

## **SUBMISSION FROM BILL CHISHOLM**

1. My name is Bill Chisholm, a retired newspaper journalist. I worked for a group of local weekly newspapers in the Scottish Borders during the 1960s. I joined the staff of The Scotsman in 1967, was appointed as that newspaper's first (and only) district reporter for the Scottish Borders in 1969 and continued in that post until 2005 when I was forced to retire due to ill health. Having spent all but two years of my working life in the Borders, I only feel able to pass comment on events in that particular part of Scotland.
2. Over a period of more than 40 years I observed at close quarters the decline of the region's local press as one family-owned newspaper after another was bought out by large-scale publishing groups with no knowledge or feel for the unique area that is the Scottish Borders. Forty years ago there was a rich mixture of good (and not so good) weeklies that competed to be first with the news. They also had to compete to attract advertisers, and pitched their advertising rates accordingly.
3. Every one of the main Borders towns had one, if not two, newspaper offices with their own teams of editorial and non-editorial staff. In those days the papers were also printed locally, and each local community had a strong sense of identity with their local paper.
4. The list of individual papers included The Berwickshire News, Kelso Chronicle, Jedburgh Gazette, Hawick Express, Hawick News, Selkirk Advertiser, Peeblesshire News, Border Telegraph and Southern Reporter. These papers produced many talented journalists and photographers who "cut their teeth" in the Borders before moving on to bigger (and sometimes better) times.
5. But many of these titles fell victim to so-called technological progress when the ink presses fell silent and computers took over, removing much of the need for manpower. The other great "enemy" of the smaller papers was corporate greed as one or two publishing houses set out to secure a monopoly of advertising revenues. As the promises of investment by the acquiring companies melted away like snow off a dyke quality and content in the editorial pages took a back seat as the drive for profits gained an unstoppable momentum. Now advertising rates are so high many of those living in the Borders' low wage economy cannot afford to pay for space in their local paper.
6. Those who now own the Borders press have closed local offices, cut editorial teams to the bone, and seem content to fill many of their columns by cutting and pasting press releases. The papers have lost their way, and at the same time have lost their identity with the places they are meant to serve.
7. The only way to restore the lost feel-good factor would be for a Government agency or private philanthropists to provide funds for

community-based weekly papers whose aim would not be to turn a maxim profit for shareholders, but instead to offer a comprehensive coverage of local events at grass roots level. The halcyon days when each Border burgh had its own wee paper may never return. But something should be done to redress the balance and replace the current unsatisfactory set-up.