

Pirates & buggers

A REFRAIN in our campaigning for journalists' copyright over the past year has been "the pirate that journalists are most worried about is called 'Rupert'." We weren't entirely aware how right we may be: we were thinking of the contracts issued by Rupert Murdoch's News International (NI) that say "You keep copyright..." but (in essence) "we, and only we, can do whatever we like with your work, forever, in universes yet to be invented, for no extra money, and if you don't agree you never darken our doors again."

Now, as the *Freelance* goes to press, we have the BBC *Panorama*

programme featuring the owner of a hacking website called "The House of Ill-Compute" claiming that NI paid him to distribute pirate access codes for ITV Digital. That company went bust in 2002, to the great benefit of NI's Sky services. The *Independent* weighed in with a reminder of a continuing trial in Sicily, alleging NI-sponsored hacking of similar pay-TV access cards for its own Sky Italia, shortly before the contract for the cards was switched to an NI company. NI strenuously denies involvement in either alleged wrongdoing.

All this will doubtless provide grist for the next milling of a Murdoch at

the Leveson inquiry – according to the *Evening Standard* pencilled in for the week of 23 April.

This is early in the inquiry's "Module 3", on relations between government and the media. The inquiry arose, of course, from allegations of bugging and tapping by NI.

The NUJ has Core Participant status in Lord Justice Leveson's inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press. Michelle Stanistreet, the union's General Secretary, will be updating the May meeting of London Freelance Branch on the union's evidence and proposals on press regulation – see back page.

Tweeting meeting

TWITTER AS a tool for journalists was the subject of an interactive demonstration at the March London Freelance Branch meeting.

Janet Awe (@AwesomeComms) was our trainer for the evening. She runs LFB's Twitter feed, which, as several members noted is worth taking a regular look at, especially for the *job alerts*.

Janet was assisted by Tom Davies (@tomdavesE17) and Sonya Thomas (@writehandmedia) who helped members set up Twitter (www.twitter.com) accounts and download Tweetdeck – www.tweetdeck.com – free Twitter content filtering software that you run on your computer to help sort out the deluge of stuff on the Twitter website.

It was an all-singing, all-dancing and much appreciated multimedia PowerPoint presentation: members had brought their own laptops, iPhones and other devices, and there was even Janet's guide to Twitter and other social media circulated in "old school" hard-copy paper format.

Janet also uses Twitter professionally, running Twitter accounts for PR clients. You need to spend time engaging with people to make Twitter to make it work for you. Topics covered included:

- "hash tags" – strings of letters starting with the # symbol, Alt+3 on a Mac, used to aggregate topics for discussion – and how to use :#leveson and so on to seek topics.
- How to find people of interest to you through Twitter and its search functions.
- Using Twitter for short updates and to verify stories.
- How to use Tweetdeck and its tools (such as "mentions") to tune



A hive of virtual activity: Image © Matt Salusbury

out the "white noise" of cyberspace and let you focus on what content interests you. It's like cable TV – there are many channels you'll never watch and you need to take time to find the few channels of interest.

- Following other people on Twitter and accumulating followers of your own; using Twitter to get yourself a reputation as an expert.
 - Retweeting – forwarding others' tweets – and how it helps this.
 - Tom Davies added that the well-timed sending out of the online versions of articles via Twitter as they are published is now part of what production journalists' jobs.
 - Virus awareness, other online hazards including using Tweetdeck to block "creepy" followers.
 - Sending "DM" (Direct Message) tweets that go only to named individuals and not to absolutely everybody in the Twittersphere.
 - Deleting your account if you decide Twitter is not (yet) for you.
- One member whose beat is higher education said she doesn't have to read the HE press any more: she just picks up on pre-sorted Twitter

links to articles, retweeted to her by others who've read them and whose judgement she has come to value.

Twitter ye not!

Some who came along as Twitter sceptics said they could see that it would be useful to them in the future. Several who are not yet Twitter users observed that it would be invaluable in promoting their books. Some job ads for work as a press officer already demand that you come to an interview with a "social media profile" pre-prepared.

Others who came to observe rather than to sign up said they would give very serious and detailed consideration to exactly when and how to join Twitter when the time was right for them.

Look for the blue birdie "Follow @NUJ-LFB" button at the top right of www.londonfreelance.org to see LFB's Twitter feed. *Freelance* articles going online from now on have a "Tweet" button at the top right allowing you post a comment via Twitter and alert others.

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LFB meetings

14 May

The Leveson Inquiry update from our General Secretary

11 June

Getting paid for online work

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