Chapter Two

Moving towards a working definition of 'investigative journalism'

The term 'investigative journalism' appears to have first entered the professional media and public lexicon sometime during the 1960s-70s timeframe. Interviews carried out with leading practitioners of the craft indicate confusion and uncertainty over when it first emerged or indeed to whom – individually or collectively – it was first used as a term of description. Literature on the topic, in the UK, USA and indeed elsewhere in the world, suggests the precise origins of the term remain frustratingly vague and repeated attempts by various authors, researchers, historians and journalists themselves to pin down the exact origins of the phrase have proven to be fruitless.

However, an interview conducted by the author with a 77 year-old American journalist named Bob Greene, may well help in identifying one of the earliest usages of the term 'investigative journalist' in the 1950s and 1960s. Greene has long been regarded as something of a legend in American journalism circles, and he began his career working on 'racket' investigations committees for the government. By combining the investigative techniques he learned during this tenure, with the press requirements to regularly break fresh stories, and by adhering to a tough legal framework when doing his investigations, Greene came up with a model for investigative journalism that has withstood decades of scrutiny and refinement.

Of particular note, is the fact that the term 'investigative journalist' has been used retrospectively, to identify and categorize work carried out by mid

19th century journalists in both the UK and USA.[1] Later sections of this study will briefly examine aspects of the trans-Atlantic historical roots of what became initially known or labelled as 'muckraking' and then later, 'investigative journalism'. But by design, since this is not intended to be a historical study, these discussions will be limited. The focus remains on more recent developments in investigative journalism, which for the purposes of this thesis, will date from the decade before and the decades since, the landmark Watergate scandal investigations c.1972 carried out mainly, but by no means only, by the *Washington Post*, most notably by its then-young staff reporters Woodward and Bernstein.

The reasons for choosing this date as a pivotal point in the development of investigative journalism will follow in later chapters. Suffice to say at this stage of the thesis, that the impact of Watergate was felt not only in the USA – which we will examine in some depth in later chapters – but also across the Atlantic in its nearest English-speaking neighbour, the United Kingdom. The perception and evaluation of that impact by practitioners who were working during this timeframe in journalism in the UK was not always as positive as some authors have argued.

Whilst the descriptive term 'investigative journalism' and the attributed and self-designated title 'investigative journalist' have been, and remain, in common usage, many professionals in the media industry refuse to countenance the actual existence of either. This thread of unwillingness to agree that such a specialised category of journalism exists and surfaces in commentaries and

[1] For examples dating from mid-19th century in the USA print-press see *Muckraking* (New York: New Press, 2002). Eds. Judith and William Serrin.

articles with surprising frequency and from unexpected sources and it is to this area of the debate that we now turn our attention to.

Dissenters to the term 'investigative journalism'

One of the UK's most respective journalists who specialised in investigative projects was the late Paul Foot, who was best known for his groundbreaking columns in the *Daily Mirror*.[2] Whilst becoming well known for his award-winning work on miscarriage of justice cases and difficult cases like the Lockerbie inquiry, Foot derided – in fact took some pleasure in publicly *rejecting* - the whole idea that a separate kind of journalism existed with the term 'investigative' fixed to it. He explained his contempt for its roots in an essay in 1999:

> [Investigative journalism] is a phrase which dates from that time [1960-70]. The expression is often used by jumped-up bylined journalists who want to distinguish themselves from the common ruck. It is in itself a little ridiculous, since all journalism worthy of the name carried with it a duty to ask questions, check facts, investigate.[3]

Another journalist, equally well known for his foreign investigations, John Pilger, also took several opportunities to decry the inappropriate use of the term. In recent years however, he edited a compilation of journalism from around the world containing the subtitle *Investigative Journalism and its triumphs*. In the book's introduction, Pilger said:

> The reference to investigative journalism in the title needs explaining, even redefining… The term, investigative journalism, did not exist when I began my career; it became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s and

[2] The first-ever dedicated award in the UK's press industry history for 'Investigative Journalism' was funded in part and named after Paul Foot. The inaugural Paul Foot award was presented in 2005.
[3] Paul Foot, 'The Slow Death of Investigative Journalism,' *The Penguin Book of Journalism: Secrets of the Press.* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp.79-80.

> especially when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein exposed the Watergate scandal…. I have applied a broader definition than detective work and included journalism that bears witness and investigates ideas.[4]

Whilst understanding and accepting Pilger's effort to enhance debate on the definition of the investigative journalism, it is important to consider some of the points he makes. Firstly, it would be ungenerous, possibly even churlish to suggest that Woodward and Bernstein's work on the Watergate scandal amounted to nothing but 'detective work'. Having said that, Woodward, has said publicly on numerous occasions that both he and Bersntein did – in a sense – carry out basic police-type 'door-to-door' investigations in order to elicit the information from witnesses they needed. The importance of the investigation into the Watergate scandal by Woodward and Bernstein and the role it played in drawing attention to 'investigative journalism' is an area that will be discussed in greater depth elsewhere in this thesis. However, even at this early stage of the study it is important to recognise that one of the reasons that much of the hidden truth and deeper contextual political and criminal meaning behind Watergate could not be featured in their early stories was simply because their stories were news articles. As such, they were constrained by the *Washington Post's* own news standards to only print factual, accurate stories which served to move the story forward, as and when they discovered more information. This is a constraint which most news reporters traditionally work under. Only if they'd branched out into longer news 'features' or in-depth articles of greater length (sometimes running into thousands of words for magazine pieces, for example) would Woodward and Bernstein have been able to explore the hidden motives

[4] John Pilger, *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism and its Triumphs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) p.xiv.

and meanings behind the news articles they were reporting.[5]Instead, it was only with the publication of their book *All the President's Men* which allowed them to explore their facts and themes in greater depth thus partially fulfilling Pilger's stated mission of bearing 'witness and investigating [ideas]…'

Secondly, it should also be recognised that both Woodward and Bernstein were relatively young reporters when they investigated the Watergate break-ins – aged twenty-eight and twenty-nine, respectively. Bernstein had had an erratic career until his coverage of the Watergate story and was known to be on the verge of being sacked when he started working on it. Woodward was regarded as being very inexperienced around the time of the break-in in June 1972, and only his reputation as a hard-worker saved him from being taken off the story. The *Washington Post* Watergate investigation which followed was not planned to become the model it has in ensuing decades. It is to Woodward and Bernstein's credit – as well as their various editors – that it remained as focused and productive in revelatory news terms, as it did. Consequently, simply labelling it 'detective work' is too narrow and too dismissive in my opinion.

Most journalists – including the author, someone who would happily under most circumstances call myself an 'investigative journalist' – would broadly agree with the central sentiments Foot and Pilger express, i.e. that most journalists *should* do investigative work as part of their normal duties and that most journalists *should* report hidden truths and investigate uncomfortable ideas. Yet to agree with these goals is not the same as dismissing the notion that a

[5] To see an example of a more recent hybrid article of this nature then read Semour Hersh's excellent piece from 1993 at: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/content/?020930fr_archive02. This investigation debunked the popular notion – still gaining currency at the outset of the US-led coalition invasion in 2003 – that President George Bush Sr, had been targeted for assassination by Saddam Hussein in 1993. Hersh's piece could only have been published in a magazine like *The New Yorker* since it demanded space, sympathetic editing, and text-heavy layout context. Ironically, like a tail wagging a dog, such an article ends up generating coverage in news articles.

separate category of 'investigative journalism' with its practitioners does exist: the two issues are not mutually exclusive. In the UK Greenslade recently noted:

> The phrase 'investigative journalism' is, in a sense, tautologous because all journalism should involve some kind of investigation that results in the revelation of a hidden truth. Then again, there is no single form of journalism so the separate description is understandable. But let's be honest: there is a qualitative difference between investigative journalism and all other editorial matter that appears in newspapers. It is the highest form of journalism, pure journalism, real journalism, the reason journalism exists. At their best, investigative journalists serve the public interest by revealing secrets, exposing lies (and liars), uncovering uncomfortable facts, evading censorship and, sometimes, risking their lives to act as eyewitnesses to events. Its greatest exponents are muckrakers with a conscience working to that age-old dictum: 'News is something someone somewhere doesn't want published – all the rest is advertising.' By its nature, investigative journalism usually involves writing against the grain, confronting the prevailing political orthodoxy and often subverting it. Inevitably, investigative reporters are treated with suspicion, sometimes hostility. They tend to be lone wolves who suffer marginalisation, branded at best eccentrics, accused at worst of being traitors, in order to demean and degrade what they write and broadcast.[6]

Few readers with a serious interest in current affairs coverage in the media in the 21st century would disagree with Greenslade's opening line that: 'because all journalism should involve some kind of investigation that results in the revelation of a hidden truth…' However, any commentator with even a cursory understanding of most newsroom and journalistic practices and standards in 21st century UK[7], would find it difficult to argue with the assertion that many journalists don't have the professional aptitude, necessary time, sufficient office resources and support, editorial encouragement, or professional inclination, to name but a few requirements, to do investigations. Most simply

[6] Prof. Roy Greenslade 'Writers on the Frontline' *The Guardian*, 30/10/2004.
[7] The same rule of thumb applies to the USA, the nearest same-language country with an investigative tradition in the press, however, as this study will show in later sections, there is qualitative differences in the journalism investigations carried out in America – both at national and local level. The complex reasons why this is will be addressed also.

don't 'dig' beyond the usual flurry of press releases, diary items and press conferences, which by and large, represent the daily grist to the mill of what eventually ends up being what most readers, viewers and listeners would think of as 'news'. The reasons that lie behind the decisions of many newspapers not to pursue investigative journalism are varied and complex as the case study which follows shows.

Case Study: Hairmyers Hospital investigation[8]

This case study underlines several common reasons why newspapers – a national title in this instance – are not generally enthusiastic about investigative projects. Even when such projects are supported, newspapers do not always have the skill-base to adequately undertake them.

The author was involved over a two month-period in an investigation for *The Scotsman* newspaper's magazine looking at a range of issues at Hairmyers hospital, a 'flagship' facility built between 1999-2000 under the New Labour government 's controversial PFI (Private Finance Initiative) scheme.

This was not a story which had been current in news terms and wasn't regarded as 'hot' in any sense. There were no apparent scandalous photographs to be had; there were no clear issues to be assessed within a given time-frame; there were no well-known campaigners 'up in arms' about anything. However, I was contacted by several nurses with grievances about their new place of work. Over a two-month period I uncovered:

1. Massive fraud by a sub-contractor hired to carry out maintenance within the building;

[8] See Appendix for details of this case study.

2. Evidence of corruption involving finance claims within the hospital from sub-contracted cleaning staff;

3. Sub-standard working practices relating to water-filtration facilities which put hundreds of lives needlessly at risk;

4. Shoddy workmanship throughout the facility;

5. Staff bullying; and a management team driven by bottom-line goals which had caused unprecedented division amongst senior consultant staff.[9]

This was, by any criteria, an important story for readers to know as taxpayers and potential patients. Yet, it was not a story that mainstream journalists covering the news on either a daily or indeed weekly basis, would have readily latched on to.

It didn't present itself within a predictable timescale; sources had to be cultivated over a two-month timeframe; the documents used in the investigation were difficult to understand and needed professional guidance in order for them to be understood; and at its heart there was no central 'human' story to use as a narrative device to tell the story through. It was a dry, complex and at times, technical, investigation. Its one selling point however, was that unless the issues described in it were tackled and dealt with, many lives might be lost, in that sense it was a story of enormous relevance. It was also an exclusive story – no other newspaper in Scotland or the UK had delved into this politically controversial topic, explaining to readers the new set of issues which PFI hospitals were now throwing up.

[9] See Eamonn O'Neill's investigation 'Critical Condition' at http://www.eamonnoneill.net/articles/HAIRMYERS%20INVESTIGATION.pdf

From beginning to end, the author used the fifteen-points derived from the Watergate investigation, as indicators and tools for this investigation. Particularly useful were:

- Use of low-level sources.
- Using circle-technique.
- Being willing to approach non-cooperative witnesses;
- Ignoring daily news agenda.
- Working from facts outwards: not a thesis inwards.
- Keeping detailed notes.
- Using multiple – and overlapping – sources (who were unaware of others' involvement).
- Making the piece relevant to readers.
- Keeping sources' identities confidential.

The article was duly published in *The Scotsman* newspaper to little attention, yet within days of it appearing several individuals mentioned in the piece were moved sideways from their jobs or indeed were quietly 'let go'. The hospital itself didn't respond to the piece or argue that its findings were wrong. Indeed, their outrage was conspicuous by its absence. Yet instead of this victory for public awareness and in-depth press scrutiny being acknowledged by the newspaper printing the article it singularly failed to publicise its existence; failed to follow-up the consequences of its findings; and avoided using the piece as any sort of investigative template or example for its full-time staff to follow.

Although, as the author, I notched this project up as a very successful one, in the short and medium terms, it didn't help in securing fresh commissions for investigations of this kind from the editors at this newspaper. I felt as though they liked the *idea* of managing investigative projects, but in practical terms, would rather have avoided them in future. Lack of familiarity with the investigative journalism genre, budgetary constraints and editorial problems caused the newspaper and editor to feel uncomfortable with this project. At the halfway point of the project, as new allegations of wrongdoing at the hospital emerged and as more sources started to contact me with documentary proof of wrongdoing and more allegations of corruption, I was forced to approach a retired senior figure in Scottish journalism for assistance. This individual was respected widely in the industry and had spent years working with *The Sunday Times'* Insight Team, which specialised in investigative stories. He was able to provide perspective, guidance and editorial suggestions, at the most tense and crucial time in the whole project. I have no doubt that this oversight only existed because he was a seasoned investigative journalist and was therefore best-positioned to offer advice which he'd earned bitterly over many years on the job.

This indicated to me, that whilst the *will* existed to back investigative projects, the experience to manage and edit such endeavours, did not always exist in all publications.

Obviously, this meant that in future, if more organisations were staffed by individuals with little or no investigative experience, then the opportunities for that organisation to produce such stories decreased. However, it is important to acknowledge that some editors without any investigative experience do

commission investigative projects enthusiastically, since they are keen for exclusives and the industry-kudos which goes with their publication.[10] Investigative journalism is a specialised form of the craft which requires specialised knowledge both in producing projects and in managing them: the journalist focusing on them, can have little or no chance of succeeding, unless experienced management and enthusiastic backing from supportive colleagues, exist.

'Investigations' are still highly regarded within the media industry in part because those who want them have experience of their powerful outcomes, and also in part, because of the mythology that's become attached to the genre and the popular usage of the term 'investigative journalist' continues into the 21st century and has remained inside the collective psyche of media-aware commentators and consumers.[11]

Even those amongst us who eschew an interest in any form of current affairs coverage cannot completely avoid the positive image of crusading investigative journalism in fictional novels and Hollywood films. Hugo De Burgh mentions the popular novelist John Grisham's investigative journalist character 'Gray Grantham' who is a central hero in the author's fictional work *The Pelican Brief*, for example, who he says:

> Is as romantic an ideal idealisation of the journalist as one might hope to meet in popular culture. Not only is he a meticulous desk worker but he

[10] One of the author's most fruitful freelance relationships was with the magazine editor of a Scottish broadsheet who had no investigative experience whatsoever, but was inclined to commission projects regularly. This editor garnered praise for the publication and confided the regular appearance of investigative articles had helped bolster its reputation.

[11] I am using the term 'consumer' here in a non-judgemental way. It is meant to indicate the broad range of average – if there is such a thing – members of the public who buy or pay for, their journalism fare regularly. I am aware that applying the label 'consumer' might be construed as devaluing the civic role that citizens play in society and narrowly defines the public-private relationship based on a capital exchange, between media companies who provide news and individuals who interact with it. No such implied meaning is intended.

> is also skilled in the practical arts… [he] is not so very far from genuine investigative journalists.[12]

These somewhat surprising comments from De Burgh reflect how intermingled the fictional ideal of investigative journalist characters and their real-world counterparts have become. Some comparisons can be drawn between the vague genesis of the whole genre of 'investigative journalism' and the 1960's US-based 'New Journalism' movement.

Both investigative journalism and 'New Journalism' have titles or labels that were – to an extent – applied retrospectively. The former, as I've mentioned, emerged at some point in and around the Watergate investigation by the *Washington Post* c.1972. One of the UK's foremost exponents of what became known as 'investigative journalism' is Phillip Knightley, a former member of the famous *Sunday Times* 'Insight' team. Since both he and the Insight team were in their professional heydays around the early 1970s timeframe, one would assume he'd be as good a judge as anyone to know where the term came from. When I asked him, he replied:

> I wish I knew! And I wish I knew who coined the term! The *Sunday Times* certainly didn't set out to create a team called Insight that would do 'Investigative Journalism'. It just sort of grew and there was a wonderful confluence of events…[13]

The label 'New Journalism' was more than likely first used in print in the 1960s to categorise the free flowing, energetic, participatory pieces, often written with a novelist's style and structure, nut was first discussed in a high-profile way by Tom Wolfe in 1973 when his landmark essay introduced

---

[12] Hugo De Burgh, *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) p10.
[13] Phillip Knightley interview with Eamonn O'Neill 30/8/05.

the material in the collection of the same name.[14] Thereafter pieces previously written by the likes of Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, George Plimpton and indeed, Tom Wolfe himself, were labelled 'New Journalism'. The fact that those subsequently cited as being members of this journalism movement didn't realise at the time they originally wrote their pieces that they were 'members' of anything, is not up for debate in this study. Nevertheless, the same backwards-glance labelling of various kinds of in-depth reporting as 'investigative journalism' – sometimes as far back as the 19th century – attests to the striking parallels between the pigeon-holing processes which were visited upon both categories. One equally striking difference however, was the *lack* of collected investigative writings in the UK containing anything similar to the Wolfe essay which codified the term 'New Journalism'.[15] Interestingly, one of the most recent attempts at something similar was from John Pilger someone who would not – in the United States, for example, nor in many section of the UK broadsheet press – be regarded as, strictly speaking, an 'investigative journalist'.[16]

Hugo De Burgh's working definition of an investigative journalist is useful for the purposes of this thesis:

> An investigative journalist is a man or a woman whose profession it is to discover the truth and to identify lapses from it in whatever media may

[14] Tom Wolfe, 'The New Journalism', *The New Journalism* (London: Picador, 1990) Eds. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson.
[15] The USA did have some collections of work drawn together by editors in the mid-1970s. One of the most significant in my view remains Len Downie's *The New Muckrakers* (Washington DC: The New Republic Book Company, Inc 1976).
[16] See john Pilger's *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism and its Triumphs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004). If one applies the normal descriptive criteria for investigative journalism (see below for examples) many items in this collection would not qualify. Whilst this book contains excellent pieces of reportage and in-depth feature writing from both the UK and abroad the title remains puzzling to the author of this study: I can only reach the uncomfortable conclusion – as someone who admires Mr Pilger's work a great deal for its thought provoking standards – that it was given this label in order to sell more copies in a marketplace that sorely lacks a decent collection of investigative pieces.

> be available. The act of doing this generally is called investigative journalism and is distinct from apparently similar work done by police, lawyers, auditors, and regulatory bodies in that it is not limited as to target, not legally founded and closely connected to publicity.[17]

Applying De Burgh's definition means that many of the examples collected in Pilger's book would be more accurately described as 'dissenting' or 'exposure' journalism. De Burgh neatly addresses this difference when he says:

> It is useful… to distinguish dissenting journalism from investigative journalism, although they are often closely connected. It is a long tradition in Anglophone societies to tolerate disagreement with authority and it is a tradition for which writers have fought.[18]

Another rigorous and useful working definition of investigative journalism comes from the authors John Ullmann and Steve Honeyman who suggest that:

> It is the reporting, through one's own work product and initiative, matters of importance which some persons or organisations wish to keep secret. The three basic elements are that the investigation be the work of the reporter, not a report of an investigation made by someone else; that the subject of the story involves something of reasonable importance to the reader or viewer; and that others are attempting to hide the matters from the public.[19]

This three-point definition was in fact conceived and written by, Bob Greene, the USA-based journalist who penned it during his tenure as president of the Investigative Reporters and Editors [IRE] organisation which was founded in 1975, based at the University of Missouri. Greene had, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, shifted between journalism and working on various investigative bodies which examined labour rackets and abuse of organised

---

[17] See Hugo De Burgh, p9.
[18] Ibid p10.
[19] *The Reporter's Handbook – An Investigator's Guide to Documents and Techniques.* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983). Houton, Bruzzese and Weinberg, Eds.

labour movements. This led him to see possibilities in marrying formal criminal investigation techniques with the press' usual need for fresh, groundbreaking stories on a regular basis. He set this merging of techniques and demand against a formal legal model of research; proof; and organisation. This was an entirely new approach to newspaper investigation, a model which would eventually be copied by other journalists and publications. Greene explained to me during a 2006 interview[20] how he flitted between the worlds of criminal investigation and journalism:

> I was on the Jersey Journal, in Jersey City, for about two years, then I had done a lot of work on Waterfront crime in Jersey City. And right after US Senate hearings on organised crime, they formed the New York City Crime Committee and I was asked to come over and be their senior investigator. So I left the Jersey Journal and went over there to work in New York. Now the person who brought me over there – if you've seen the Hollywood movie starring Marlon Brando called 'On the Waterfront' – well the priest in there was really a Jesuit priest who got very involved in waterfront crime, just like in the movie, on behalf of the workers. He was the one who knew me, he baptized my children, and I knew him for Xavier, and he brought me over and was the conduit to the crime committee. I worked on the crime committee for about 4 years as a senior investigator in New York, mainly working on waterfront crime, competition crime, and Teamster's Union crime. In the course of that, whilst that was going on, Robert Kennedy was the Minority Counsel, to the United States Senate Investigations Committee. He'd been looking into waterfront crime and his people had come over and interviewed me. I talked to them and said, 'You should really look into this Teamster's stuff…' He kept this in his mind. I left the crime commission when it got too political and I went to work for Newsday which on Long Island at that time, had about 200,000 circulation. I became a crime reporter and a labour reporter through them. I was working for Newsday for about two years when Robert Kennedy became a Counsel for the Senate Labour Rackets Committee which was the one which went after Jimmy Hoffa. So they came to me and I was the first outside person that they hired. I had to take a leave-of-absence from Newsday, which I did for about 18 months….[21]

Greene maintains that whilst the term 'investigative reporting' and 'investigative journalism' did come into the consciousness of the mainstream media

[20] Bob Greene died on Thursday April 10th 2008. Tributes to his professional contribution to the world of investigative journalism and to the education of a whole generation of young journalists, poured in from across the globe after his death.
[21] Bob Greene interview with Eamonn O'Neill, July 2006.

after *All the President's Men* was released in print and then later in film, the reality was that many journalists were using the same techniques and approaches in earlier decades. He explained that:

> There were major investigative reporters around doing investigative reporting, we maybe hadn't defined it but you knew it by what you were doing… I was giving seminars at the American Press Institute for reporters and editors, on what I called 'investigative reporting' in the '60s…. There were well known investigative reporters who were called 'investigative reporters'. For example, George Bliss from the Chicago Tribune; Todd Link from the St Louis Post Dispatch; Malcolm Johnson from the New York Sun, to mention only three.
>
> That was before Watergate. *Newsday* had two major editions, and some reporters from one particular town felt that every time they tried to cover corruption in their place their editor kept trying to steer them off, and so they said to me, 'Can you come out here and look at this?' So I went to my boss, who was the boss of the other guy also, but he discouraged me from checking this out – but two other bosses agreed that I should go. When I went out there and checked it all out, it turned out that the editor had deals with the politicians in this particular town, and he knew when major building projects were going to happen – major municipal airports for example – and so he was able to secretly go into business with the council and buy land etc. In the meantime he was doing stories about how great the airport was and also steering his reporters off checking things out. As a result the editor took a heart attack and a number of people in our stories went to jail. I had asked for more reporters to come out and work with me and they gave me more reporters. I was using techniques I had used in the Senate Rackets Committee to form a squad, a group of reporters. And that was the genesis of the Newsday Investigative Team. We investigated people in the surrounding town and sent more people to jail, because there was huge fraud and corruption. We got passage of all kinds of new laws. Now that was all going on in the 1960s, and we won our first Pulitzer Prize in 1970 with the team was called the 'Investigative Team' or the 'Greene Team'… All I am trying to say is regarding the use and currency of the words 'investigative reporting' is that there were investigative reporters who used the words 'investigative reporting' long before Watergate.[22]

The impact of Greene's approach and style were far reaching and other colleagues from across the industry came to study his techniques and organisational approach. It also challenges Pilger's assertion that investigative journalism is mere 'detective work'. Because Greene had worked for a government agency during his

[22] Bob Greene interview with Eamonn O'Neill, July 2006.

racket investigations, he was aware that a systematic, organised and clearly focused approach was required for an efficient investigation. He was very keen, for example, on an intricate but accessible filing system, which allowed sources to be cross-checked by waves of reporters on his staff. This allowed complex investigations to flow across timeframes and staff changes. He was also well-aware that his investigations, whilst primarily for press publication, would ultimately encounter the law. This meant he adhered to a high standard of sourcing and fair sense of focus. In terms of the former, it meant that multiple sources – not just two, as was applied during Watergate inquiries by the *Washington Post* – were required by reporters. Regarding the latter, he tolerated no skewed fact-picking in order to frame a target. This meant he could never be accused of what later came to be known as 'gotcha' journalism, whereby journalists decide the culpability of their quarry before embarking upon an investigation, and therefore consciously – or even unconsciously – sift out awkward evidence hinting at alternative issues and instead cherry-pick only the material which supports their thesis. This even handed, professional approach indeed used 'detective' methods, inasmuch as old-fashioned 'shoe-leather' was worn out by going door-to-door, street-to-street, for sources and evidence, but it didn't ignore the complex context against which the story was told, nor was it ignorant of the subtle power-related issues which moved like tectonic plates underneath everything Greene investigated.

The success of this unique blend of craft and strategy attracted success for him, his team and his publications. What was utterly unique about Greene's approach was that for the first time, newspapers were deliberately organising their staff into teams, led by senior staff members, focused on investigating issues which were of importance to readers but which required serious investment of time and money and

which, in all cases, had no sure fire successful outcome in terms of either resolving the issues under scrutiny or, in any case, ever producing a readable story.

Despite these odds, Greene managed to produce stunning work which soon became the model for ambitious papers and editors across the United States. He explained: "*The Boston Globe* came along and studied the way we worked. Then they went back and formed a team that worked the same way – the 'Spotlight Team'. And the year after we won it, they won the Pulitzer Prize in 1971. They sent us a telegram saying 'Thanks teach' for making it possible…' And then the Providence Journal came to us and studied the way we did it, and a year after that they won a Pulitzer Prize."[23]

Investigative journalism involves more focused hard work carried out over longer timeframes, than normal day-to-day routine reporting. It requires more imaginative techniques and energetic identification of witnesses. Sources that prefer to remain hidden and silent have to be identified and tracked down. Important documents which have been buried in bureaucratic labyrinths have to be sought out. The information which is gathered may not obviously represent a 'story', so the investigative journalist must be able to translate the information into something meaningful for readers without altering its factual integrity. The journalist must be able to analyse obscure documents – sometimes historical – to understand their meaning and significance. All of this requires time, energy, resources and a platform for publication.

This type of journalism always works from the facts outwards, never from a thesis inwards. This means that journalists doing investigations do not start with a 'target' as such. There is no set-piece discussion at the beginning of a project to outline 'the story we want to tell'. Instead, the idea is to ask a series

[23] Bob Greene interview with Eamonn O'Neill, July 2006.

of penetrating questions which help delineate the areas of interest. In seeking to answer these questions, information is gathered by journalists, who then piece together their material to see if a comprehensive picture of the situation, and hopefully answers to their questions, begin to emerge. One must never begin with a thesis and then work-inwards since this is tantamount to framing a subject and skewing the 'reality' which has been uncovered during the investigation process.

Investigative Journalism in UK Pre-Watergate

UK investigative journalism roots are as difficult to trace as those across the Atlantic in the USA. Similarly, it should be noted, the genre as we know it now, was already in existence before its techniques, approaches and practices were informally and formally codified into the category known as 'investigative journalism'. The purpose of this study is not to recount a full historical development of the genre, since that has been done expertly and comprehensively elsewhere.[24]

Most scholars trace the practice as now know it – meaning the marriage of a powerful 'story' for a publication and aiming to bring a story connected with some form of social 'justice' to the wider public's attention – back to 1885, when journalist and campaigner[25]W.T Stead managed to 'buy' a young 12 year-old girl in London. On July 6th of that year Stead, who was the editor of the highly-popular *Pall Mall Gazette* decided to stage a sting operation after a long period of on-the-ground research into a relatively hidden issue of the time,

[24] See De Burgh. Although not exhaustive, this author does explain the roots of the practice in several early chapters.
[25] Later sections of this chapter explain the continued debate in the academy and journalism profession about the differences between being an 'investigative journalist', a 'campaigning journalist' and/or a 'dissenting journalist'. This doesn't seem to be a debate which will end any time soon.

namely child prostitution. To do this, he researched where he could procure a child, then used the magazine's funds to do just that. The hue and cry which followed, included Stead being briefly jailed for the crime, but released shortly afterwards since the journalistic and campaigning motives behind the stunt became all too apparent.[26]

This approach regarding the same subject – only this time in Eastern Europe – was used over 120 years later, when the UK's *Sunday Telegraph* reporter David Harrison, won a major award for his expose on sex trafficking.[27]It is not within the remit of this thesis to chart every step between those two points on either side of the historical UK journalistic landscape, but key points are worth considering.

Firstly, although Stead's landmark study and his unique approach to bringing the issue to public attention was popular and boosted sales of his magazine, the uptake and development of this style of journalism in the UK over the subsequent decades was, at best, spotty. Several authors of this genre cite specific reasons for this: mass-market titles were owned by press barons who were more interested in profits rather than campaigns or projects aimed at uncovering hidden information which could threaten the powerful;[28]many of the titles which did carry out investigative 'type' projects and print their subsequent articles were mass-market gossip magazines like *Titbits*; and as we will see in later chapters, investigations were never seen as institutionally valuable to the UK's journalistic tradition in the same way as they were in the USA, nor – crucially – were they ever taught – in theory or practice – to beginning journalists in either the workplace nor the country's higher educational

[26] See De Burgh P39 for an excellent account of the incident.
[27] See http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=35977
[28] For numerous examples of this point see Hugo De Burgh, p43.

establishments. This tradition is carried on to this day with the continued publication – on and off since 1961 of *Private Eye Magazine*. The latter, which contains a mix of inaccurate gossip, spot-on investigative articles, cartoons and entertaining columns, ironically sponsors the UK's only investigative journalism award. Although unreliable at times, many of the investigative stories in the *Eye* prove to be accurate, resilient and frequently withstand the test of time and scrutiny.[29]

Secondly, a study of secondary sources and interviews with some key media industry figures from the 20th century carried out for this study, indicates that 'investigative journalism' in the UK was not a category which was treated as seriously in educational or professional terms as it was, for example – and as we will see in later sections of this work – in the United States of America.[30]

In the UK context, investigative journalism was a genre of reporting which reared its head rarely and sporadically. It tended to be carried out by mass market titles – specifically tabloids – in relation to scandalous stories, usually involving celebrity or at least, public figures. The element of social 'justice' or a

[29] Two classic examples of this were Paul Foot's investigation into the Lockerbie Bombing and the shady financial dealings of former *Mirror Group* owner, Robert Maxwell. At the time the magazine took flak for publishing both investigations. Foot's solo efforts and the backing of the magazine which routinely received libel writs from Maxwell, for example, meant that the work which was produced was significant and rare. Few other platforms existed for this kind of journalism.

[30] Funded by the University of Strathclyde's Continuous Professional Development fund and examining this issue for the purposes of starting a Masters degree in Investigative Journalism, the author of this study systematically approached a total of almost 40 television companies; universities/colleges; newspapers (local/national); and other media outlets over a one month period in August-Sept 2007 to ask 'Do you employ an investigative journalist and/or provide in-house training in the practice of investigative journalism?' The companies were approached at random, over a limited time-frame and the contact was made through telephone calls. Due to the nature of the study, it was not a full, in-depth project, but a sampling inquiry meant to deliver indications of the situation, rather than answers and a fully-developed picture. The answers were noted down by the author but became so repetitive that I eventually held out writing details down, since none veered from the stock reply I was receiving. Simply put, the answer in 100% of cases to both parts of the question, was, 'No'. In casual remarks conducted after the initial question was asked, many reporters and editors gave variations of the following statements: 'I wish we did'; 'we have no support for that here'; 'you must be joking'. On the basis alone of the results of this informally-recorded sampling study, the author believes a larger, more complex and more comprehensive study addressing these and related questions, should be conducted into the state of play of investigative journalism in the UK in the 21st century, as soon as possible.

wider social 'cause' was frequently used as a fig-leaf to justify the story's existence, and to conceal its prurient appeal. Phillip Knightley told me:

> Well, apart from *The Mirror* under [Editor Hugh] Cudlipp, and eventually with John Pilger as a sort of star, they weren't doing anything at all. They [UK tabloids] were writing celebrity knockdowns, and investigations into people's love lives and that sort of thing, but the idea that you would have a tabloid journalist going around doing a serious look at the state of the nation, as Pilger did on several occasions, and would get coverage, space and support that Cudlipp gave him, was an anathema to any other tabloid paper.[31]

Knightley's claims chime exactly with separate interviews carried out for this study with other media industry figures inasmuch as they reveal that unless individual editors like Hugh Cudlipp went out of their way to support investigative-led projects, then none were done. This is important for two reasons: Firstly, it shows that within a UK context, investigative journalism throughout the 20th century has not been as important nor treated as a vital, integral part of a newspaper's daily or weekly mission, akin to the reporting of football, crime, law, or even the printing of daily crosswords or horoscopes. In fact, looking through the lens of recent history, the appearance of serious, focused and systematically carried out investigative reporting was simply the exception rather than the rule. Thus, the stint of John Pilger at *The Mirror* under Cudlipp, remains a totemic point in the paper's history and the journalist's own professional career.[32]Secondly, Knightley's remarks also hint at the fact that investigative reporting needs either institutional support from the publication or media organisation (i.e. treated as an integral, vital and well-financed element in

[31] Interview with Phillip Knightley by Eamonn O'Neill 30/8/05.

[32] Pilger himself frequently refers to this era and stage of his career yet it was only for some 36 months between 1963-66. This might leave him open to self-exploitation and to inflating this part of his CV. In fact, on closer examination, the sheer -range, depth and weight of the investigations and campaigns he was involved in during these three years support the view that his *Mirror* stint was productive and significant.

the overall mission of the organisation), which as we have seen rarely happens in the UK, or alternatively, it requires one-off, individual support from certain editors. This latter claim would appear to have been the pattern throughout the UK media in recent historical times, with some honourable exceptions which will be mentioned later. Certainly, in terms of this author's professional experience working in this genre for almost two decades, the argument that the UK media supports investigative journalism, not because it institutionally values it, but because individual editors decide to aggressively support it, seems to be the case

One of the most oft-cited examples of UK-based investigative journalism is the era of *The Sunday Times'* Insight Team under the stewardship of editor of the paper, Harold 'Harry' Evans from 1967-81. Evans' personal backing was a prerequisite for this section of the paper's very existence. Phillip Knightley, recallimg his time on the Insight Team explains:

> Evans… not having come from an Establishment background… his father was an engine driver, but nevertheless encouraged by someone who had come from an Establishment background, Dennis Hamilton, and given his head. Evans' main thing was that he loved the job of editing, he knew as much about layouts and editorial presentation as he did about content. But I suggest to you that his main attribute was that he recognized talent when he saw it and couldn't bear the thought that that talent was working for anybody else, and he hired people in lifts, toilets and bars – anywhere. And he had a strange effect on the way the Sunday Times worked, because the Sunday Times didn't pay very well, it wasn't the best paid paper in Fleet Street, but people wanted to work for it for the prestige and they were all highly motivated people who wanted to see their stories in print.[33]

Harry Evans did not organise his paper's crack 'Insight Team' in the same way that Bob Greene did. Unlike Greene, who had worked for the US government's Senate Rackets Committee and had learned how to investigate in an organised,

[33] Interview with Phillip Knightley by Eamonn O'Neill 30/8/05

systematic, focused and to aim for an almost legal standard-of-proof in his findings, a style which he transferred to his subsequent journalistic projects, Evans' approach was more haphazard. Says Knightley:

> Despite what you may have read or what people thought, it wasn't quite as formal. There was no Insight Team sign outside any one office. It was a group of journalists who felt the same way who were all on the 5th floor, as distinct from the fifth floor which was the newsroom. They did look each week for the big story or the explanation of the running story of the week. Someone said the other week, 'God I wish for the ST Insight team when the shooting took place of the Brazilian guy…' But the following Sunday there was nothing to explain it at all. The old Sunday Times would have been in there, not only employing the Insight team of five or ten people, but also anyone they could grab from the newsroom to look into that story. So it was a flexible group of journalists who did feel themselves a little sharper and better, who did see themselves as an elite. Which was one of the reasons Neil and earlier Frank Giles, scrapped them. Because they were disruptive in some ways to the rest of the editorial staff.[34]

The Evans approach was therefore, very much guided and encouraged by him personally on a professional basis, with his plans built on a mixture of experience and gut instinct for a 'good' story. Knightley explained to this author, that sometimes Evans himself wasn't sure which story would predominate in any given week, and he'd simply let his staff sort it out amongst themselves, until he began seeing something solid emerging:

> The so-called 'space barons' as someone called them who were in charge of various sections of the newspaper, every week had five or six main stories to consider, stories that any other paper would give their eye-teeth for. And they would choose one of those five or six, and it would be the main news story if the week but the others were all equally good. Because the journalists were so keen to get their name in the paper, Evans would say, when they expressed some discontent, 'Take a couple of colleagues with you, there's an empty room on the 4th floor, and find some long-term project to get involved in.' And that's how a lot of the stories grew. They'd go down there, kick it around, think of something and then get on and do it.[35]

---

[34] Ibid.
[35] Interview with Phillip Knightley by Eamonn O'Neill 30/8/05

Evans did not have an overt political motive for his approach to investigative journalism apparently, nor did he employ anyone who did. As far as he was concerned each project was tackled on its own merits. Knightley gives an example of some issues which faced them and the motivations which drove them:

> Bruce Page, London born, educated in Australia, someone who caused some to ask Evans what his political agenda was and Evans said, 'He hasn't got a political agenda as far as I know… except he believes that journalism can make a difference.' He and Ron Hall – British Establishment in many ways, Oxford graduate – had a dedicated and scientific approach to stories, and were the main leaders of the team. And grouped around them were a bunch of groupies who felt that working with these people was a privilege. They worked incredibly long hours. I mean Page would turn up on Friday morning at say 10 am, and not leave the office until 10pm on Saturday night. If he slept at all, he slept on the couch in the newsroom, or in his own office. The belief that if you didn't know it yourself then there were people who could teach you in a very short time. Page became such an expert in pharmacology that he was able to hold his own with pharmacologists who'd worked on drugs for years.

The story for which the *Times'* investigative efforts became best known, was the Thalidomide drug scandal. As someone who worked on the team, Phillip Knightley nearly describes what this investigation was, what it undertook and what the outcome was:

> A drug company [Distillers] originally from Germany but later spread around the world, it was marketing a drug that was said to be safe for women to take during pregnancy to alleviate symptoms of morning sickness and that it was perfectly safe for the unborn foetus – well it wasn't. It caused some 8,000 deformed babies to be born around the world. As a result of that, not only did the British victims get adequate compensation, which had been refused beforehand by the government, but the system of allowing new drugs onto the market was reviewed and there were new laws brought in to make sure that such a thing couldn't happen again.[36]

Reporting laws on civil cases in English courts were also altered as a result of this groundbreaking case.

[36] Interview with Phillip Knightley by Eamonn O'Neill 30/8/05.

Evans' style was unique and buccaneering in many ways. His belief in the moral duty of the reporters carrying out investigative journalism under his authority into scandals of the day like Thalidomide, or later the expose of Cambridge spy Kim Philby or the publication of the former Labour Government Minister Richard Crossman's scandalous diaries from his time in power, was absolute. The fact he did so on the Sunday version of the UK's so-called 'Establishment paper' was further proof of his singularity. Sales figures for this period are difficult to obtain and the best sources – journalists themselves from that era – have told this author that under Evans circulation improved by between 5-7% and then 'held steady'. Thereafter, his investigations didn't increase this position but neither did they weaken it. Asked whether there was financial interference in Evans' investigative projects in an effort to boost sales, one ex-journalist says:

> No, never. Quite the opposite. The advertising manager at *The Sunday Times* came to Harold Evans when we were doing Thalidomide and pointed out that DVC (Distillers Biochemicals Ltd) was a subsidiary of Distillers Ltd who were major, major advertisers in the *Sunday Times* because they produced just about every brand of spirits known in Britain. He said, 'I don't want to influence your editorial decisions but these people do spend about £200,000-£300,000 per year in advertising in the Sunday Times. So he did point it out but Evans took no notice…[37]

The 1960s-1990s time-frame in the UK also marked a high watermark for broadcast investigative journalism with the BBC's *Panorama*, ITV's *This Week, First Tuesday, TV Eye* and *World in Action* all competing for the tough stories and issues of the day.

The latter *World in Action*, made for the ITV network by Manchester-based Granada TV, began its life in 1961, with the original remit that it should be a 'Northern Panorama'. This mission-statement was meant to infuse the

[37] Ibid.

programme makers with an edgier version of the 'Reithianism's aims of education and universality – both regarded as outmoded, elitist and ignorant of the emerging multi-ethnic realities of modernising Britain – which they felt the BBC's flagship *Panorama* series had embraced.[38] Curiously, although in the 21st century *World in Action* is primarily recalled for its populist and uncompromising investigative journalism for over three decades, it actually only ever featured investigations from its own internal 'Investigations Bureau' for approximately one-third of its known episodes.[39]

The Granada series however, actually produced an astonishing array of films which over 40 years later, still astonish the viewer with its variety of cinematic styles, story-telling techniques, investigative approaches, scale of project management, reportage camerawork, and sheer, dogged determination to tell 'stories' of all kinds about the world its makers inhabited. Its mission statement, according to one editor was to 'comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.[40]Certainly the knockabout roots of the series, as cited by Gus Macdonald, meant it was 'born brash'[41]in the same timeframe as other previously mentioned investigative initiatives in the UK, *Private Eye* and *The*

[38] The BBC's *Panorama* series, which merits a scholarly study in itself, was constantly referred to in its 1970s heyday and has remained dubbed to this very day, *Paranoia* amongst professional journalists in the UK. This is not a reference to conspiracy theories or the like, but instead was meant to indicate the ill-at-ease, stab-in-the-back, corridor-politics, mentality which has allegedly bedevilled the strand from its inception. Some critics have also told the author of this study this is trait an alleged carry-over amongst certain staff from their public-school educated backgrounds. *World in Action* by contrast prided itself in being a 'happy ship' where staff sorted out problems by chewing things over 'after a pint'.

[39] Anecdotal evidence obtained by the author of this study from Gus Macdonald, a former Editor of *World in Action* suggests that some 'lost' programmes may exist which were never broadcast. These were 'bankers', that is, films made on relatively timeless subjects (e.g. a life in the day or a bus route) which were filmed and then 'banked' in the library in case other films of a more immediate nature fell through for various reasons (e.g. legal difficulties or technical problems in the filmmaking process of dealing with 16mm film stock) at the eleventh hour. The figure cited in the text of this study – 201 episodes – represents 35 series of the programme spanning three and a half decades.

[40] Steve Boulton, in *The Independent* in December 1998.

[41] From 'A Short History of Group Gropes' by Gus Macdonald, in Edinburgh International Television Festival magazine, August, 1984. P19.

Sunday Times 'Insight Team'. The first editor was Tim Hewat who Macdonald said was:

> …a knock-em-down, drag-em-out Aussie [who ensured] nobody slept at the back when *World in Action* was on. Soon it got itself banned. The offence – broadcasting the fact that defence cost £60 a second; a cost dramatised, admittedly, on the *Beat the Clock* set at the London Palladium. That 1963 IBA ban was, said *The Spectator*, the penalty for 'tough, tireless nosiness in the best tradition of good journalism. The truth is that, before the Sixties, Britain did not have much of a tradition of digging journalism.[42]

It is not clear why 1960s were allegedly so significant in the story of investigative journalism in the UK in print and broadcasting terms. Several sources interviewed have suggested the wider social awareness and political unrest of the era meant that journalists who were keen on the social-justice aspect of the profession's mission, started to push to work on more projects of this kind. Others suggest it was a coincidence that so many like-minded journalists ended up working on the same kind of projects at the same time. Equally, a few also told the author the widening educational opportunities (e.g. the expansion of so-called 'Red Brick' universities in the UK) and arguably the breaking down of class barriers in the British media alongside the expansion of programme-making in the ITV network, meant there were more jobs available to journalists from a wider array of social, education and economic backgrounds. These new producers and journalists brought with them, it is argued, a whole new range of personal and political experiences which they wanted to reflect in their work.[43]

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Anecdotal evidence like this needs more research to explore this interesting question across the UK broadcast and print journalism sectors from the 1960s.

Interviews with former journalists and reviews of secondary and primary documents from the early days of *World in Action* reveal that from the beginning there was cross-fertilization between the investigative sections – such as they were – within the UK journalistic press community, and the new series at Granada. Gus Macdonald, for example, expands on this point:

> David Plowright, relaunching *World in Action*, set up an 'Investigation Bureau' under the editorship of Jeremy Wallington, a founder of *Insight* [at *The Sunday Times*] who had moved to the [Daily] *Mail's* [investigative] '*Newsnight* squad and exposed Savundra[44].The brief: not to *report* news but to *make* news by digging in depth for things people in power did not want you to find out. The first *WIA* exposes were infrequent, but instructive. Those of us from newspapers found television a much tougher trade which demanded film as evidence. Documents, second hand accounts and stills of the guiltiest of men did not make good television. Instead we found ourselves posing as Rhodesian sanctions busters, Biafran arms smugglers or industrial spies, and hoping the primitive bugs and hidden cameras would record the transactions. Another problem was the culture clash. Film directors said journalists had no eyes; we feared they had no brains., certainly little appreciation of evidence required to freeze frame , say 'This man is lying', and escape prison. Some good journalists couldn't take it and fled back to Fleet Street. Thankfully some film folk turned into very good journalists. By the end of the Sixties, the investigative ethos infused the whole team.[45]

The ratings received by *World in Action* in its first series and indeed, throughout its first two decades were, as one recent study characterised them,

---

[44] He is referring to the investigations carried out by various sections of the UK media into the case of fraudster 'Dr' Emil Savundra. He arrived in the UK from Sri Lanka in the early 1960s and cashed in on the growing need for compulsory vehicle insurance for new car owners. Unfortunately for those estimated 400,000 customers who bought his coverage, Savundra didn't have the cash reserves to cover any legitimate claims they might have filed. Simultaneously, the businessman was diverting what capital reserves he did have toi offshore tax havens and living a conspicuously lavish lifestyle, whish allegedly included a liaison with prostitute Christine Keeler of Profumo Scandal infamy. His corruption was exposed in thorough and powerful articles in *the Sunday* Times and *Daily* Mail amongst other titles. On TV, he was famously confronted by David Drost on his series *The Frost Programme* which was filmed live in front a a TV studio audience. Frost challenged the smug pompous and aloof Savundra about his alleged crimes and swindles and, realising he'd the audiences' support behind him, berated and grilled him with an unusual intensity, giving rise to the phrase 'Trial By Television'. The crooked insurance man was left bewildered and floundering in the unfamiliar eye of the storm of public scrutiny. Within twelve months he was tried for his crimes and sentenced to 8 years, where he remained until his eventual release in 1974. He died two years later.

[45] From 'A Short History of Group Gropes' by Gus Macdonald, in Edinburgh International Television Festival magazine, August, 1984. P19.

'phenomenal.[46]Indeed in the first season of 40 programmes, *World in Action* was watched on almost 25% of occasions by half the entire UK viewing audience available.[47]Part of this stunning success was the creative approaches the programme makers at Granada utilised – everything from making an entire film in 'reportage' style without any pre-determined structure or narrative; to focusing on unlikely topics of the day, like Mick Jagger; to employing multiple camera crews to film a single landmark event, like a London city-centre anti-Vietnam War demonstration.

In investigative terms, the use by *World in Action* of experienced Fleet Street reporters who'd already been inspired by the leadership of the likes of Harry Evans at *The SundayTimes*, meant that they brought organisational skills and press-expertise in the handling of documents to the project.

An additional source of inspiration and even talent, for *World in Action* was the growing awareness and coverage of North American subjects and issues. Indeed, in just one example, by the end of 1968, out of 58 *WIA* programmes broadcast, a full 19 of them were shot in and about, American topics. This was an acknowledgement of the growing influence the USA was having on the UK's social, political, cultural and economic spheres.[48]

The sheer ambition and expanding remit of the series – bolstered by the network audiences it was hauling in weekly – is underlined in a simple but

---

[46] See '1967-75: the classic period' in *Public Issue Television – World in Action 1963-98* by Peter Goddard, John Corner and Kay Richardson. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007) p47. The authors support this claim with the fact that in its first five programmes alone, *WIA* ranked 3rd, 6th, 4th, 5th and 7th respectively in the entire week's viewing Top 20 programme choices in the UK.

[47] Ibid.

[48] According to the Goddard, Corner and Richardson, *WIA* memos they've scrutinised, reveal that producers seriously considered opening up a permanent New York bureau. This is not surprising given the sheer presence of US issues in the series.

startling image of some of the series' staff pictured in 1964. Bearing the caption 'It takes 33 people to get Granada's WORLD IN ACTION on the air' the reader sees a team of producers and researchers; a technical team and their gear standing on top of a specially adapted VW campervan; several secretaries and a 'voice-over' narrator; all are standing front of the most startling piece of equipment of all – *World in Action's* own Granada-funded aircraft, complete with the series logo draped across its exterior. How this supposedly bygone era's operation would translate into 21st century coverage, and considering what could be unearthed using modern, relative and to-scale equipment, is almost mind-boggling.

Of course it is important to stress that technology does not necessarily mean better investigative journalism. In recent years, the likes of Donald MacIntyre's work, for example, often includes elaborate technological set-ups and careful undercover filming and recording. This costs a considerable amount of money but the dramatic affect is undeniably heightened for watching viewers who are often arguably conditioned by spy films from Hollywood to expect investigative stories to include hi-tech surveillance elements in their evidence gathering techniques. In fact, much of what is gathered by such equipment can be routinely gathered using less technologically-advanced means. Tracking down a witness can just as easily be done by walking down to your local library in the UK and asking to see the printed version of the most Electoral Roll or wanting to discover who runs a business and pays tax on its income can be easily discovered by paying a visit in person to the local facility which keeps companies' registers. Other investigations require an investigative mindset: meaning the ability to assess whether you're being fed selective information; the

ability to pinpoint what are the best questions to ask to dig at the actual facts; and the skill to present the information you uncover in way that makes readers and viewers understand why this concealed information is important to their lives and the societies we live in as a whole. On one hand therefore, it could be argued that much of what MacIntyre is doing is as much for visually dramatic purposes as for journalistic newsgathering. On the other hand, some surprising stories have resulted in the use of C.A.R. (Computer Assisted Reporting) in the USA and Europe in recent years. This is discussed in more depth in later chapters. C.A.R. projects require special software to analyse databases which are often encoded for institutions and thus rendered near impenetrable for outsiders to understand. These projects can cost considerable amounts of money in terms of time and resources for media organisations and, as is often the case, do not guarantee a compelling story as a result either. Therefore, there is no clear correlation between technological investment in an investigative project and a guaranteed successful outcome. The example of the *World in Action* series, was that the extra equipment and technological resources, only emerged after the staff had proven that they could deliver hard-hitting and audience-generating programmes on modest budgets. The additional kit exploited and supported their existing approaches and techniques – it did create them and they did not rely on it for their existence. The equipment was also not a crucial week-to-week, intrinsic part of the visual story-telling journey undertaken by the on-screen reporters and programme makers. However, it is worth considering whether a modern-day version of *World in Action* might succumb to the technological advances available to the modern reporter today and to ponder how they would utalise such equipment in support of their projects, as opposed

to allowing it to overwhelm the journalistic process because of its attention-grabbing theatrics, and as some critics have argued in relation to MacIntyre's work and other productions, also covertly act as a crowd-pleasing but covert cost-cutting enabler which eventually overwhelms each project until serious stories are rejected because entertaining technological devices cannot be employed.[49]

Occasionally, US-talent also found its way into the ranks of the *World in Action* staff roster. This was the case with Gavin MacFadyen, an American producer who worked on the series in the 1960s-70s. He explained his views in an interview with the author of this thesis regarding pre-Watergate investigative journalism in the UK and some reasons for its later decline:

> I had direct experience of [investigative journalism] in New York when before I joined *World in Action*, significant sections of the banking and financial industries were bankrolling very hostile stuff against the regime and you felt there were many allies that you had. That of course is not true now. We live effectively now in what you could call a one-party state where there is no opposition…. We have had 25 years of effective conservatism. One of the longest periods of right-wing politics in memory. I think in maybe 75 years there hasn't been such a long stretch, which was uninterrupted by any liberal pretence. So that's meant that most young people don't even know or expect other than what they've got, 'Big Brother', etc.
>
> I think you combine the absence, up and until recently, of political opposition with an establishment that hasn't been very active, and the financial crisis in western societies, is really enormous. The effect of that has been to cut costs, reduce taxation, to keep profit margins at a high level, against ferocious competition. You've got costs cut to such a degree that's made expensive programming like *WIA*, very difficult to justify. Even though *WIA* was always a very profitable programme. But it wasn't profitable enough.[50]

[49] See Paul Kenyon's comments regarding this in 'The Blair Years' by Hugo de Burgh in *Investigative Journalism* (Routledge, London & New York) 2nd edition, 2008, p88. Kenyon admits that technology like undercover filming is used as a 'tool' because it pulls in audiences and it is cheap.
[50] Interview with Gavin MacFadyen by Eamonn O'Neill 21/7/05

MacFadyen knew what 'investigative journalism' was before he worked at *World in Action* but he believes one of the most interesting comparisons was actually sketched out to him by two of the UK's top *drama* directors of the period, who happened to also work at Granada:

> I knew people in the BBC in drama, and they thought of us as being allies to them. I remember meeting Tony Garnett and Ken Loach one day during that period, and being told by them that we were their equivalent in factual TV. but they saw it almost in class terms in a way that I didn't. They said, 'Well, we represent working class drama, you represent working class justice.'
>
> That's what they said and I remember it left a lasting impression because I'd never thought of it in quite that way. But in a sense they were right. Most of our subjects were trade unions; H&S; injustice; exploitation. Some of the films I made were on child labour and the exploitation of women, police and government corruption – all that stuff.[51]

The sheer tenacity and toughness required to engage in this standard of investigative journalism however, took a toll both personally and professionally, on the *World in Action* team at Granada. Macdonald noted down in an untitled analysis of what *WIA* was doing in the early 1970s, examining why it was so successful and where it stood on the UK's journalistic landscape – after each observation he placed in brackets the title of a recent programme to underpin his views:

> Investigative journalism has always been the most difficult area of current affairs programme making and we have it to ourselves for the most obvious of reasons: it costs a great deal of money (Tea); one programme can wipe out experienced team members for most of a series (Dundee); there are formidable legal problems (Gozo); it strains relations with the IBA (Poulson); aggrieved people lodge complaints (lifeboats); juries make unexpected decisions (Drug Squad); powerful interest groups fight back (Ceylon); viewers protest (British agents in Ulster); civil servants put on pressure (Hong Kong); and sometimes the narrative threatens to collapse under the weight of accumulated detail (Coal Inquiries). Worst of all are the times when nobody seems to notice.[52]

[51] Ibid.

This powerful text alone, testifies that an investigative journalism tradition which paralleled later definitions in terms of working practices, projects, aims and techniques, was already up and running – both in terms of success and into robust opposition at times – in the UK before the Watergate era had dawned. MacFadyen says:

> I think the idea that investigative journalism somehow started in the United States is wrong. I think it was already well entrenched here [UK], it was brought about by the political culture, and also brought about by the war in Vietnam and the establishment here were, in very large part, clearly opposed to that adventure, as indeed were a large part of the American establishment. And they could therefore encourage people to write hostile pieces to reflect their point of view.[53]

Bob Greene investigates pre-Watergate Nixon

It is clear that the same state-of-play in investigative journalism pre-Watergate, also existed in the USA.

For most people, the touchstone of investigative journalism is the famous Watergate investigation by various investigative journalists, most notably the *Washington Post's* Woodward and Bernstein. However, it is worth noting that Bob Greene, had already been investigating Nixon's alleged financial improprieties some time before the Watergate story even broke. Greene told me that:

---

[52] See '1967-75: the classic period' in *Public Issue Television – World in Action 1963-98* by Peter Goddard, John Corner and Kay Richardson. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007). pp64-5.

[53] Interview with Gavin MacFadyen by Eamonn O'Neill 21/7/05

The year before Watergate I had read some stuff that President Nixon was involved in a land deal when he was Vice-President, down in Florida and it fascinated me because of one or two of the people he was involved with, and I had said, that I kept hearing some bad stories about this man and – I am not a Democrat or a Republican, I have not political heroes – we'd developed what we call a 'smell' or a 'sniff' which means you go into something and you sniff around and you see if there's anything there and if it looks like there's something there, then you commit yourself to it. We did that, and Nixon's former counsellor was a friend of mine, he was a former newspaperman who'd quit the White House and he gave me stuff and other people gave me stuff, and finally, I said that we'd enough for a 3-4 part investigation. So I took a bunch of people down to Florida and we worked on Nixon down there. It made for an interesting story, we didn't send anybody to jail, but we exposed a very sleazy kind of relationship between people down there, who were all making money. So when we published that, it drew a lot of attention from the government inside. Nixon had a house on Key Biscane, and people had houses on either side of him and he really didn't want them in there, so any time that people came home with packages from the store and so on, then the Secret Service guys would jump out and frisk them. And if guests were coming to the house, then they'd be frisked too. This tactic worked and eventually these people just sold out for not much of a price, and two of Nixon's friends bought the houses on either side of him. And then the government put hundreds of thousands of dollars into refurbishing those houses and these houses were incredibly improved. So I wanted to know what the terms of the leases were for Nixon's buddies, so I went to John Dean who was the president's counsel, and I asked him to see the leases but he said, 'Those are covered by National Security'. And I said, 'Bullshit…' I told him I didn't want the room layout, just the leases to see what kind of deal these people got. He didn't answer expect saying, 'I'll get back to you…' Of course, people mostly figure that if they wait long enough then you'll drop off.

Finally, I got his home number and I started calling him in the evening at home. Eventually he flipped and I got the leases. I read them and you could see that they were very, very favourable to Nixon's friends. And that was a nice part of the series that we were doing. But then afterwards, that Fall, I got called in to get my income taxes audited. Fortunately I am not that honest, but my accountant is very honest. Of course they didn't find anything and I thought nothing more of it, until John Dean is testifying at the Watergate hearings. And I am in my office, not paying much attention, until my daughter calls and says, 'Daddy, he's talking about you…' And I heard it and he was saying that they wanted to 'teach me a lesson' for going into Nixon's leases, so Dean had sent two of his flunkies to the IRS, and had my income tax audited. I was on the 'Enemies List' and I was audited. John Dean was a sleazy person, but he's supposedly now redeemed himself – bullshit! He was a crook in the beginning and he's a crook now. They invariably find Jesus in publishing houses.[54]

[54] Bob Greene interview with Eamonn O'Neill, July 2006.

The point of this long extract is to show how another investigative journalist, working a full year before Nixon authorized the Watergate burglary, had already come into contact with the warped Presidential psyche and his attendant functionaries who misused federal mechanisms to terrorise journalists and thwart media scrutiny. In this case it failed. But this example of investigative journalism doing its duty was not only a dry-run for the *Washington Post* and its Watergate investigation, but also something of a rehearsal for the Nixon administration's response to such media scrutiny. Equally, the way that Greene organised and executed his investigation into Nixon's property dealings became something of a template for other investigations during this era and would eventually serve as a prologue for the better-known Watergate investigation that followed on its heels.[55] Although, as we have seen, investigative journalism' existed and was practised in the UK before Watergate, we must pause and consider if its non-presence in most newspapers and TV outlets meant that fewer Greenes existed on these shores, which alone might be one reason why the UK has never had its so-called 'Watergate Moment' in its journalism history. Indeed, an indication of this imbalance in how the USA and the UK valued – and continue to do so to this day – investigative reporting, can be gleaned from the simple fact that the USA's highest journalism awards, the Pulitzer Prizes, has had a category in investigative reporting since 1953[56] None of the major UK awards – for example, the British Press Awards or the Scottish Press Awards for that matter – have ever had a category in investigative reporting. In fact, over a full half-

[55] See 'Role Model: A Larger Than Life Reporter: Bob Greene taught Newsday Journalists how to investigate corruption with a flourish' by Anthony Marro, Columbia Journalism Review February 2002.

[56] The 1953 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting was won by Edward J. Mowery of the *New York World-Telegram & Sun* for his work on a miscarriage of justice case.

century after the genre of reporting was first allocated a Pulitzer in the USA, the UK's first investigative journalism prize was finally instituted in 2005[57]- even then it was backed by only two publications and, tragically, in order to come into existence, one of the few real investigative journalists in the country had to first die. This state of affairs arguably sends a clear signal to practitioners in the media in the UK, that investigative journalism is not institutionally valued, appreciated or rewarded. On the other hand, it could be argued that it reflects a growing awareness of its importance in modern times.

This chapter has shown that investigative reporting is significantly different from other kinds of journalism. Whilst there are dissenters to the whole idea of this, the reality is that investigative reporting requires separate skills and approaches from the start until the end of projects. The mission of this kind of reporting differentiates itself from day-to-day reporting by going behind the news agenda promoted by PR events and diary-led news items. This means probing deeper and wider into the forces and individuals who drive the routine of news agendas.

Whilst the investigative journalism process shares similarities to the 'detective work' scolded by Pilger, it does not share either the police's legal agenda nor is limited to the scope of an alleged crime. Neither is investigative journalism intertwined with 'dissenting' or 'campaigning' journalism to the extent some commentators and professional journalists have claimed. Investigative reporters do not start with a pre-conceived agenda and they do not

[57] *The Guardian/Private Eye* Paul Foot Award. The author was a runner-up for the 2005 inaugural award.

approach a project as part of a wider campaign since those wider issues could skew or influence findings as the project proceeds. The resultant published or broadcast works must also be largely of the journalist's own works and not simply fresh publication of someone else's investigative findings. The projects must also be of relevance to readers and viewers of the news. Investigative journalism projects often, though not always, involve longer-time frames, imaginative use of resources and techniques and the ability to present the eventual project in a form that's engaging, convincing, accurate and engaging. The moral imperative of an investigative journalist seems to be more apparent than other forms of journalism, although in theory this should not necessarily be the case. Authors have argued that investigative journalism tends to present stories in 'Good' versus 'Evil' paradigms. The author finds this a sweeping and inconclusive conclusion to make, since powerful investigative journalism is also often complex, subtle and analytical in content, rather than black and white.

Constraints on investigative reporting have existed for decades and continue to exist. Not all reporters are keen to pursue projects which involve long-term commitment, since for many the attraction to journalism was simply the daily shifting of coverage of changing events during the average 24-hour so-called news-cycle. Not all editors feel that the commitment of personnel-resources yields articles which are of sufficient interest to readers or viewers as to justify this strategic investment. Some who have been interviewed by this author expressed an interest in pursuing this kind of reporting but felt that in tough economic times, the budgets were better served elsewhere on their publications. Editors who were keen on more investigations couldn't not always

find suitably trained or motivated staff: staff keen on more investigations sometimes found themselves working for less-than-enthusiastic editors. Experience also played a constraining role. Lack of investigative experience meant that editors sometimes felt they were ill-equipped to mount such projects. The same rule applied to staff who had never undertaken such projects before. However, the opposite was also true and this author interviewed several editors and reporters who initiated and carried out award-winning investigative projects simply because they were compelled to do so for either general moral reasons or because a powerful one-off story crossed their desks. Lack of experience did not hold them back. The reputation investigative journalism has for swallowing resources also reached the ears of publishers and programme controllers who felt reluctant to pour lots of money into projects whose outcome was not guaranteed. Other reporters told this author they were not willing to investigate sources of their daily news. This meant, for example, alleged miscarriage of justice cases went un-investigated because it meant challenging police versions of events. This process could have involved clashing and scrutinising officers and PR managers at police headquarters who were relied upon daily by reporters for stories and tip-offs. The reputation attached to investigative reporters as being award-seekers and lone-wolfs in the trade, meant some reporters were reluctant to look like they were keen on the limelight. The author came across this attitude on a surprising number of occasions when conducting research into the lack of investigative reporting in the UK in recent times. Reporters were reticent to be seen to call themselves ‘investigative’ and felt they might pigeon-hole their careers and attract unwarranted attention by peers for doing so. Others told this author they were fearful for their safety if they initiated investigative

projects involving violent criminals. They felt their inexperience in undertaking such projects and employing risk-management techniques meant their own health and lives might be in danger. Others cited poor support from editors as a signal that any risks they took wouldn't be assisted by practical support from senior management.

This author has often found that editors were receptive to this kind of reporting but were unwilling to provide any development money to initiate projects. Only when the story was certain would they become involved and even then, their biggest concern was being sued. The only consistent and steadfast exception to this general picture was BBC Scotland's News & Current Affairs operation.[58]Once successful projects had been delivered, and relationships were built, editors were incrementally more willing to support projects at their earlier stages. Whether the project had a moral element in its make-up rarely came into discussions: most editors were keener on the potential audiences a fresh, revelatory and exclusive story could pull in.[59]Legal constraints were often a key factor in stopping a project from getting support, to slowing or even stopping its progress, to significantly altering the final version of that project which saw the light of day. Editors often expressed interest and enthusiasm for a potential investigative project, only to immediately decline any support on the ground that they might end up spending money ensuring it was legal and/or after being sued when it was published or broadcast.

The UK's well-known punitive libel laws also play a large and continuing role in the decision-making process of supporting or abandoning

[58] Under the management of Mr Blair Jenkins until 2007.
[59] This wasn't always the case. BBC Scotland often supported research on obscure subjects which did contain a moral argument at their core, rather than an obvious factor which ensured high viewing figures in the future.

potential investigative journalism projects. Infrequently, but significantly, some projects are simply too complex. In the case of author's investigation into the issue of the UK's nuclear tests in the 1950s, the sheer weight of medical and other scientific evidence meant wave after wave of experts had to be consulted. This produced a highly interesting but nevertheless momentous amount of often contradictory testimony and material. This generated many man-hours of research and editing to produce a satisfying final programme for broadcasting the contents of which are being debated still in 2008.[60]Only anecdotally has this author has never heard of a publication or broadcast entity refusing to investigate a subject for political reasons.

Colleagues in Scotland have expressed periodic enthusiasm for some themes more than others. For example, in recent years, the Labour Party in Scotland has been viewed by some publications as a potentially fertile target for investigation. Instead of having a particular aspect of the party to investigate, some editors have expressed willingness to spend money on targeting any aspect that could generate a story. This could be interpreted as a healthy approach to a powerful political institution that only benefits wider society by opening it up for examination. Or it could also be interpreted as an invitation to journalists to make a name and reputation for themselves by starting out with a scandalous assumptive mental headline and then go out of their way to prove it. Only on rare occasions has this author felt his choice of investigation was not supported by managers and editors despite producing an acceptable article.[61]However, the

[60] Lawyers representing nuclear test veterans who witnessed tests investigated in this 'Dispatches' programme for Channel 4 in January 1991, recently contacted this author for clarification and assistance.

[61] The last one involved investigating a famous British chef who was tangentially involved in a mysterious death investigation. After the article was published the author discovered the magazine's deputy editor apologised for the undisputed and factually-correct article having been published presumably because it contained testimony which was critical in a balanced way of this chef's workplace regime. The author refused to take any role in this apology which, anyway, occurred without

author is aware of instances in other newsrooms where certain issues are considered 'no-go' zones for in-depth stories for constraining reasons cited elsewhere here, and for personal relationship reasons involving individuals also.[62] Finally, another constraint, as mentioned earlier by a former *World in Action* executive, Macdonald, is the harsh reality that sometimes 'nobody seems to notice' your investigations.

This author has frequently experienced silence as a response when difficult and seemingly important investigations have been broadcast and published. This caused an initial reaction of relief in editors connected to the projects that they had not been sued for libel. Later they admitted to this author that it played a part in their thinking that future investigative projects were perhaps not worth the sheer effort in undertaking.

In an age of tightening budgets and crowded markets competing for a shrinking broadcast and print audience, this lack of profile after many hours of labour cannot be underestimated as a constraining factor in the minds of managers controlling dwindling budgets.

Yet, in the USA, modern history records a different trajectory for this kind of reporting. Whilst, as we will see in later chapters, its 21st century position remains far from being a complete success story, its modern beginnings were auspicious.

Whilst Greene was indeed practicing excellent investigative reporting in the late 1960s and first couple of years of the next decade, it was the reporting of two young reporters from *The Washington Post* and their subsequent successes

---

his knowledge. The recipient of this apology was Mr Gordon Ramsey.

[62] Nothing on the scale of the apparent covert daily influencing of the news agenda at Fox news and its affiliates as covered in Robert Greenwald's investigative film 'Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch;s War on Journalism' has been discovered by the author during research for this thesis, or encountered during a nineteen year professional career.

that transformed how the wider-world perceived the genre. As Greene explained:

> I think the fact that their target was the President of the United States, and the fact the President of the United States was forced to resign, speaks to your work… I think they worked very hard and I think they did terrific work. I think that the idea that they were able to show, in our country in particular, that nothing is that sacred if you're doing something wrong, and reporters can get the information, then things will happen and things don't always get covered up.[63]

It is to the Watergate investigation that we now turn our attention to in the following chapter.

[63] Bob Greene interview with Eamonn O'Neill 1/8/06