

When Jules Verne named in his first book in 1863 as his balloonist Dr Samuel Ferguson, one of the best correspondents of the *Daily Telegraph*, the London newspaper was already famous. Founded in 1855, it had reached a few years later a circulation of 27000 copies, at one penny a copy, only exceeded by *The Times* which, however, cost more. By 1877, the *Telegraph* had a daily circulation of nearly 250000; then the largest in the world.

By the time I joined it, only on a short time basis, its circulation was around 1.3 to 1.5 million copies and still had the reputation as one of the richest and greatest newspapers. This success is widely ascribed to personal ownership, first by the Lawson and then by the Berry families, who had wisely and conservatively guided its fortunes. My temporary appointment was of the simplest kind, a 5-minute talk, nothing else, with the Editor Maurice Green. I only met the owner, Mr Michael Berry, many years later, when I had been well-established as the official Science Correspondent.

Anthony Smith returned from Africa after a few months, not weeks as he had promised, with a large store of excellent animal safari photographs, films and copious notes, all of which gave him many articles and a book, numerous lectures and other sources of income as a recompense for his daring voyage. At one stage a local Reuters agent in Africa reported to London, that his balloon was hit by lightning and going up in flames. "Michaelis write obituary" was the laconic message I received from the News Room, and I promptly followed this command. However, before it could be printed that night another Reuters message was received in Fleet Street "Balloon OK" and his obituary was filed for possible later use in the enormous and well-staffed library. (Many years later I was asked to write my own obituary, as was then the custom for members of the staff, 'for possible later use').

My first entry into the imposing marble hall of 135 Fleet Street was more than slightly worrying, as it did not correspond to the dim and hustling newspaper offices I had imagined. I was directed to the 5th floor, where I found the 'Science Office' next to that of the 'Russian Correspondent' and other grandiose labels on doors. 'Science' was a large and light office with three desks, one for Daily Science, mine, one for Sunday Science and one for the highly efficient Secretary, Mary. The *Sunday Telegraph* Science Correspondent was John Dellin, who left his academic appointment at Loughbrough University on Thursday or Friday to come to London and went home again late on Saturday night. John was a mathematician by academic discipline and a delightful colleague during the 10 years we shared the office.

I had a large table, telephones and an immense wastepaper basket, which always overflowed by the end of the day, such was the vast amount of news that regularly came to me.