told Lord Crewe: “The Calcutta Committee [of the Institute of Journalists] is composed of members of the profession most of whom are Journalists well known in London and provincial Journalism at Home as well as in India, and holding positions of trust and responsibility on the English Newspapers in Calcutta.

“The Council is convinced that under no circumstances of reasonable probability would the Calcutta newspapers with the conduct of which they are identified have taken any such course as to require or justify the application to them of the provisions of the India Press Act.”

Deferral

Using language that seems extremely deferential by today’s standards, the letter continued: “The Council gratefully remembering other recent occasions in regard to which its representations to your Lordship on behalf of journalists have been received with much kindness and courtesy, ventures to believe that the allusions reported to have been made to the English Newspapers of Calcutta in the speech in question were not intended to bear such a meaning as that which, nevertheless, on the face of them, they have seemed capable of bearing.”

The Institute’s records are silent on the reaction of Lord Crewe!

Concert-ed action

It was time for the 1912 Institute of Journalists to face the music. To entertain Institute members at their Brighton conference, the local council staged a free concert in the Dome featuring the Brighton Municipal Orchestra and Chorus.

Members were told: “The Orchestra Director (Mr H Lyell-Tayler) is making arrangements in honour of the visit of the Institute for a special performance of Gounod’s ‘Faust’, full chorus and orchestra of 400 performers (!) and soloists from the Royal Opera Covent Garden, and the Royal Carl Rosa Opera company.”

To provide time to attend the concert and the following annual dinner, Brighton magistrates granted a special license to serve late drinks.

Thenumberofperformersoutnumberedthe Institute members attending.

Critical mass

Is a critic a journalist? Yes, said the 1912 journalists. No, said many of the critics of the day who cold-shouldered a plan to create a Critics’ Circle within the Institute of Journalists “and hold themselves aloof from anything that would bring them into touch with journalists.”

One distinguished writer replied to his invitation: “I am a critic not a journalist, restricting myself to musical criticism.” When reminded that he also wrote other articles for newspapers, this pompous man replied: “That may be but still I am not a journalist. I am a critic and when I write any articles outside the subject of music I should prefer to be called a publicist rather than a journalist.”

A notable theatrical critic of the day said: “I have not the slightest desire to enter the Critics’ Circle... the gentlemen who write for the dailies have a habit of posing as superior persons. The snobbery of some is too absurd for belief.”

OBE for Institute member

Congratulations to CIJ member Zarin Hainsworth Fadaei on being awarded the OBE. The award was announced in the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Birthday Honours and is in recognition of Zarin’s work for equality and women’s rights.

Zarin Hainsworth Fadaei OBE