CROWDFUNDING news was the theme of June’s LFB meeting; among the speakers was Peter Jukes (www.peterjukes.com), who crowdfunded his coverage of every day of last year’s phone hacking trials, then two books on these trials. He’s now a columnist on byline.com, already the world’s biggest crowdfunded journalism site despite being only seven weeks old. Also speaking were Peter’s colleagues on byline.com Martin Hickman and Byline.com’s CEO Seung Yoon: see page 4.

Given the “parlous state of journalism,” said Peter, crowdfunding might be able to “help you guys out.” He described “how I ended up crowdfunding” after a career of writing screenplays, scriptwriting (Waking the Dead included), novels and only then journalism, helped by a “series of successful accidents.”

British TV ten years ago was in a “similarly parlous state” to journalism — “top heavy management, revenues down.” In 2009, Peter wrote a “Why can’t we write The Wire?” piece for Prospect, about how “70 per cent of BBC drama was commissioned by one man”, how it was more of a baronial court than a marketplace. In TV scriptwriting, this was a “career suicide note”.

But “when the phone-hacking story broke, I understood about media monopolies,” he noted. Via his sideline blogging for the Daily Kos website, whose readers’ recommendations floated him to the site’s front page, a publisher approached Peter to write the book that became The Fall of the House of Murdoch. He’d become a correspondent covering “the problems of monopolies” from News International to Google. Initially he went to the phone hacking pre-trial hearings only “to update my book,” but Peter started live-tweeting from the trial, and very quickly had 2000 followers.

He later learned that “the police didn’t bother to come in, they just followed my feed” from their offices. He broke the revelation of the Coulson-Wade affair 20 seconds before the Guardian’s Nick Davies. Near the trial’s end, he could see “everyone in court watching my tweets.” The trial, which was supposed to be over by Christmas… went on deep into summer”. Peter told his followers, “Sorry, guys, I can’t afford it”… and everyone said “so crowdfund it.” He initially asked for £4000 to continue covering every day of the phone hacking trial (having a video of him on CNN helped): within six days he had £6000.

You are “owned by your audience”, says Peter, but they are “90 per cent of the time helpful: they will check and spell-check you”. He developed some premium perks — £25 gets you an invite to the launch party, £200 and you could have dinner with him. But even the big donors just passionately “want you to get the story out there… it’s not a market equation, there’s a public good that people are willing to finance.”

There is “a lot of trust involved, they’re pre-paying”, there’s a “lot of schmoozing going on” with your crowdfunders: but then “you used to have to schmooze editors.”

Peter Jukes: photo © Hazel Dunlop

Making contracts fair

AS YOU MAY have heard, the European Union’s civil service, the Commission, is considering changes to the law on authors’ rights – the UK incarnation of which is the copyright law in ensuring the supply of high-quality new work. But there is such an imbalance of power in contract-making that we know of no cases in which journalists have been able to negotiate extra pay for exploitation

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13 July
Parliamentary meeting on what can be done about unfair contracts being imposed on journalists
See back page & www.twitter.com/NUJ_LFB

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