

Fred Hunter, *Hacks and Dons: Teaching at the London University Journalism School 1919-1939: Its Origin, Development and Influence*, Kultura Press, Essex, 2012 [price not given], 978-0-9542899-4-2 (paperback) pp. xiii + 335

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Media courses are part of today's university landscape, their value still hotly debated. In *Hacks and Dons*, Fred Hunter tells the story of the UK's first stab at media education within a university: the Diploma in Journalism which ran from 1919-1939, based at the University of London. Initially targeted at ex-servicemen returning from the First World War, it quickly became popular with young women, 219 of whom received the Diploma, compared with 190 men. Many more attended the course but left before completion, often to take up jobs in the newspaper industry.

Unlike the United States where, by the early twentieth century, journalism was an accepted academic discipline, in Britain it took years of negotiation and persuasion to get the course off the ground. The usual career path for a journalist was to start on the provincial papers, gradually progressing towards Fleet Street; experience on-the-job was widely viewed as more valuable than classroom training. Once the Diploma had started in 1919, it was subject to the complexities of the London University system. This meant that, right up until 1935, very little practical journalism was actually taught, rather students attended lectures and tutorials in, for example, English, history or economics. In fact, one of the reasons why the course was so popular was because it enabled young people to access a university-style education without the usual strictures of matriculation. In 1935, there was a radical change to the way the course was run, with the appointment of Tom Clarke, as Director of Practical Journalism. Clarke, a former Fleet Street editor, introduced both rigour and hands-on assignments, creating for the Diploma the atmosphere and tension of a newspaper office.

Hunter is painstaking and expansive in his details of the roles played by the dozens of individuals who contributed to the foundation and development of the Diploma in Journalism, almost all of

whom were men. This means that the overall tone of the book is steadfastly male; it is only when it reaches 1937 that the first significant woman makes an appearance, Miss Joan Skipsey, who was appointed as an Assistant to Clarke. An ex-student, she had gained her Diploma in 1936. Aged just twenty-two and earning £250 a year, Skipsey was responsible for setting the practical journalism tasks which involved liaising with a wide variety of commercial agencies, legal organisations and national bodies. The selected assignments were then allotted to scores of students who had to report, write-up and submit each task to a strict deadline. Skipsey then oversaw the marking, paying particular attention to presentation, punctuation and spelling.

Chapter eleven, the final chapter of the book, is of most interest to women's historians. Entitled 'Young Women Learning Journalism at London University', here Hunter briefly explores the development of journalism as a career for women before divulging snippets about many of the colourful individuals who attended the Diploma in Journalism course. This is where the book really comes to life and amongst the impressive list of former students are Stella Gibbons, Elizabeth Bowen, Penelope Mortimer, Leila Berg and Yvonne Kapp. The author Ruth Tomalin kept a diary of her time on the course with entries from 1938 that reveal lectures on psycho-analysis, Bow Street Court reporting, gossip paragraphs and headline writing (pp. 217-218).

The Diploma in Journalism was suspended at the outbreak of the Second World War, and despite attempts to revive it in the 1940s, it was not until 1970 that journalism was again taught in a British University with the founding of a one-year Postgraduate Diploma at Cardiff University, followed by a similar course at City University in 1976.

Fred Hunter, who sadly died aged 77 just before the book was published, was eminently qualified to write this history. He was a founding director of Independent Radio News (IRN); the first person to complete a Journalism PhD at City University, who then went on to develop the Broadcast

Journalism course at the London College of Printing. The book is based on his PhD thesis and herein lies the problem. Although it has been extensively re-written, it remains very dense and fact-based. Hunter was planning a second book specifically on women journalists, which may explain why, in *Hacks and Dons*, they appear more as an elaborate footnote, rather than as an integral part of the text.