

A life in crime (reporting)

DUNCAN CAMPBELL, a strong supporter of the Union, came to the February London Freelance Branch meeting to talk about his life in crime reporting. He told us it was a pleasure to be back in the Branch he first joined in the 1970s.

He had recently been at a memorial service for crime reporter Jimmy Nicholson – whose farewell marked the end of a “golden age” of crime reporting – at the Magpie and Stump pub opposite the Old Bailey. In the 19th century, court reporter Charles Dickens covered public hangings outside Newgate prison that could be viewed from the upstairs room at the Magpie and Stump. Crime reporting has an extremely distinguished lineage.

In those days, John Stevens of the *Standard* met detectives in a hotel off Grosvenor Square on Thursday nights with a pack of tenners. Newspapers got information. But when corruption at Scotland Yard was at its worst in the 1960s and 70s none of it was reported by crime reporters – it was exposed by other journalists on the *Times*.

Crime reporters were fantastically sexist. When Sylvia Jones became the first woman crime reporter, they tried to block her membership of the Crime Reporters' Association.

Duncan got started in student journalism at Edinburgh. Of his early features for the student paper, one was on a struck-off doctor who did then-illegal abortions. Another was on Lothian Constabulary arresting drinkers at (also illegal at the time) “homosexual bars”. The third was on capital punishment, abolished in 1965. So Duncan “did stories on two things I hope no-one would ever try to make illegal again and one that I hope never comes back”.

Then at *Time Out* Duncan got embroiled with the 1970s equivalent of whistleblower Edward Snowden.

This was Phil Agee, who had worked for the CIA and spilled the beans, horrified by the Agency's involvement in genocide in Latin America. “One time we printed the names of all CIA people at the US Embassy.” Despite support from the NUJ, the Agee-Hosenball Defence Committee failed to stop the subsequent deportations of Agee and young US *Time Out* reporter Mark Hosenball. It was an exciting time at *Time Out*: “we never knew when there'd be a raid. A colleague interviewed an IRA member and was arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.”

There were crimes to report on, too. Someone's head was cut off, left in a gents' in Islington and dumped the torso in the Thames. Duncan was sure that the resulting “Torso trial” was a miscarriage of justice.

For the *Guardian* Duncan reported on corruption at Stoke Newington police station in the 1990s. Police were allegedly “recycling” the drugs from busts. The *Guardian* reported that eight officers had been moved from Stoke Newington to eight different stations. It didn't name them, and said it was not suggesting that any were involved in the corruption.

Just before the then three-year limit for defamation lawsuits (it's now a year) writs arrived from solicitors to the Police Federation, who'd won all of a run of 95 separate actions to defend members' reputations. But *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger decided the Stoke Newington story was true and must be defended. He hired the “very tough” George Carman QC, who advised: always insist on a jury; and find someone in the jury you like the look of and deliver all your evidence to them. Despite Mr Justice French telling the jury, “you can award each officer £125,000...” they won 10-2.

When Duncan started, every paper had dedicated people covering



Duncan Campbell
Photo © Hazel Dunlop

the courts. The Press Association had seven at the Old Bailey. Now, many cases go unreported. Duncan has learned from crime reporting never to make assumptions: “I've met detectives who are experts on the playwright Harold Pinter or the painter Hieronymus Bosch. I've met criminals who did Open University degrees on Virginia Woolf.”

As a result of the phone-hacking scandal it's much harder to get information from police. News International, as then was, “dobbled in all the confidential email and phone contacts” to avoid corporate prosecution. They acted as “classic grasses” and “poisoned the well” of confidential information. Now police careers are in danger if they're seen just having a drink with a journalist.

“Always protect your sources.” You will get fantastic support from the NUJ. “One great thing about being my age,” Duncan said, “is that most of my sources don't know how use email. Brian Reader (jailed for the Hatton Garden heist) didn't have a mobile phone – his co-conspirators would phone his son.”

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● See a much longer report at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1703dunc.html

Self-employed creative survey

The Creative Industries Federation (which lobbies the government on behalf of “arts, creative industries and cultural education”) has launched a survey for “self-employed creatives” that explicitly includes freelancers. Most LFB members would tick the survey's “publishing” sector box. What's striking about the survey is how few tick-boxes there are, and how much space it has for free text, which in the *Freelance's* humble opinion makes it well worth responding to. It ends by soliciting your help being a case study. It's at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/N9YYDW6 and see also the TUC “insecure work” survey at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/TellTheTUC

Our Branch at Women's TUC

PROTECTING the rights of EU nationals and ensuring continued progress in equalities legislation in the UK post-Brexit were top of the agenda for trades unionists at the TUC Women's Conference 2017. For freelance and precarious workers at the event in London on 8-10 March there was recognition of the increasing pressures we face.

Raising her concerns about a lack of government support for women's work issues, the Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Sarah Champion MP, highlighted self-employment and zero hours contracts as a major challenge: “We

know the labour market is becoming increasingly precarious,” she told the 300 delegates from 31 unions. “There are now nearly 1 million people on zero hours contracts and we cannot fool ourselves into thinking that women who are self-employed are having their rights protected.”

Motions highlighted the lack of maternity leave, or other rights enjoyed by employed workers, such as paid time off to attend antenatal appointments, for the self-employed.

The four-strong NUJ delegation – London Freelance Branch members Maureen Paton and Magda Ibrahim,

with Disabled Members Council chair Ann Galpin and NUJ Norfolk's Cath Saunt – tabled a motion to tackle cyber abuse and its toll on women journalists. Cath Saunt told conference: “Women journalists and bloggers, generally strong women's voices online, are especially prone to the vilest of words and images.”

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● A longer report is online



The NUJ's delegation at the Women's TUC Conference. Left to right: Magda Ibrahim; Cath Saunt; Anita Halpin (former NUJ president); Ann Galpin and Maureen Paton.
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