

SENTINEL 100

SENTINEL HISTORY ... SENTINEL HISTORY ... SENTINEL HISTORY ... SENTINEL HISTORY ... SENTINEL HISTORY ... SENTINEL HISTORY ... SE

EDITORS FILE

After Hector, there have been six other editors. Stewart McRobert dug out their files.

Jim Taylor
Issues 12-18

The changing of the guard at The Sentinel in the late summer of 1977 saw Jim Taylor take over as editor from Hector Macrae.

Becoming increasingly involved in community affairs he remembers falling into the post more by accident than design. As he says, "I was committing myself to everything at that time, as you do when you're new and enthusiastic, and I thought it was an exciting project."

Having had previous journalistic experience he became a member of the Sentinel Board, then its Chairman, and gradually he found himself slipping into the position of unofficial editor before he was eventually recognised as the man in command.

What Jim relished about those early days was the feeling of being involved.

Talking to him he fondly recalls typesetting, layout, paste up and leaning over a desk with T-square in hand at two o'clock in the morning.

Most people will recognise that the bold amateur enthusiast can suffer a lot for the sake of his favourite project.

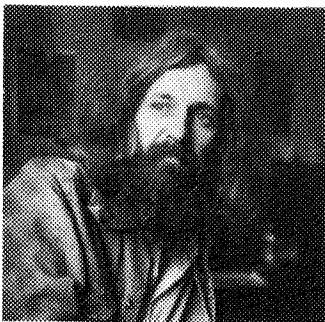
Jim firmly believes the important fact about the time was that people were learning things and taking on responsibilities.

Another advantage was gained from the distribution system in operation then which allowed the Sentinel's early pioneers to check their 'customers' reaction to the paper.

Many's the time Jim, along with others, has climbed stairs and put Sentinels through letter boxes.

Of course people would often let him know what they thought about the paper and, fortunately, most praised it.

However sadly, the thing that is most likely to dampen enthusiasm is the despair that arrives when you feel you are not getting anywhere.



Gradually Jim became disenchanted with community politics and, believing that what was said had little or no effect, he grew ever more cynical.

On reflection though he now realises that he wasn't entirely true in his beliefs.

But the seeds of frustration did take root and, despite the praise of people in the community and his enjoyment of the work involved, Jim gave up the editorship of the Sentinel and gradually withdrew from the administration side of Wester Hailes affairs.

Laurence Demarco
Issues 19-25

The job of a community worker is to help the development of the community in which he works. Laurence Demarco holds such a position in Wester Hailes.

He arrived here just before the first issue of the Sentinel appeared and right away he realised that it would be a powerful tool which could help promote a positive image of the area.

So he was determined to see that it succeeded.

As well as helping along the paper in the early period he found that when Jim Taylor left that he had to take over the editorship.

This move was always intended to be a stop gap measure but it lasted longer than most people anticipated.

The main problem that Laurence came up against was that his other duties gave him very little time to devote to the Sentinel.

He often found himself, two days before an issue date and with only a little

work done, having to say "Right, let's get this paper out."

A trip to Heriot Watt to get the paper typeset followed and then it was a case of burning the midnight oil and hectically sticking individual papers together.

Another way in which Laurence was able to help was in the acquisition of a number of small grants which let the Sentinel overcome any temporary hiccoughs in its financial affairs.

These things were done because Laurence wanted to see the paper develop as a forum for discussion, a means of communication between Wester Hailes and the world outside and a vehicle for debate for people within the community.

Of course this hand to mouth situation that existed was a great hindrance which did not allow the Sentinel to develop in the way he hoped.



However a breakthrough came when the paper became a subject of the Government's Youth Opportunities Programme.

This meant a number of young people would come to work on the paper and they would be led by a YOP supervisor.

The supervisor naturally became the editor and Laurence gladly turned the paper over to people who would have the means, the time and the energy to cope with it.

Merle Gower
Issues 26-27

Thrown in at the deep end as the first YOP supervisor was Merle Gower.

She remembers a hectic period with about fifty people to a room crammed into the newly completed Community Workshop.

One of her first surprises were the punk rockers that turned up as her assistants to work on the paper. She found out though that sticky up hair and threatening appearances don't count for a lot.

She worked with six young people altogether and discovered them to be

talented, enthusiastic and great fun.

She also adds that she has "never had the mickey taken so much in my life."

But of course it was not all frivolity.

As usual the job of compiling, administrating and getting advertising for the paper involved a lot of hard work.

After a while either the mickey taking, the chaos and the great amount of work had got to Merle, or simply she had found something else she wanted



to do. In any case she gave up her position with the Sentinel.

But she always remembers the people she worked with and the Sentinel with a great deal of affection.

Gus McFadzen
Issues 28-51

Once Merle left it was of course necessary to find a replacement. Luckily there was a person living in Wester Hailes who was a contributor and had just missed out on being selected for the post of YOP supervisor and Sentinel editor six months earlier.

His name was Gus McFadzen.

After eventually assuming responsibility Gus found that as no guidelines had been issued he and his trainees were given a free hand and expected to shape the paper as they saw fit.

Fortunately Gus had an idea of the function he wanted to see the Sentinel perform.

As Hector Macrae had imagined a common 'notice board' so Gus held the idea of the paper reinforcing a sense of community identity. He disliked the idea of fragmented areas each working for their own corner, believing that the presentation of a united front would be more effective.

Also recognised was the need to present a positive image of the area. Whenever anything bad happened in Wester Hailes other media usually spotlighted it — good things were ignored.

A purpose of the Sentinel was to help to redress the balance. On the organisational side Gus's tenure included a time when "we took a long hard look at ourselves."

With the valuable help of a day-release student from Edinburgh University a survey was undertaken. On top of this a number of seminars were held to gauge local people's thoughts on the Sentinel's existing condition and its future development.

These measures were very useful because they allowed Gus to have a clearer picture of the way the paper should go, particularly with regard to the most important people i.e. those in Wester Hailes.



This establishment of the paper and its identity occurred at an apt time.

Apt because it was discovered soon after that an Urban Aid grant which had been applied for was to be awarded. This would consolidate the position of the paper and would allow the employment of a full time professionally experienced editor.

So an eventful, stimulating and sometimes frustrating period of his life came to an end and he left with the grateful thanks of all those involved with the Sentinel ringing in his ears.

Pamela Kovachich
Issues 52-54

Responsibility for overseeing the transitional period between Gus leaving and the present editor taking over fell on the shoulders of Pamela Kovachich.

Although her time as official editor covered only three or four editions her commitment to the paper can be demonstrated by the fact that, despite living in London, she is a subscriber to the Sentinel and regularly receives a copy every month.

Asked to describe her brief spell in charge she replies that it was "an

enjoyable few months", and adds that she remembers there was a "hellish amount of work involved".

Pamela is very impressed with the present day standards of the paper and she believes that it is improving with every issue.

As a parting shot in a short telephone conversation she extended her best wishes and hopes for good luck to all the people she worked with in those hectic days of 1981, and to the



community of Wester Hailes in general.

Mel Young
Issues 55-100

Mel Young the present editor, started on the Sentinel in May 1981.

An experienced journalist, he began slowly and determinedly, and with the necessary help of Board, contributors and staff, to develop the paper into what it has become today.

The reasons he originally wanted to work on a community newspaper are quite simple.

Unlike other newspapers where you may be stuck in an office working press releases, he believes that when involved with a paper such as the Sentinel you are dealing with a 'live' situation. That is you get involved with people and their community and the issues which provoke both problems and pride.

Mel believes that this can be exciting and productive.

One of those issues which gives great problems and has been a regular feature of Sentinel articles over the years is that of housing faults and deficiencies.

Mel thinks that the city's new administration has the will to tackle these problems

and may be able to transmit it to the bureaucrats.

He also feels that the Sentinel played its part in engendering this will by continually highlighting the problems and making a greater number of people aware of them.

Memorable issues include the campaign to get Tommy Smith to America and the uncovering of the DHSS snoopers.

The latter was important because it saw the Sentinel being ahead of the national press which was a great confidence booster to everybody involved with the paper.

It also clearly showed the potential which a community newspaper with the right staff, equipment and community involvement and commitment can have.

For the future Mel hopes soon to see the Sentinel become a weekly paper.

He firmly believes that there is enough going on in Wester Hailes to merit a weekly issue and that the present monthly format means some stories have to be missed out and are then



picked up by other papers.

The final words of this article come from him:

"No-one will really appreciate all the work that goes into producing a newspaper like this unless they have actually worked on one.

The hours worked are incredible but the ends justify the means.

Everyone experiences a little piece of magic when the paper comes out and you know all your work hasn't been for nothing.

But our contributors group are really critical of the final product and I firmly believe that is why we keep on improving."