



City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Lashmar, P. (2013). From the Insight Team to Wikileaks, the continuing power of investigative journalism as a benchmark of quality news journalism. In: Anderson, P.J., Ogola, G. & Williams, M. (Eds.), *The Future of Quality News Journalism*. (pp. 35-52). Routledge. ISBN 9780415532860

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/18368/>

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Lashmar, P (2013). From the Insight Team to Wikileaks, the continuing power of investigative journalism as a benchmark of quality news journalism. In: PJ Anderson, G Ogola & M Williams (Eds.), UNSPECIFIED . Routledge. ISBN 1134108508

This is the unspecified version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/18368/>

Link to published version:

Copyright and reuse: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

publications@city.ac.uk

2 From the Insight Team to Wikileaks

The Continuing Power of Investigative Journalism as a Benchmark of Quality News Journalism

Paul Lashmar

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the current state of a very specific form of news provision, quality hard news investigative journalism, and to evaluate the extent to which it still has a future. This type of journalism is regarded by many as the pinnacle of the profession and is seen as providing the monitoring of power and its exercise that is crucial to the effective working of the kind of participative democracy outlined in chapter one. Equally, in its most highly professional form, it conforms to the key quality criteria set down within that chapter. For the purpose of this exercise, the author will take one of the world's oldest democracies, the United Kingdom, as his case study, not least because he worked for 30 years as a member of some of its leading investigative reporting teams and is therefore able to offer an insider perspective as well as an academic analysis.

The discussion starts with Donal McIntyre, a television investigative journalist best known for infiltrating a vicious gang of football hooligans, who observed that the imminent extinction of his trade has been prophesied many times:

The death of investigative journalism was predicted with the creation of commercial television in 1954. All through the 1990s I heard it while at BBC documentaries and *World in Action*. For the last decade as budgets got tighter and the information world changed at lightning pace the same arguments that gained currency in 1954 have now become an accepted truth. (Mair and Keeble 2011, 2)

It has been common practice to describe hard news investigative journalism as in its death throes, starved of resources and far too serious and expensive to survive in a media world of celebrity superficiality. Certainly, if investigative journalism was an intensive care patient, its struggle for life would be akin to a particularly dramatic episode of *Holby City*.

By 2008 there was a general agreement that the quality of the traditional media is in decline, and that is supported by a growing body of empirical research (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008; Davies 2008). One of the

most disturbing findings to come out of this was the high percentage of stories in the national mainstream news media that, while by-lined with a reporter's name, were in practice taken directly from PR material or news agencies. Around the same time, The Reuters Institute published a detailed analysis of the likely impact of the digital revolution on the economics of news publishing in the UK. Among the conclusions reached in the report was that in the UK and elsewhere, news publishers are increasingly building digitally mechanised factories, equipped to feed content to a range of media platforms, all day and all week. "Under pressure to exploit content across multiple platforms, many publishers are morphing into a form that favours the processing rather than the generation of content" (Currah 2009).

Also in 2008, former *Sunday Times* investigative journalist Nick Fielding commented that "very little serious investigative journalism is going on" in the UK. Citing job losses at *The Guardian* and industry speculation over the future of the Independent newspaper, Fielding said of the British Press, "It's an industry which is massively in crisis at the moment" (Lashmar 2011). He was right, and worse was to come. The tabloids were obsessed with 'kiss and tell' and celebrity stories (many, we now know, were the product of phone hacking), and these obsessions infected the middle market and even the broadsheets, too. There was profound concern that the traditional media either no longer had, or wished to employ the resources to maintain, a sustainable level of investigative journalism. The dismal jingoist reporting that accompanied the Iraq War (see Lashmar 2008a) and complete lack of early warning of the 'credit crisis' (see Lashmar 2008b) had revealed the desperate need for better in-depth reporting. Investigative journalism was in a coma with few signs of life.

Among news and current affairs professionals it was widely believed that investigative journalism had suffered disproportionately. Former *Sunday Times* Insight team editor Stephen Grey claimed that cutbacks have severely reduced the number of investigative journalists able to work in the UK. "I think it's been absolutely savage in Great Britain. It's quite a long trend that's been going. You have seen major investigation shows in Britain collapse. There is very little investigation going on—telly as well as newspapers" (Stourton 2009).

In a 2009 paper, *The Crisis in Investigative Journalism*, I estimated that the number of serious journalists in the traditional media who could be called investigative, had fallen from around 150 during the 1980s to fewer than 90. I remarked, "even the most optimistic apostle for the resilience of investigative journalism would recognise that the genre is fighting for a sustainable future. The crisis for investigative journalism falls within the wider seismic changes occurring in the media, where newspapers face decline and TV is accused of no greater ambition than to be a ratings machine" (Lashmar 2009).

If we take 2011 as the next stop on this rollercoaster hospital drama, we find former BBC producer John Mair very positive in his prognosis for the patient:

Its death has been much predicted and is long in coming but Investigative Journalism in Britain is still in rude health.

In the last year alone we have seen Rupert Murdoch catapulted to crisis by 'Hackgate', (FIFA's) Sepp Blatter forced into a corner and Jack Warner out of FIFA, a policeman prosecuted for the unlawful killing of a bystander at the G20 demonstrations in 2009, a quarter of a million previously secret diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, Winterbourne View, a 'care' home exposed and closed by *Panorama* and more wrongdoers brought to justice all thanks to the diggers of the journalistic world.

The *Daily Telegraph*, not renowned for its anti-Establishment positions, did splendid work on the MP Expenses Scandal in 2009 where it simply bought the purloined data from an insider and exploited it on the page slowly, surely and deliberately. Six Members of the Mother of Parliaments are serving or have served prison sentences as a result of those revelations. (Mair 2011)

But within months the patient was to suffer another series of life-threatening setbacks. Take Wikileaks: At first this appeared to be a fascinating, even compelling, new response to the misuse of power, particularly by the U.S. government, using the global reach of new technology to protect whistle-blowers. It was a huge collective, international effort that revealed what American foreign policy really meant. Within a year of the disclosure of hundreds of thousands of U.S. classified diplomatic cables, Wikileaks had dissolved into a farce centering on its founder, Julian Assange, and his increasingly desperate efforts to avoid extradition from the UK to Sweden to answer some difficult questions over alleged sex offences. Then take the philanthropically funded Bureau; in early 2010 it appeared to be as a beacon in the darkness, a new response in the UK to funding high quality journalism, a reason for optimism. Then, suddenly, an ill-considered tweet by the Bureau's editor about the possible naming of a senior member of the British Conservative party as a paedophile and a terrible error of judgement within the BBC over a *Newsnight* programme on child abuse left the Bureau in a critical condition. It was involved in the second public relations disaster as well as the first, and its reputation was deeply and possibly irreversibly sullied as a result.

What all this shows is that investigative journalism is in such a fragile state in the UK that a very small number of negative episodes such as the previously outlined can dramatically change the perception of whether the patient will live, particularly when so much is reliant on so few in terms of the number of people actively involved still in hard news investigative journalism. Therefore, prophesying the survival of investigative journalism is a risky undertaking. Nonetheless, with careful framing, a series of nuanced expectations can be suggested.

There are certainly reasons to be miserable. The area within UK journalism where investigative journalism has prospered in recent years has been towards the bottom end of the market, and the recent Leveson Enquiry has

exposed the extent to which the techniques used to secure personal information within this previously over-resourced and under-controlled branch of UK journalism had become not only increasingly ruthless, but illegal. The situation hit proverbial rock bottom when it was discovered that a journalist had hacked the phone of a murdered schoolgirl, accidentally causing considerable distress to the family. Worse, the phone hacking scandal that started with the *News of the World* was soon found to extend to most other newspapers. This led not only to the reputation of the UK news media as a whole being dragged into deep and very public disrepute via the Leveson Enquiry and the media's own coverage of its embarrassing revelations, but to such truly damaging events as the charging of former News International Chief Executive Rebekah Brooks with perverting the course of justice. Overall, this huge and sordid scandal brought investigative journalism *as a whole* into disrepute. Such was the concern, the Lords Select Committee on Communications undertook an inquiry in 2011 into the future of investigative journalism. Some 40 people, including the author, gave oral evidence. The report, published in February 2012, summarized the status quo: "The role and practices of investigative journalism have received unprecedented scrutiny over recent months. Its long history of exposing issues that are not in the public domain and speaking truth to power has come under the microscope as the phone-hacking scandal, perhaps the greatest political media scandal of a generation, has gradually unfolded, raising a plethora of questions surrounding the public interest, privacy and media ethics" (House of Lords 2012, 5).

There are however, some reasons to be optimistic. This chapter will examine some very positive moves. First, in the campaigning sector, where pressure groups, consumer groups, charities and NGOs increasingly are undertaking their own investigative journalism to great effect.

Secondly, despite the 2012 crisis of the Bureau for Investigative Journalism, there is still hope for investigative journalism units funded by donations or subscriptions. In the United States, a number have been successful (though not all), like ProPublica. Exaro, another UK-based philanthropically funded outfit is performing well at the time of writing.

Thirdly, a whole generation of web savvy journalists is emerging who use new investigative techniques to interrogate public interest issues. Datascraping, crowd-sourcing, the network effect and using social media have really taken off as powerful tools for investigative journalism.

Fourthly, there is the rise of international yet informal networks of investigative journalists.

A SHORT HISTORY

If investigative journalism is in decline, that presupposes there have been better times. It has a long history. The origins of investigative journalism

can be traced back to the government inspectors in China in 700 AD sent to report on economic and social conditions in the empire. In the UK the roots go back at least to the 17th century pamphleteers and thereafter include the activities of such notable individuals as William Cobbett and Charles Dickens (de Burgh 2008, 27).

Modern investigative journalism is often epitomized by the Watergate scandal in the United States during the early 1970s, which showed what an important role journalism can play in society. Over in the UK in the same period, the *Sunday Times*, under Editor Harold Evans, was seen as the epicentre of investigative journalism, with famous detailed investigations. These included the Thalidomide scandal, where the paper fought legal suppression to publish the facts about the drug responsible for serious birth defects in children whose mothers had used it to reduce sickness in pregnancy.

The 1970s saw UK television create a high quality, fiery brand of investigative journalism whereby individuals like John Pilger, and high profile investigative programmes like *Panorama*, *World in Action* and *This Week* took on the Vietnam war, torture and fascism, industrial disease and injury, child labour, major miscarriages of justice and major corruption stories. As will be discussed later, the tabloids were also producing a distinct vibrant form of investigative journalism, some of which was in the public interest. The Lords Committee commented that some witnesses described the 1960s to 1980s as the ‘golden age’ of investigative journalism. According to Gavin MacFadyen, Director of the Centre for Investigative Journalism, “It should be said that, for the last 20 years, investigative reporting, as I am sure everybody here knows, has been in major decline in Britain from what it was—major television programmes like *World in Action*, *This Week* and *Panorama*—to where we are now; we have nothing, really, that is comparable, or at least comparable with the depth and frequency that those programmes were” (House of Lords 2012, 21).

Professor de Burgh also identifies a boom in TV investigative journalism in the mid-1990s. “A systematic trawl of a database for 1995 (Programme Reports, 1995) suggests that in that year alone on UK terrestrial television there were 300 discrete programmes that could be classified as investigative, this total excluding magazine programmes with investigative elements” (de Burgh 2008, 6). Whether there was a ‘golden age’ of investigative journalism is a matter of debate. Investigative journalism has always been a struggle, but at some times more than others.

THE ROLE OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

It is hard to over-estimate the importance of investigative journalism. It is the most pure manifestation of the *fourth estate* role of the news media. For all their faults, the news media are the only group that has consistently

shown the independence and heterogeneity to monitor the excesses and corruption of the establishment and even errant parts of its own industry. The Victorian politician and commentator Lord Acton famously observed, “Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely,” and there you have the succinct manifesto and justification for investigative journalism. For the author, with 30 years of experience as an investigative journalist, it is simple—without hard news investigative journalism and the monitoring of the powerful and the very public exposure of wrong doing that it provides, there can be no democracy as corruption will inevitably spread through the body politic. Investigative journalism may account for a very small part of the outpouring of the news media, but it is the benchmark that all other journalism is judged by.

Investigative Journalism has helped bring down governments, imprison politicians, trigger legislation, reveal miscarriages of justice and shame corporations. Even today, when much of the media colludes with power and when viciousness and sensationalism are staples of formerly high-minded media, investigative journalists can stand up for the powerless, the exploited, the truth. (de Burgh 2008)

Roy Greenslade has encapsulated the nature of the investigative journalist:

The best journalistic output is often created by individuals who are driven by a conviction that they alone have a handle on ‘the truth’. They are usually single-minded, sometimes bloody-minded, often preferring to work alone, even if they are nominally part of a newspaper team. Wise editors know that certain reporters have qualities that place them apart and, despite the difficulties that sometimes causes, they give them their head. Nowhere is this more evident than in the overlapping fields of investigative and campaigning journalism. These are the provinces of lone-wolf reporters and, of course, the individual editors who publish their work. In an internet age, reporters can self-publish, but the results of their labours—if it is to cause ructions and bring about real change—presently require traditional media publication. (Greenslade 2010)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

The appalling and illegal practices of the *News of the World* have resulted in a certain airbrushing of the history of investigative journalism. There is tendency to ignore the fact that tabloids do produce high quality real investigative journalism, as sparse as it might have been in the latter years. When giving talks or lectures, it is easy for practitioners and lecturers to avoid the

subject and make investigative journalism purely the remit of the ‘serious’ media, such as *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, Channel 4 and the BBC. But tabloid investigative journalism has on occasion had a serious hard news impact. When the Lords Committee picked out eight significant and relatively recent pieces of investigative journalism, two were from the tabloids, and both from the Murdoch stable.

- The *News of the World*’s ‘sting’, exposing corruption by Pakistani cricketers, published on 29 August 2010; and
- *The Sun*’s investigation, published on 14 September 2006, which exposed that an HIV-positive security guard had knowingly infected six women.

The Pakistani cricket sting was organized by one of the best known and the most controversial of UK undercover reporters, Mazher Mahmood, who spent 20 years working for *News of the World*. He has been dubbed as ‘Britain’s most notorious undercover reporter’. The *News of the World* claimed that Mahmood had brought more than 250 criminals to justice. (Though this figure has been challenged, as has his own accuracy in making such claims.) Mahmood is also known as the ‘fake sheikh’ because he often disguised himself as a sheikh in order to gain his target’s trust. He posed as an Indian businessman to expose a cricket bookie by the name of Mazhar Majeed in August 2010, who named Pakistani cricketers Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Asif, Salman Butt and Kamran Akmal as having engaged in spot-fixing during Pakistan’s 2010 tour of England. The team was accused of deliberately bowling three no-balls. Mahmood’s targets have also included various society figures, including Sophie, Countess of Wessex in 2001 and, more recently, Sarah, Duchess of York in 2010.

Mazher Mahmood may be controversial, but he reflects a tradition of reporting that goes back a long way to such distinguished names in UK tabloid investigations as Laurie Manifold. Manifold joined *The People* in 1958 as news editor, later becoming investigations editor. Roy Greenslade is one of the few academics to document investigative journalism in the ‘Red-Tops’. He says of Manifold, “It is no exaggeration to describe him as the father of modern popular paper investigative journalism. He trained a legion of journalists in a range of investigatory techniques, which they went on to practise in other newspapers, such as the *News of the World* (Trevor Kempson, Mike Gabbert and Mazher Mahmood), and on television, notably *The Cook Report* (Clive Entwistle)” (Greenslade 2008).

In order to investigate difficult stories, Manifold innovated with the use of subterfuge, covert tape recording and the setting up of fake companies. “He left nothing to chance,” says Greenslade. “He devised special techniques to persuade reluctant sources to spill the beans. He drew up sets of rules for reporters on how they should behave.” Greenslade spoke to and

corresponded with eight former members of Manifold's staff, all of whom revere him as the wildest and wisest of mentors. One spoke of him having "a mind like steel trap" (Greenslade 2008).

Manifold oversaw hundreds of investigations, and probably the pinnacle of his career was the exposure of high-level Scotland Yard corruption. "With the revelation in 1972 that the head of the Flying Squad, Commander Kenneth Drury, had been on holiday with a pornographer who had paid for the trip, the investigation ballooned as informants came forward to reveal widespread corruption within the force. It proved to be a drawn-out affair but it eventually resulted in the suspension and early retirements of 90 officers, and the convictions of 13 policemen, who were sentenced to a total of 96 years," says Greenslade. He notes that in 1978, Manifold and his team were recognised for their work with a special What The Papers Say award (Greenslade 2008). This tradition is what has been lost with the drive to celebrity reportage by the tabloids and the industry disaster that is the phone hacking scandal.

THE BBC TRAGEDY

Since the Lords Committee reported, there has been the BBC debacle. The editor of BBC's *Newsnight* spiked what appears to have been a piece of very serious journalism on child abuse committed by celebrity broadcaster and former disc jockey Jimmy Savile. Instead, the BBC ran a series of tributes to the recently deceased celebrity over Christmas 2011. The error of judgment in killing the investigation became blatant when rival ITV broadcast the story in September 2012 in a new investigation strand.

In a separate fiasco, a month after the Savile fiasco broke, *Newsnight* broadcast a programme interviewing Steve Messham, who alleged child abuse committed by a senior Conservative politician at a North Wales home at which Messham had been a child resident in the 1970s. While *Newsnight* did not name the politician, the way in which the programme was conducted resulted in the name of Lord McAlpine, an innocent man and senior Conservative grandee, spreading across the social media. The BBC was forced to issue a public apology, and Director-General George Entwistle resigned, as did the director of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Iain Overton, who had had input into, though no editorial control over, the item. As the BBC report says, some "basic journalistic checks were not completed" (Burrell 2012). Lord McAlpine received £185,000 in damages from the BBC.

It now transpires that while high quality investigative journalism has continued within the BBC and especially at *Panorama*, the actual number of experienced reporters and producers has dropped. The NUJ's Michelle Stanistreet said in November 2012 of the swingeing Government imposed cuts, "Even flagship programmes have not been ringfenced—at *Newsnight*, for example, the budget in real terms has halved over the past five years and the

number of reporters and senior journalists has been cut relentlessly. These are simple facts. With fewer journalists, many employed on a casual basis, it means there is no time for that extra telephone call, no time to double-check the facts, no time to reflect properly before a programme goes out” (Turvill 2012; see also Lashmar 2012).

SURVIVAL AND EVOLUTION

If investigative journalism does have the capacity to survive, it is because of its continuing ability to evolve. The author can see that some of the early major investigations he undertook as a working journalist would be of little interest to the public now. For example, he can remember when the public were genuinely shocked by the idea of a police officer being corrupt. It took a long while for them to accept that, while it was not routine, it was too commonplace in some forces. Now, in the experience of the author, the public are perceived to have a more jaundiced view of the police than do reporters. Therefore, you will rarely see an investigation into police corruption. They are the most difficult of investigations. If journalists make a mistake in framing allegations of corruption or misconduct, the cost of defaming a police officer is exceptionally high. Investigative journalism is not static or a given; it evolves to survive. So, as some editors ask when a reporter suggests an investigation into police corruption, “why go to a lot of trouble to tell the public what they already know?” The former editor of Channel 4’s *Dispatches*, Dorothy Byrne, has said that she believes it is more and more difficult to surprise audiences with investigative journalism because they increasingly believe corruption to be widespread (Byrne 1999).

Various editorial tactics have been tried to make investigations more exciting and relevant for the present-day viewer to whom little, arguably, is a surprise after the revelations of recent years. The use of secret filming has been very influential, though it has tended to spawn story lines chosen for their undercover filming potential rather than actual public interest. Another is the rise of the celebrity investigative journalist. Roger Cook was the first, but Donal MacIntyre probably reflects most the obvious attempt to create an on-screen journalist ‘superhero’. This is evolution to survive and be relevant. Methods used by investigative journalists have also evolved. Here I have identified a range of new ways in which high quality investigations are being conducted.

NGO JOURNALISM

In November 2012 Greenpeace secretly recorded the Conservative MP running the party’s by-election bid in Corby apparently supporting the campaign of a rival candidate. This became a front-page story in *The Guardian*.

Chris Heaton-Harris, campaign manager for the Conservatives in Corby, was recorded saying he encouraged an anti-wind farm candidate to join the election race against the party employing him, adding, “Please don’t tell anybody ever” (Lewis and Evans 2012).

This is a small example of the new breed of non-governmental-organisations’ (NGOs) investigators at work. Importantly, there are an increasing number of NGOs, pressure groups, social justice groups, consumer groups and charities that conduct investigations and analysis on matters of local, regional and international concern. Organisations in this sector have become increasingly effective in bringing political and economic pressure to bear on errant governments and companies. Such campaigning, once the province of enthusiastic amateurs, is rapidly becoming highly professionalised and a core activity. They are waking up to the full potential of investigations as a campaigning tool. Some NGOs have been supplying investigative material to the traditional media for a long time. But NGO managers say there has been a sea shift, and they now often have to provide the whole package.

Paul Bradshaw, award-winning blogger and visiting professor at City University, argues investigative journalism does not have to be pursued—or funded—in one particular way. “The newsroom investigative journalist was an endangered species well before the internet arrived, while over the last decade NGOs and activist organisations have taken on an increasing role in funding investigations” (Mair and Keeble 2011, 246). The Lords Committee was interested in the migration of investigative journalists to NGOs who were sponsoring investigations into areas within their own sphere of interest. The author told the committee: “NGOs . . . have the money and the patience to do these things well . . . there are seven or eight [investigative journalists] that I can think of immediately who are now working for NGOs and doing really good work . . . they are using their expertise and bring professionalism and they now work with the media and are much more proactive” (House of Lords 2012, 54).

Other NGOs make extensive use of investigative techniques. The Environment Investigation Agency (EIA), an independent campaign group, has a great track record of undercover filming across the world. International NGO Global Witness uses investigative techniques to expose links between natural resource exploitation, conflict, poverty, corruption, and human rights abuses worldwide and has an inquiry team that includes former investigative journalists. Clive Stafford-Smith, the founder of prisoners’ rights group Reprieve, told the author, “Reprieve places a huge emphasis on investigation—important cases are won by facts to a far greater extent than they are by law. My own view is that many NGOs, pressure groups and charities could be more effective by developing their investigative skills. Likewise, the symbiotic relationship between NGOs and journalists could do with

a re-emphasis, particularly now that print media spends so much less on its own investigations, and depends to a greater extent on NGOs such as Reprieve” (Lashmar 2011).

NOT-FOR-PROFIT INVESTIGATION BUREAUX

The author was part of a group of investigative journalists who met in a London pub in 2009 to discuss the perceived perilous state of investigative journalism. The group examined the American experience, where long-standing, non-profit organisations like the Center for Public Integrity and the Centre for Investigative Journalism have used the combined foundation and donation funding model. One attractive model from the United States was ProPublica, which employs a substantial number of experienced journalists funded by a wealthy philanthropist—but the question was how to raise the money in the UK? Two public-spirited people, the former *Sunday Times* writer Elaine Potter and her husband, David, the developer of the Psion computer, intervened and put £2m of seed money from their charitable foundation into the project. The Bureau for Investigative Journalism was born.

In 2011, John Lloyd, at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, spoke of the “extremely encouraging signs of not-for-profit money coming in to investigative journalism in particular. In this country, it is not in a huge way, but in a significant way, in the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which is attached to City University, and in the States there is much more” (House of Lords 2012, 53).

The then editor of the Bureau, Iain Overton, told the Lords Committee,

We get commissions . . . to do broadcast journalism. We have worked with all of the major national papers. We have been operating since April 2010. We have had 26 front page stories in that time. We have won an Amnesty Award and a Thompson Reuters Award. We have just been nominated for a Foreign Press Association Award. We have been mentioned around 12,500 times in different articles internationally. (House of Lords 2012, 53)

However, the fate of such initiatives is dependent on how well they are led and managed. Unfortunately, at the time this chapter was written, the Bureau was in crisis. Iain Overton had tweeted an ill-considered message before the *Newsnight* child abuse programme went out (see previous discussion). As pointed out earlier, he resigned as a consequence. The Bureau has used much of its funding from the Potter Foundation and unfortunately has not been able to claim charitable status. Certainly, charitable status would encourage more not-for-profit journalism. Peter Preston (2012) says the

bureau will only survive if it finds the funds to keep going. Whether it will or not is now dependent partially on the extent to which it is able to recover its reputation after the severe damage it inflicted on itself during 2012.

DIGITAL INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Social media has also become a useful tool in the investigative journalists' toolbox. Probably the reporter best known for using it in this way is *Guardian* reporter Paul Lewis. He has written extensively about the use of social media in piecing together the events that lead to the death of the news vendor Ian Tomlinson during the anti-G20 protests and also the death of Jimmy Mubenga, a deportee from the UK who died after being forcibly restrained on an aircraft. Lewis makes the point that in the pre-internet age, journalists mostly sought sources; now with social media, sources can seek out journalists (Lewis 2012).

Clare Sambrook, a freelance journalist, spoke of the benefits of using social media to publicise investigative reports. She said,

There are lots of very good online publications and then also online we can promote the work through Twitter, for example. So, if you get a really astonishing piece—like we had a . . . piece on the Breivik massacre—and it just went . . . around the world. We got loads and loads of people reading that. It was a piece that would not have appeared in a national newspaper, a piece by a Norwegian giving context to what had happened very, very quickly. It would have been extraordinarily difficult for him, as somebody unknown to a national newspaper, to get that kind of space. So, there are all sorts of benefits to online publication and online research, massive benefits. (House of Lords 2012, 58)

The power of the internet has breathed new life into investigative journalism. Bradshaw thinks that we may finally be moving past the troubled youth of the internet as a medium for investigative journalism. He points out that for more than a decade observers looked at this ungainly form stumbling its way around journalism and said, "It will never be able to do this properly" (Bradshaw 2011). Now the internet is growing up, he says,

finding its feet with the likes of Clare Sambrook, Talking Points Memo, PolitiFact and VoiceOfSanDiego all winning awards, while journalists such as Paul Lewis (the death of Ian Tomlinson), Stephen Grey (extraordinary rendition) and James Ball (WikiLeaks) explore new ways to dig up stories online that hold power to account. As these pioneers unearth, tell and distribute their stories in new ways we are beginning to discover just what shape investigative journalism might take in this new medium. (Bradshaw 2011)

Few of these journalists work for the traditional media. A new world of web-based journalism, with niche interests that parallel traditional investigative journalism, is emerging.

A massive amount of information, much of it statistics, is now made available online by public bodies as part of the UK Government's Open Data agenda. This is an opportunity for investigative journalists. Jeremy Hunt MP, former Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, said, "If we unleash citizen journalists on vast swathes of government data we are opening up big, big opportunities both to hold Government to account and also to learn things about our society that we never knew before. It is a very, very big opportunity" (House of Lords 2012, 59).

Professor Jon Crowcroft, Marconi Professor of Communications Systems in the Computer Laboratory at the University of Cambridge, also told the Lords Committee,

Vast amounts of data are not necessarily a barrier to making some forms of investigative journalism easier, because the vast amount of computing power that is very cheaply available, almost freely available, offsets that . . . the biggest barrier seems to me, as in many walks of life, that to do anything reasonably new you might need to do some new piece of computing that might need some extra skills and resources in the journalism world that they might not have. (House of Lords 2012, 60)

Bradshaw argues that the internet has made it possible to separate the "investigative" from the "journalism": students, bloggers, activists, and anyone else with a burning question can begin to investigate it. "They can raise questions openly with thousands of others online; submit Freedom of Information requests at the click of a button or analyse datasets and documents with free tools, regardless of whether or not they are employed as a journalist. The vast majority do not want to be a journalist. What they want are answers" (Mair and Keeble 2011, 257).

GLOBAL NETWORKS

On 28 November 2010, WikiLeaks and five major newspapers from Spain (*El País*), France (*Le Monde*), Germany (*Der Spiegel*), the United Kingdom (*The Guardian*), and the United States (*The New York Times*) started to simultaneously publish the first of 251,287 leaked confidential—but not top-secret—diplomatic cables from 274 U.S. embassies around the world, dated from 28 December 1966 to 28 February 2010. This was one of those rare events that creates such a momentum that it changes the whole paradigm. It gave an enormous boost to investigative journalism before descending into the conflicted cult of personality described previously. It showed investigative journalism working internationally.

Even before Wikileaks, there were a growing number of international networks of investigative journalists spluttering into life. Some estimate that there are as many as 50 of these now in play. The author particularly watches Global-L, which has a charming air of diversity and occasional amateurism. Some of the participants are quite amazing in their innovation and collegiality—Henk van Ess of the University of Rotterdam, for example, who created the ‘cablesearch’ engine for full-text retrieval of the Wikileaks cables. It is a great journalistic response to the globalisation of capital and crime. There is also Paul Cristian Radu of the excellent Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project in the Balkans. They have devised the ‘Investigative Dashboard’ (2011) to help journalists track information and individuals across the world. For example, a short video tutorial explains how to find out if citizens of your own country are involved with companies based in the offshore haven of Panama. It uses Daniel O’Huiginn’s scraped database of Panama companies. This is a follow-up to a previous video tutorial that shows how to navigate the more complicated Panama official registry of companies.

What also becomes clear is that these groups are part of the expansion of investigative journalism across the world and the willingness of journalists in one country to help journalists in another. The number of journalists who have been killed in countries like Pakistan and Mexico while pursuing their profession in recent times puts the problems of UK journalists in perspective. Hannah Storm, Director of the International News Safety Institute, said in November 2012 that 119 journalists had been killed worldwide that year: “We are heading for one of the darkest years on record in terms of the safety of journalists, with that number of casualties this year among our colleagues” (Storm 2012).

CONCLUSION

Asked whether investigative journalism is dead, former BBC reporter Barnie Choudhury said, “My response to that is an emphatic *no*. Basically, we will have investigative journalists so long as reporters maintain their insatiable curiosity” (Mair and Keeble 2011). The mainstream media are still delivering these stories. David Levy, of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, told the House of Lords committee that although technology offers many new opportunities for journalists and news organisations, “the main model for investigative stories will continue to be larger organisations that are seeking to enhance their brand by putting themselves, as they would see it, at the cutting edge of journalism” (House of Lords 2012, 62).

However, the Lords Committee was less optimistic and concluded, “With increasing economic pressures facing both the newspapers and broadcasting industries and a cultural shift in the way in which people receive news and information, large dedicated teams of investigative journalists within

traditional news organisations no longer seem affordable. However, this does not mean that important issues cannot be uncovered by journalists, either working alone or as part of smaller, flexible teams” (House of Lords, 2011, 14).

Above all, investigative journalism is suffering from a lack of proper investment and organisational support. The Lords Committee suggested that the Charities Commission should look favourably on charitable status for not-for-profit investigative agencies. They also suggested, “To offer some respite from the funding crisis, we recommend an investigative journalism fund. Any fines which are levied for transgression of journalistic codes of conduct—including fines that might be introduced under a new system of press self-regulation and a proportion of fines issued for breaches of the Ofcom code—should be allocated to this fund which might be used for investigative journalism or for training investigative journalists” (House of Lords 2011, 5). Lord Inglewood, the Lords Committee Chairman said, “We are encouraged, nonetheless, by the number of new funding and organisational initiatives that have started to materialise as a means of promoting investigative journalism, and believe it is vital that measures are taken to support and foster further initiatives which are independent of public subsidies or state support” (House of Lords 2011, 6).

Updating my 2009 estimate, I believe the number of reporters making their living from investigations in the mainstream media has increased and is probably more than 100. However, it is doubtful that this is enough to enable the kind of participative democracy outlined in chapter one. While the commercial news media might be argued to have an economic excuse for the cutbacks in resources going into hard news investigative journalism over recent years, given the current pressures on the industry, the same cannot be said for the BBC and the government’s treatment of it. The corporation has long been seen as providing a safety net for democracy, helping fill the gaps in terms of impartiality and the range of issues reported that are left within the coverage of the commercial news media that surrounds it. But for that role to remain both credible and adequate, neither government nor the BBC itself should at any time have considered as being acceptable the argument that when there are budget cuts, news and investigative journalism must take their share of them along with everything else. The argument is fallacious by virtue of the simple fact that it legitimises the partial undermining of one of the key means of monitoring the honesty and proportionality of the exercise of power within the UK—both nationally *and regionally*—and therefore reduces the ability of the quality news media to enable a participative democracy. This is most particularly the case in the face of the aforementioned decline of investigative reporting over the years within the commercial media—and even while new sources of such reporting have grown up in the UK and elsewhere, these cannot on their own do the job that a better resourced mainstream media can, a fact that was perhaps emphasised both by the near disaster that befell the

Bureau for Investigative Reporting in 2012 and the continuing uncertainty of its long-term funding. In addition, as pointed out earlier, the very fact that the BBC was having to use the Bureau in its abuse investigations, together with the feeling that the disasters that befell Newsnight in 2012 were an accident waiting to happen as a result of severe cutbacks in its investigative journalism budgets over recent years, would seem to emphasise the utter folly of treating the news budget as something that should be cut in the same way as anything else. Arguably, it is the BBC's performance in the field of news and current affairs that defines the public's trust in the corporation.

Equally, the Lords committee's position on the funding of quality hard news investigative journalism in general stops short of what is needed to make its position secure as part of the recognised monitoring framework that is essential to the proper functioning of a participative democracy. There is no reason why there should not be adequate public funding set in place to help support this kind of reporting across a number of different platforms and suppliers, and not just with regard to the BBC. It is hardly beyond the wit of government, the media and other interested parties to come up with adequate safeguards and an interference-free formula for funding that would protect such essential financial underpinnings from those who would try and misuse political or administrative powers to make the granting of finance dependent on the favouring of one view over another, or the avoidance of "inconvenient" lines of enquiry. This remains an area that needs to be explored more fully.

These comments and criticisms aside, there are signs of life in the old dog yet. Outside the mainstream much is going on. NGOs in the UK have about half a dozen former mainstream media investigators on their staff, but have somewhere between 12 and 20 homegrown investigators to all intents and purposes undertaking investigations. Then there are the media investigators who do not operate in the traditional way and produce investigations in innovative and unexpected ways on a range of platforms.

At the time of writing, it is not possible to judge what impact the Leveson Report will have on regulation and how that will affect investigative journalism. As the standards of proof are high for quality, public interest investigative reporting, it will have less impact than on the more salacious end of the news media.

This chapter finishes as it started with Donal McIntyre, who says investigative journalism should be celebrated: "The *Guardian's* campaign against the undue influence and the corrupt practices of some *News of the World* journalists has resulted in arguably the most dramatic shift in power in this country over the last three decades. Against that backdrop how can it be said that investigative journalism is at death's door? Judging by the fruits of its labour, the future of investigative journalism appears to be very bright indeed" (Mair and Keeble 2011).

For that future to be as bright as McIntyre hopes, however, the kinds of funding issues outlined previously need to be given more genuine and serious attention than has so far been the case. There is also a need to draw a clear line in the public perception between the disreputable, downmarket end of news investigations exposed during the Leveson Enquiry and the high quality work that has been the trademark of the Sunday Times Insight Team, World in Action, Panorama and the other benchmark names of UK journalism of the past 50 years. And while there is still a core need for traditional, mainstream hard news investigative reporting of this type, the future of quality investigative journalism will include also a variety of other providers on a range of platforms. Together their role is essential given the role of high quality investigations in preserving, promoting and periodically shaking up democracy.

REFERENCES

- Bradshaw, Paul. 2011. "Has Investigative Journalism Found Its Feet Online?" Part 1. *Online Journalism Blog*, 23 August. Accessed 7 February 2013. <http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2011/08/23/has-investigative-journalism-found-its-feet-online-part-1>.
- Byrne, Dorothy. 1999. Guest lecture, MA Investigative Journalism course, Nottingham Trent University, 29 April.
- Burrell, Ian, 2012, "Basic Journalism checks were not carried out." *The Independent*, 12 November, accessed 13 May 2013 at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/basic-journalistic-checks-were-not-carried-out-bbc-begins-disciplinary-proceedings-over-unacceptable-failings-by-staff-8306067.html>
- Currah, Andrew. 2009. *What's Happening to Our News: An Investigation into the Likely Impact of the Digital Revolution on the Economics of News Publishing in the UK*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Investigative Dashboard. 2011. "How to Fish for People in Panama." Accessed 7 February 2013. <http://www.datatracker.org/2011/03/how-to-fish-for-people-in-panama>.
- Davies, Nick. 2008. *Flat Earth News: An Award-winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- De Burgh, Hugo, ed. 2008. *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Greenslade, Roy. 2008. "People Power." *British Journalism Review* 19: 15–21.
- Greenslade, Roy. 2010. "Investigative Journalism is Still Thriving in the Internet Era." *London Evening Standard*, 27 October.
- House of Lords. 2012. "The Future of Investigative Journalism." Select Committee on Communications, 3rd Report of Session 2010–12, Paper 256.
- Lashmar, Paul. 2008a. "From Shadow Boxing to Ghost Plane: English Journalism and the 'War on Terror'." In *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice*, ed. Hugo de Burgh, 191–214. Oxford: Routledge.
- Lashmar, Paul. 2008b. "Sub-Prime—the Death of Financial Reporting or a Failure of Investigative Journalism?" Paper presented at the Future of Journalism conference, University of Bedfordshire Luton, October 17–18.

52 Paul Lashmar

- Lashmar, Paul. 2009. "Investigative Journalism: A Case for Intensive Care?" Paper presented at the Journalism in Crisis conference, University of Westminster, London, May 19–20.
- Lashmar, Paul. 2011. "The Future of Investigative Journalism: Reasons to be Cheerful." *Open Democracy*, 11 June. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/paul-lashmar/future-of-investigative-journalism-reasons-to-be-cheerful>.
- Lashmar, Paul. 2012. "Tragedies of the Fourth Estate." *Open Democracy*, 20 November. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourbeeb/paul-lashmar/tragedies-of-fourth-estate>.
- Lewis, Justin, Andrew Williams, and Bob Franklin. 2008. "Four Rumours and an Explanation." *Journalism Practice* 2: 27–28.
- Lewis, Paul. 2012. Talk to Media Education Summit, Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, September 12.
- Lewis, Paul, and Rob Evans. 2012. "Tory MP Running Corby Campaign 'Backed Rival in Anti-Windfarm Plot'." *The Guardian*, 13 November. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/nov/13/tory-mp-corby-anti-windfarm-film>.
- Mair, John. 2011. "Is Investigative Journalism Dead or Alive?" *Huffington Post*, 26 August. <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/john-mair/is-investigative-journalism-dead-or-alive/>.
- Mair, John, and Richard Keeble, eds. 2011. *Investigative Journalism; Dead or Alive?* Bury St Edmunds: Abramis.
- Preston, Peter. 2012. "Journalism Once Had Woodward and Bernstein. Now it's Guns for Hire." *Observer*, 18 November. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/nov/18/bureau-of-investigative-journalism-newsnight-bbc>.
- Storm, Hannah. 2012. "We are Heading for One of the Darkest Years on Record in Terms of the Safety of Journalists." International News Safety Institute, 23 November. <http://www.newssafety.org/news.php?news=20586&cat=press-room-news-release>.
- Stourton, Ed. 2009. "Investigative Journalism." *The Media Show*, BBC Radio 4, 14 April.
- Turvill, William. 2012. "NUJ: Newsnight Budget has Halved Over the Last Five Years." *Press Gazette*, 12 November. <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/nuj-newsnight-budget-has-halved-over-last-five-years>.