RUNNING a hyperlocal news blog: how’s that work, then? Our February meeting asked David Altheer – owner, editor-in-chief, reporter, ad manager and commercial director of Loving Dalston (lovingdalston.co.uk). When David left the employ of The Times 11 years ago, he was told “you don’t exist without a website.” So he decided his would be about local news.

Unlike other bloggers in the area who don’t even give their names, David’s blog has his name and photo. So sometimes readers recognize him in the street and give him stories. The blog’s strapline is “news from Hackney and about that you’ll read here first!”. Loving Dalston won’t handle stories that another publication has already picked up.

Cuts at the company running the local newspaper have moved its offices ever further away from Hackney – to Enfield and now Swiss Cottage. In these circumstances, it’s hard for the local paper not to miss most stories. David’s keen to “give minorities a voice”. He spotted a poster for an Anatolian (Turkish and Kurdish) festival in his local supermarket and asked for a translation. Attending the event, he discovered none of the English-language media had ever covered it. After Loving Dalston’s story, the local mayor and MP went along to next year’s event, the local newspaper have moved its offices ever further away from Hackney – to Enfield and now Swiss Cottage. In these circumstances, it’s hard for the local paper not to miss most stories.

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He covers neighbouring boroughs if the story’s good enough. A resident of Forest Gate was the focus of a story on London’s Ahmadis – a religious community subject to sectarian persecution. Among many stories on developers, the blog ran a story from faraway Barnet, whose estate agents were describing the area as “the new Barcelona.”

Does it make any money? “Not enough to live on,” but enough money to take David and his partner on “good holidays” that include “five star hotels”.

Although Hackney has the nation’s highest proportion of “young people with high quality degrees” – “very interesting” to advertisers – ads don’t make much money. David stopped ads he was unhappy with – gambling, or tobacco-related – that were insinuating themselves onto his blog via the algorithms.

What does bring in the cash is sponsored links. With “hundreds of links” on his website and a surprisingly high Google ranking, links mean very wary of this” and “can’t afford lawyers”. He advises looking into the libel insurance offered through the NUJ – or learn to “live on your wits”.

Advice? With libel law “you have to prove your innocence… I am

Two royal rows over copyright

WE ARE getting used to copyright – the law that ultimately underwrites freelancers’ ability to charge for your work – facing crunch points. Now there are two, and between them they encompass every nook and cranny of the UK’s unwritten constitution except, as far as we can tell, the Church.

First, the UK government stated on 21 January that it does not plan to implement the new EU Copyright Directive, which will for example give authors in joined-up Europe rights to challenge unfair contracts.

The NUJ is talking with other organisations representing creators to see about changing the government’s mind. We must be aware, though, that it is talking of a trade deal with the US government and that these very often include clauses committing the other government to adopt US-style copyright and measures friendly to the US-based internet giants. There may be trouble ahead.

However, on the same day Nigel Adams, Minister for Creative Industries, did say in a Westminster Hall debate: “We support the overall aims of the Copyright Directive… it is imperative that we do everything possible to protect our brilliant creators, as well as the rights of consumers and users of music.”

We now turn to the monarchy, the courts and the “fourth estate” –

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Welcome to the Freelance and our handy copyright guide

The Freelance is the newsletter of London Freelance Branch – which sends it to members of the NUJ who have told the union they are freelancers. We are sending this issue to all members, since it includes an updated handy guide to copyright – to things you need to know to defend your rights in your own work, and to do journalism while respecting other members’ rights. Whether you are on staff or freelance, please find regularly updated news relevant to freelances at www.londonfreelance.org/fl – and if you are doing freelance work please tell membership@nuj.org.uk so we can better help you.

David Altheer

Image © Hazel Dunlop

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