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Newspapers support recycling:

Recycled paper made up 80.6 per cent of the raw material for UK newspapers in 2006

A local paper for local people

Cumbrian PR and media adviser **Alan Air** praises Cumbria's league of press gentlemen in his first column of the New Year



One consequence of Cumbrian farmer Robert Wilson's sensational murder trial was to underline the pivotal role of small town newspapers as meticulous record gatherers. Whilst TV noir comedy *The League of Gentleman* twisted the word 'local' into a euphemism for everything incestuous, dysfunctional and just plain weird, its prefix before newspaper can still merit respect.

Reporter Phil Coleman's comprehensive coverage of the trial in *Business Gazette's* sister paper, the *News & Star*, was an example of good old-fashioned reporting – fascinating parochial detail captured in shorthand, impact delivered in banner headlines and the case endlessly discussed at bus stops, in hairdressers and over dining tables. A local newspaper reporter who knows his patch, guards his contacts, understand his readership and delivers big stories in depth is worth his weight in gold. At a time when it is easier to attract the Pope to Cumbria than BBC *Look North* and ITV's *Lookaround* stares into the abyss, local newspapers are now the only media outlets that stand between us and news blackout.

JOKER

Conscious that my recent criticism of the *Daily Mail*



Anthony Devlin/PA Wire

Hang-dog expression? Home Secretary Jacqui Smith

may come across as borderline obsessive I will admit to a sneaking admiration of acid-tongued columnist Richard Littlejohn. Described as 'misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic, brutal and spiteful' – and that was just his mother talking – Littlejohn's regular journalistic howls of anguish suggest he is suffering from a permanent case of thrombosed haemorrhoids. Yet here's the rub. The Mail's chief sabre rattler's passion for labelling anyone he hates as Third Reich 'apologists' is chokingly funny but suggests that all he ever dreams about are doodle bugs, Lord Haw

Haw and Woolton Pie. Sadly, Littlejohn shattered my illusion that he actually believes in what he writes when citing early snowfalls in the Alps as categorical proof that global warming is a myth. Now that really is a joke.

FACE OFF

In the wake of an 'unconvincing' sofa explanation of her role in the sinister arrest of Conservative immigration spokesman Damien Green, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith's front bench days are surely numbered. Not because the *Independent's* Matthew Norman knifed her with

cold logic when arguing that her denial of foreknowledge about the arrest was irrelevant after insisting a few weeks earlier that "men who pay 'trafficked' prostitutes for sex be criminalised whether aware of it or not", but simply because her miserable hang-dog expression on TV is a PR shocker; driving voters across the land to scramble on to 10th floor ledges. Most of us look rough in the mornings but Smith reminds me of a Les Dawson drag queen crossed with a dalek. Why New Labour image maestro Lord Mandelson hasn't poked her with an umbrella tip is beyond me.

GREY'S ELEGY

And finally... if, like me, you still miss the parliamentary sketches of Matthew Parris in *The Times* you must catch his weekly diary. After a recent trip abroad, the former Tory MP's late-night balcony view across credit crunch London moved him to evoke Edward Grey's prophetic warning on the eve of World War One. "There seemed to be fewer lights burning," reflected Parris grimly. "The lamps are going out all over Canary Wharf; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

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