

Met: 'we are not editors'

POLICING the Olympics, and how this affects journalists, was the subject of a briefing by Acting Assistant Metropolitan Police Commissioner Chris Allison and Commander Bob Broadhurst – “Gold” (senior) commander for the Olympic police operations in London. Allison is “Gold for the whole lot”.

The briefing, organised by NUJ LFB and the NUJ Freelance Office, was the result of the Met contacting the NUJ asking to come to brief journalists, a testament to the effectiveness of years of work in this area by Freelance Officer John Toner.

Both officers emphasised that having a Press Card alone won't get you through the fence around the Olympic Park and into the sporting events. For that you need accreditation from LOCOG or another Olympic body. The Commander reminded journalists that the Met “are not running this event”. Access to the events themselves is “LOCOG's gig” they control accreditation. And when it comes to “breaching venue security, the press do not have im-

munity from prosecution.”

The police will be in considerable force outside Olympic venues, but there will be “minimal policing presence inside... mostly LOCOG do security” and bag searches. The Met is contributing to the training of LOCOG security (G4S), which includes “dealing with media.” Chris Allison said Olympic security staff have no extra powers under the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act 2006 but “security, G4S plus military, volunteers... they have the same powers as anybody when you go onto private property.”

For journalists unable to access Olympic venues, there's still plenty to cover. There are post-torch parties on open spaces “almost every night” in the immediate run-up to the Games as the Olympic Torch passes through many London boroughs. There's also “the small issue of Notting Hill carnival in the middle of it”. Expect intensive policing of these “parallel events”: the Met see these as being a potential terrorism “soft target”. Broadhurst assured his

audience that “we are not editors” and that he would brief his officers (and the 2000 officers from other forces in London for the Games) not



to hassle the “40,000 non-accredited media reporting on London” and remind them about the Press Card.

● There's a longer report online.

Your Press Card alone won't get you through the Olympic Park fence.

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Bow down before us

WHO'D A THUNK it? When the Ministry of Defence wrote to the residents of the old match factory in Bow, East London, to inform them that for their safety and security they were to be blessed with an array of A5 anti-aircraft missiles on the building's tower, did they not take a



The military on the roof, if you look very closely.

Photo © Brian Whelan

look at the building? Had they done so, they might have guessed that they'd be delivering this security-sensitive missive to more than one journalist.

The site was the scene of a key moment in the history of Britain

when the 1888 “match girls' strike” marked the forcible entry of women into the trade union movement. The women who made matches for Quaker businessman Theodore Bryant were charged for the materials they worked with – sounds familiar to freelancers? The final straw was when management insisted they denounce a pamphlet by feminist Annie Besant decrying their conditions – which included “phossy jaw” abscesses that glowed in the dark.

Fast forward 124 years and the factory is flats: and its water tower handily overlooks the complex of electric fences and military checkpoints that is an East Ender's view of the Olympic Games. One resident, at the time of writing, is Brian Whelan, one-time newspaper reporter, now an editor for Yahoo! – and star of the morning news shows when he Tweeted the MoD letter.

Then it all got appallingly complicated. The building's management, it seems, would prefer to host a tranquil apolitical yammer of yuppies, the better to let flats to corporations like Ford. Brian got a notice to quit. The letting agent claimed to have a tape of him giving up the tenancy. They didn't. The case continues. Prior to their deployment on the roof the Bow match factory, only a small number of A5 missiles had ever been test-fired.

Brian told the *Freelance*: “I moved to a building I thought would be

safe, with 24-hour security, after years of writing about the far right in the UK and Ireland. It seems I've actually moved into the most dangerous building in east London. The MoD have done their best to make me seem like a fringe resident with no support – but the feeling in the local community is overwhelmingly opposed to this plan and we are getting organised. The Olympics should be an opportunity to showcase the greatest sporting talents from across the globe, not for showcasing military hardware and cracking down on civil liberties.”



The old Abbey Mills sewage pumping station: the new razor wire suggests some Olympic function or other

Photo © Mike Holderness



Essex police video order overturned

Mr Justice Eady ruled in the High Court on 17 May that the BBC, Sky News, ITN, Hardcash and NUJ freelance Jason Parkinson (pictured) need not hand over to police photos of the October eviction of travellers from Dale Farm, Essex. Eady said: “The interference caused by such orders cannot and should not be dismissed mainly because a small proportion of that which is filmed maybe published... The judge [in Chelmsford Crown Court] should have feared for the loss of trust in those hitherto believed to be neutral observers if such observers may be too readily compelled to hand over their material.” Jason said the ruling sent a message that “we will not be forced into the role of unwilling agents of the state.”

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