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## The media, affect, and community in a decade of disasters: reporting the 1985 Bradford City stadium fire

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the 1985 Bradford City stadium fire through the coverage of the national, local, and specialist print and broadcast media. Drawing upon extensive media coverage, it argues that the reporting of the fire provides a useful lens through which to understand the emotional environment and construction of communities during Britain's 'decade of disasters'. Moreover, archival sources have been consulted to reveal the multiplicity of personal and collective responses to the media reporting of the fire, covering both the immediate and longer-term aftermath. Through letters sent by members of the public to the Bradford Disaster Appeal Fund, it shows how people received media narratives and articulated their own affective bonds with the tragedy. These included declarations of belonging, through which the disaster became the impetus for the creation of a multicultural civic identity in Bradford. Finally, it uses social services records to show how survivors and the bereaved continued to be affected by the disaster even as the story of the fire—as told in the mass media and through memorial ceremonies—turned towards resilience and recovery.

### KEYWORDS

Media; emotions; disaster;  
Bradford; 1980s Britain

Saturday, 11 May 1985 was supposed to be a day of celebration. Having won promotion to the Second Division as champions, Bradford City Football Club hosted Lincoln City at Valley Parade stadium for the final match of the season. Before kick-off, the cup was paraded in front of the sell-out crowd and players held aloft signs spelling out 'thank you' in recognition of their supporters. The souvenir matchday programme proclaimed the championship win 'an outstanding landmark in Bradford City's 82 year history.'<sup>1</sup> Unusually for a Third Division match, the game was a mass media event. Television cameras and press photographers were in attendance to record the celebrations and the match was screened live to millions of viewers across the country. Towards the end of an uneventful first-half, supporters and commentators noticed a glowing light emanating from underneath the flooring of the wooden stand near the back of Block G. A small fire had taken hold underneath the seating area. Police officers in attendance at the match were called to the scene, the fire service notified, and club stewards appealed for calm from supporters, the majority of whom were reportedly unperturbed by the fire—one fan poured the remainder of his cup of coffee through the crack in the seating to try and extinguish the flames.<sup>2</sup> A police officer called for a fire extinguisher, but a delay meant that it arrived too

late to be of use. It later emerged that the club's chairman, Stafford Heginbotham, had declined to make extinguishers available in the main stand because he feared that they would be misused by hooligans.<sup>3</sup>

Within four minutes, the fire had overcome the wooden stand, lighting the pitch roof and causing burning debris to drop onto supporters, who were also being choked by thick smoke. The police evacuated the stand, first by the gates located near the turnstiles at the back, which were kept locked during matches to prevent supporters from gaining free entry, and subsequently by the front onto the pitch—a drop of approximately six feet onto a concrete terrace followed by a scramble over hoardings. As supporters swarmed onto the pitch, some with their jackets and hair alight, the game was abandoned and the injured were transported to local hospitals. In total, the bodies of 52 people were removed from the burned-out stand; four patients later succumbed to their injuries at the regional burns unit in Wakefield, leaving 56 dead and over 260 injured. It was then the largest single football disaster in modern British history—until the Hillsborough stadium disaster four years later, which caused the deaths of 96 Liverpool supporters—and the first in a series of mass casualty events which would come to define the 1980s.

The Bradford fire has been the focus of academic studies seeking to learn the lessons of the tragedy for future stadium safety and disaster response.<sup>4</sup> During the twentieth century, the football stadium became a site of danger as successive disasters led to the loss of life in and around the arena.<sup>5</sup> Compounded by the moral panic surrounding football hooliganism, the sport and the stadium were in crisis by the 1980s despite efforts over the previous decade to modernise them. Nevertheless, the scope of stadium modernisation was limited: many of the new regulations, including those regarding fire safety, did not apply to Bradford's Valley Parade as the club was then in the Third Division. In a tragic irony, on the day of the fire, the local newspaper, the *Telegraph & Argus (T&A)*, reported on the redevelopment of the stadium which was to begin the next day in order to prepare the club for the Second Division.<sup>6</sup> The fire at Valley Parade also occurred on the same day as crowd violence between supporters of Birmingham City and Leeds United, which saw a crumbling wall separating supporters from the rival clubs collapse and fatally injure a 15-year-old boy attending his first match.<sup>7</sup> A public inquiry, chaired by the High Court Judge, Oliver Popplewell, subsequently probed the events that occurred at Birmingham and Bradford, conflating the separate issues of crowd safety with the control of supporter behaviour, which drew complaints of insensitivity from the Labour Party and Bradford MPs. Less than three weeks later, crowd disturbance between supporters from Liverpool and Juventus overshadowed the European Cup Final in Heysel, Belgium, causing the deaths of 39 people; this event was subsequently added to Popplewell's terms of reference for his final report, which was issued in January 1986.<sup>8</sup> The crisis of football hooliganism, and its close association with stadium design and safety, therefore inflected the emotional response to the disaster and the construction of communities which resulted.

While the importance of the Bradford City stadium fire for the sport of football and disaster management are clear, its broader social and cultural significance within the city, the 1980s, and in the lives of the bereaved has been little explored. The 1980s were, as contemporaries described it, a 'decade of disasters'.<sup>9</sup> The term itself, from a chronological point of view, is slightly problematic because the fire was the first in a series of mass media disasters which occurred in the second half of the 1980s. Bradford was followed, less than three weeks later, by the Heysel Stadium tragedy; in 1987 by the Zeebrugge ferry disaster

(193 fatalities) and King's Cross station fire (31 fatalities); in 1988, the Lockerbie bombing (243 fatalities) and Piper Alpha offshore oil rig explosion (187 fatalities); and, in 1989, the Hillsborough disaster (96 fatalities), among others. Such were their scale, frequency, and social and cultural impact, in 1989 the Mass Observation Project asked its respondents to reflect on 'the succession of public disasters' which 'cannot be ignored in the history of the 1980s'.<sup>10</sup> Together these tragedies called into question the contradiction between a government committed to deregulating the free market and its statutory obligation to protect public safety where private and commercial organisations failed to do so. While the preceding decades were certainly not immune to mass tragedy, the decade of disasters raised significant issues about the effects of the retreat of the developmental state and its replacement by the private sector on people—and their safety—in their everyday lives.<sup>11</sup>

The decade of disasters also called into question the ways in which the media reported mass casualty tragedies and treated the victims, survivors, and the bereaved, which will form the main focus of this article. Historians have argued that scrutiny of the popular media in its multiple forms is integral both for understanding disasters and historicising the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> While it was later eclipsed by subsequent disasters, the Bradford City stadium fire clearly highlights the role of the mass media in shaping narratives during the decade of disasters. Within the context of changing media technologies—when footage of disasters could be, sometimes unwittingly, broadcast live to the public—their reporting increasingly affected the way individual audience members, survivors, the bereaved, and state institutions understood, experienced, and responded to the disaster. The local and national press became a forum for people to express their emotional response to the fire, including anger directed towards the club and local authorities at the way warnings were ignored before the disaster occurred, and at the national press and particular journalists who published sensationalist and misleading reports.<sup>13</sup> The media continues to shape people's experiences of disasters—especially those of survivors and the bereaved—long after the event.

This article examines the reporting of the Bradford City stadium fire to show how disasters were understood, experienced, and responded to during the 1980s. In doing so, it builds on Stephen Brooke's argument that 'Emotion provide[s] a framework of knowledge and a language for understanding and representing a particular social and political world'.<sup>14</sup> The social and political world of the later 1980s was, this article argues, increasingly shaped by the preponderance of disasters. This is demonstrated through the examination of media reports, letters to the Bradford Disaster Appeal Fund, and the personal reflections of people injured or bereaved in the disaster which were collected by social workers in the city. Firstly, it examines the use of disaster imagery on television and in the press to show how the changing emotional environment shaped the types of pictures used. Secondly, it analyses the construction and reception of particular narratives deployed within the mass media to show how the disaster and its effects were understood. Thirdly, the article focusses on the narrative construction of community in the aftermath of the fire. Through letters sent to the Bradford Disaster Appeal Fund, it shows how members of the public developed personal narratives and emotional links to the tragedy in dialogue with the media's reporting. Individuals therefore constructed narratives of community and the self to contextualise their affective response to the disaster.<sup>15</sup> This was equally true of adult respondents as it was of children. Through such

correspondence, some of which took place in the local press, the article shows how the disaster was drawn into a common, cross-cultural experience. Finally, through the pages of their own specialist publication, the article examines the longer-term impact of the narratives of individual resilience on people injured and bereaved by the fire. In doing so, it contends that the role of the media in shaping the emotional environment and disseminating ideas of community are important in understanding the social history of 1980s Britain, when the country witnessed a succession of human-made mass fatality disasters which continue to affect people's lives to this day.

## Picturing tragedy

The Bradford City stadium fire unfolded live on national television. In one of the first such incidents before the advent of 'rolling' twenty-four hour news in the UK, footage of the disaster was broadcast to the viewing public as it happened.<sup>16</sup> The fire was a multimedia event, with its own grammar of seeing and hearing, which also influenced how it was reported in the newspapers.<sup>17</sup> Horrific images, accompanied by the commentary of an audibly shocked John Helm, were televised live, with the cameras capturing sights of intense human suffering. The subsequent coverage, on local and national news bulletins, followed the broad pattern identified by John Langer in his study of television's coverage of disasters, focusing predominantly on victim stories, interspersed with scenes depicting the fire and the burnt-out stand, and interviews with survivors, eye-witnesses and first responders.<sup>18</sup> Television coverage later turned to the wider community's response to the fire. This included group counselling provided to the survivors and police officers on duty, which featured in a documentary broadcast on the first anniversary of the disaster.<sup>19</sup> This shift in the coverage reflected the changing emotional environment of the disaster, from shock and sensationalism to recovery and resilience. Nevertheless, that initial shock, which played out live on national television and was repeated by news outlets across the world, continued to reverberate.

Where people recorded them in their letters to the disaster appeal, affective responses to the footage overwhelmingly emphasised shock, sadness, and grief rather than anger. It is important to note here that 'anger' is a slippery concept, and as such its meaning within the context of 1980s disasters needs to be defined.<sup>20</sup> People rationalised their own emotional response using the term itself, but anger is also taken to mean expressions of frustration and hostility, particularly those directed towards individuals and institutions both at the time and some years later.<sup>21</sup> Anger was initially muted, however, because of the way the disaster unfolded live on television and the imagery which audiences witnessed. As images of the fire were broadcast live, the disaster became a moment in which men were publicly and openly brought to tears. One couple described how 'there was not a dry eye in our pub including strong men who we thought would never show emotion'.<sup>22</sup> Another man explained how 'After seeing the horrific scenes last Saturday on ITV news, I was very upset and cried a lot, like many thousands of people throughout Great Britain'.<sup>23</sup> That these men openly wept should not come as a surprise; the Bradford fire came more than ten years after, as Thomas Dixon has argued, 'British masculinity changed' and men's tears became a part of football culture.<sup>24</sup> Rather, these responses are significant as they helped to shape the emotional environment within which the disaster was reported.<sup>25</sup> Children responded in a similar way, expressing sadness at the images

they had witnessed on television. In particular, the imagery of people injured resonated with children. One student from South Yorkshire wrote about how 'None of my friends or relations were in the fire but I am very very sad about all those people who got burnt and died in the fire'.<sup>26</sup> As rational actors and consumers of media coverage, children explained their emotional response to the disaster in relation to both the images they saw and the reactions of people around them. One noted:

I am very sorry that the Bradford stand has been on fire. I am very upset that it happened. I just can not get over it. Everybody just can not get over it because it's so hard to forget. It was awful because a little fire simply spread into a great big fire. I didn't like the man that was on fire and I didn't like the man that had his hair on fire.<sup>27</sup>

Another young respondent cited the footage of the disaster as the impetus for his fundraising: 'I was so shocked to see the fire at Bradford football ground on television. I felt so sorry for the people that I decided to have a small fair in my garden and I asked my friend Timothy to help me'.<sup>28</sup> Some young children also expressed their emotional response to the fire through drawings, encouraged by their teacher to communicate through artwork in what is now a widespread practice of facilitating emotional healing following disaster.<sup>29</sup> Their drawings frequently replicated the early images broadcast on television, featuring the stadium in flame and injured fans, clearly linking their affective response to the scenes they witnessed.

If people missed the unsettling scenes as they unfolded live on the television, they could not escape them from the Sunday newspapers, which printed graphic scenes of extreme injury across their front and inside pages. Many daily newspapers published on the Monday followed suit, displaying a startling absence of ethical awareness on the part of some editors.<sup>30</sup> Both the *Sunday Telegraph* and *The Times* printed front-page photographs that graphically depicted supporters with their clothing alight clambering over hoardings onto the pitch, which were taken from live televised scenes.<sup>31</sup> The same photograph was printed on the front page of the *News of the World* as well as in the *Daily Star*, albeit tucked away in the middle of the newspaper. It was also printed in the *Daily Mail*, where it is framed within a television set border with the caption 'Tragedy on TV ... scenes which reduced entire homes of non-football people to tears'.<sup>32</sup> Editors justified reproducing such images because they had already been screened on television. As one feature in the *Sunday People*, published the morning after the fire, put it: 'The entire nightmare, from first flickering flames to lines of burned bodies being laid out on the pitch, were graphically described over the air'. Pictured alongside is a photograph depicting a severely injured supporter being dragged from the blazing stand by a police officer, illustrating the 'heroism and heartbreak' of the tragedy in a single image.<sup>33</sup>

Not all newspapers printed such graphic photographs, however, which perhaps illustrates a level of ethical awareness from some editors towards victims' families, who were likely to be newspaper readers, as well as the wider footballing community. For example, the *Sun*, a football-focused newspaper, opted to print a photograph of the burned-out stand on the front page of its 13 May edition. Meanwhile the *Daily Mirror*, led with its announcement of a national fund to help the victims and their families, the Mirror Group Soccer Disaster and Safety Fund, to which it contributed £50,000. Whether this was a purely altruistic approach is a matter for debate. The newspaper's owner, Robert Maxwell, was also chairman of Oxford United, a football club with an urgent need for refurbishment of its Manor Ground in

preparation for its promotion to the First Division. In a speech on the evening of the fire, Maxwell identified a similar litany of defects at Manor Ground to those that befell Valley Parade. These included wooden stands and cheap plastic seating, a deficiency of hydrants and extinguishers, no fire warning system, and stewards ill-trained in fire evacuation procedures; up to £1 million would be required to finance ground improvements so that the club could compete safely in the First Division. Maxwell consequently wrote to the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, calling for a reduction in the football pools betting levy, alongside an increased contribution to the Football Grounds Improvement Trust, in order to fund 'the necessary measures required' and help 'restore the public confidence in the safety of our grounds' both in Oxford and across the country.<sup>34</sup> Not only do Maxwell's remarks point to the paucity of funding in lower-league teams, where supporters preferred to see their club spend its limited resources on player acquisitions to bolster their chances of promotion, but also the ubiquity of the danger which crumbling infrastructure presented. This was especially pertinent in the case of Bradford City, as the club had faced insolvency during the 1983–84 season before its finances were restructured under a new board and the club embarked on an impressive run of form to secure promotion.<sup>35</sup> Beyond the First and Second Divisions, on whose clubs the 1975 Safety in Sports Grounds Act applied, under-investment in stadium safety meant that the tragedy could, potentially, have happened anywhere. As one card sent to the disaster appeal simply put, it 'could so easily have been my family'.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, there was no shortage of images available to the newspapers for publication, demonstrating the insensitivity of many national titles in opting to publish upsetting photographs. According to the Bradford coroner, James Turnbull, the fire was one of the most widely photographed disasters of the 1980s given press photographers were in situ to document the awarding of the championship trophy to the players before the match. Whilst this inevitably helped with identifying the deceased by tracing their final movements, it also served as a traumatic reminder to any families and friends who saw the images.<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, some photographers such as the *T&A*'s Dennis Flatt, received verbal abuse from angry Bradford supporters for documenting the tragedy. Flatt's editor subsequently sold the images to foreign press agencies, raising £17,000 for the disaster fund. Instead of reproducing the more graphic photographs available, the *T&A* focussed predominantly on images that depicted the aftermath of the horror, showing material artefacts such as a charred souvenir supplement, police officers sorting through discarded and burnt articles of clothing, and forensic experts examining the charred remains of the stand.<sup>38</sup>

Many of the public's photographs were made available to the police and coroner's office to help with their investigations, and used during the public inquiry in order 'to try and show in graphic form the development of the fire'.<sup>39</sup> Some were reproduced in newspapers: the *T&A*, for instance, printed a selection taken by a supporter from the Spion Kop terrace. Other supporters sent in their photographs in the hope that they would help readers piece together the movements of friends and family at the match.<sup>40</sup> The photographs, alongside witness testimonies, also challenge the prevailing view amongst certain tabloids that mass panic prevailed on the terraces, contributing to the high number of fatalities.<sup>41</sup> In addition to falsely claiming that the fire had been caused by a smoke-bomb let off by a Bradford supporter, the *Daily Sport*'s football writer Ian Trueman sensationally reported that 'It was every man for himself' as supporters clambered over fallen bodies in their 'fight for survival'.<sup>42</sup> However, his description is at odds with psychologists' research, which drew



upon evidence from this and other mass casualty fires.<sup>43</sup> Whilst panic is described more frequently in newspaper accounts of fire than in any other disaster situation, it is often used as a common trope to generate dramatic effect.<sup>44</sup> In reality, as police officers' testimony to the public inquiry revealed, supporters initially followed official advice in evacuating via the gates at the back of the stand, and, only when they discovered that these were locked did they make the decision to exit onto the pitch, with many pausing to help others to safety on route. One of the operational police officers told the public inquiry that 'there was no panic among the crowd who were moving in a reasonably orderly way to the exit.' Many simply followed the advice announced by a club official over the public-address system: 'Please do not panic, make your way to the front, on to the pitch.'<sup>45</sup>

That few newspapers reported on this testimony suggests that it potentially disrupted their preferred narrative by offering a more reliable account of the behaviour of football supporters at a time when they were widely derided in print media as hooligans. Indeed, 1985 was cited as the game's 'annus horribilis' as high-profile incidents of crowd disorder bought football's problems into stark relief for the sport's governing authorities and Thatcher's Conservative government. Thatcher, who popularised an authoritarian approach towards crime and disorder issues, formed an emergency group of senior Cabinet ministers tasked with working with chief police officers to devise a raft of measures aimed at 'stamping out soccer hooliganism' in the wake of violence between Luton and Millwall supporters during a televised FA Cup match in March. These included installing perimeter fencing around pitches, introducing closed-circuit television to identify offenders and banning the sale and consumption of alcohol at 'problem' grounds. Whilst specialist football magazines and club officials criticised the proposals as a slur on the majority of supporters and a threat to the finances of clubs in the lower divisions, right-wing daily newspapers and the police welcomed the government's tough stance against 'soccer's vandals'.<sup>46</sup>

It was this shadow of hooliganism that prompted some members of the public to write into newspapers bemoaning the pitch-side scenes of 'mindless jeering' by young supporters as the fire enveloped, cynically interpreting their behaviour as hooliganism: 'Were these cretins too thick to realise people were burning to death, or were they just uncaring? If the latter is the case it just shows to what depths some of the youth of today have sunk'.<sup>47</sup> Right-wing tabloids uncritically reported the theory that 'yobs' and 'louts' might have been responsible for starting the fire, noting that anyone could buy a cheap smoke bomb from garden centres, and reporting that the police had interviewed members of the local Ointment crew about their potential involvement.<sup>48</sup> That some police officers later praised the same 'soccer thugs' for helping them with the rescue effort was only reported by the *T&A*, however. As one put it, 'Never class all young football followers as hooligans. People from all walks of life and all age groups, without any thought of danger to themselves, went into that paddock and stand to help the police get people to safety. This was an eye-opener'.<sup>49</sup> Not for those whose news diet relied solely on tabloids, where it was never reported.

## Narrating disaster

The narratives constructed within the press, as well as through television news, shaped how many people understood and experienced the disaster. Given the preponderance of disasters during the 1980s, understanding how the media narrated them is vital in writing the social history of the decade. Stories were packaged together to signify the gravity of the



news, with a distinctive visual design in order to set an emotional tone that was sustained through personal testimonies gathered from witnesses, survivors, and first responders.<sup>50</sup> All tabloid and middle-market newspapers used black page borders with inset graphic images of the burning stand and short titles to frame their coverage and set it apart from the rest of their content. The *Daily Mail*, for example, initially used a graphic inset titled 'The Bradford Disaster', which it quickly renamed 'Disaster at the match', possibly to distance itself from the downmarket *Daily Star*, which had also used the former title. Nor was this stylistic approach limited to the national newspapers: the *T&A* used different inset images and titles for its coverage of both the fire ('Day of Disaster') and the public inquiry ('Day of Disaster INQUIRY'), while *Fire* magazine used a black page border with the title 'BRADFORD' and depicting a football replacing the letter 'O'.<sup>51</sup> The broadsheet newspapers eschewed such stylistic devices, and generally avoided quoting emotionally-charged witnesses, preferring instead to focus on the facts as conveyed by emergency service leaders in press releases.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the packaging of newspapers' coverage helped to ensure that the overarching narratives constructed within these publications were clear for the audience.

While the broadsheets focussed on the investigation into the cause of, and the political response to, the disaster, tabloids were more interested in the spectacle of the fire and the human stories of heroism, near-death experiences, and the trauma of death and injury. They used specific narrative tropes, deploying emotionally charged language to describe the scenes and its aftermath, in order to arouse readers' emotions. Before the names of the deceased were published on the Wednesday morning, the dead and seriously injured were described using a mixture of symbolic representation as well as graphic depictions of bodies on fire. The *Sunday People*, for example, reported how 'fans see women and kids die', thereby singling out those who its largely white, male working-class readers would have seen as the most vulnerable groups in society, while the *Daily Mail* reported 'bodies burnt beyond recognition' with 'dozens scarred for life'.<sup>53</sup> Witness testimony was commonly used to illustrate some of the more graphic aspects of the fire, the descriptions appearing more shocking if they came from eyewitnesses. The *Daily Mirror*, for instance, quoted a teacher, who described how 'People covered in flames were jumping on top of us. I pulled one woman from the front of the stand and she had nothing on her back, neither clothes nor skin'.<sup>54</sup> The publication of such graphic descriptions thus turned death and injury into spectacle.

Tabloids predominantly focused on white, working-class male supporters, who constituted their core readership, portraying the fire as a culturally-specific disaster to befall the city's traditionally white and masculine footballing community, as depicted in photographs of the crowd before kick-off.<sup>55</sup> Once the names of the deceased were published, other survivors emerged onto newspapers' front pages: one, 12-year-old Martin, 'the bravest boy in Britain' as he was described, lost his brother, father, uncle and grandfather in the fire and subsequently became one of the most well-known faces of the bereaved community, along with his mother, Susan.<sup>56</sup> Mother and son were subsequently pictured at the family funeral in Pudsey, with celebrities at a charity football match at Huddersfield Town, and at the unveiling of a sculpture donated by Bradford's twin city of Hamm on the first anniversary; their mourning having been deemed to be newsworthy.<sup>57</sup> The most poignant image of the two was taken outside Valley Parade as, holding hands, they examined the shrine of flowers, cards and scarves left by supporters and other well-wishers. A single photograph embodied both the grief of a family and city where the victims were often well-known within their local community.<sup>58</sup>

Letters to the disaster appeal show how such stories of individual survivors became the impetus for charitable donations. Cecily told of the 'many tragedies' she had suffered in her lifetime, but 'nothing so tragic as the Bradford Football ground one'. For her, the stories of the survivors, whether their service during the Second World War or that of the 'young boy who lost most of his family', likely Martin, particularly resonated.<sup>59</sup> Donations to the disaster appeal—however large or small—and letters outlining people's reasons for contributing thus became a means through which individuals could articulate narratives about their own lives alongside their response to news of the disaster. This was especially the case when the respondent had recently lost a loved one and believed that this experience helped them to understand or empathise with those bereaved by the disaster. S.J.N. wrote that they 'know from experience that no words can heal the voids left by the sudden tragic loss of [a] loved one, because my brother died last year aged only fourteen'.<sup>60</sup> The affective links between geographically and temporally distant tragedies were made clear in a condolence card sent by V.F., who lost her son following a fire at a house party in Lewisham, London, in January 1981.<sup>61</sup> Without outlining the social and historical significance of the fire which killed her son, V.F. explained how 'My tears and sympathy goes with you all. I just can't explain to you how I felt but I know how you feel because I went through the same thing I am so so sorry'.<sup>62</sup> Through their correspondence and contributions, people were therefore able to articulate their own personal experiences in relation to the narratives put forward within the media. Indeed, expressing past bereavement enabled people to convey their understanding of disaster as an experience lived by those left behind.

In addition to the survivors, first responders and other experts acted as proxies for the dead and the grieving before the names of the deceased could be officially released. Firefighters were pictured sifting through the debris of the burnt-out stand, whilst teams of forensic scientists were depicted identifying the bodies of the dead, often from the personal belongings which had been left behind.<sup>63</sup> The police received the greatest level of newspaper coverage of the emergency services. With approximately 150 officers on duty during the match, police officers featured prominently in stories of evacuation, rescue and first aid, while 40 officers were treated for burns. Interviews with senior officers revealed the challenge in identifying both the names of the dead and the cause of the blaze given the scale of destruction.<sup>64</sup>

Two police officers stood out as the embodiment of the service's work during and after the fire, and demonstrate the way in which narratives of heroism were gendered, which was a long-standing trait of fire rescue reporting.<sup>65</sup> First was PC Graham Jones, who featured prominently in photographs printed in newspapers with his hair ablaze as he assisted supporters from the burning stand.<sup>66</sup> The *Daily Mirror* described how this 'brave policeman, his hair on fire and tunic blazing, rescued two pensioners from the inferno.' Much of the story was given over to Jones's own recollections of the fire, in which he vividly describes how 'the flames were scorching my lungs. I could feel my arm and hair burning. I just had to keep going'.<sup>67</sup> Here was a hero, a survivor and a mourner, the embodiment of hope and recovery for survivors and the Bradford community. Second was PC Janice McLean, one of West Yorkshire Police's family liaison officers, who was interviewed by journalists about the trauma of notifying next of kin, and which was published across national and local daily newspapers, and in specialist magazines, commonly accompanied by a photograph of her wiping a tear away from the eye. Her

selection for interview, as the sole female officer in the police liaison team, presented a warmer and more emotional image of the police alongside the more conventional stories of life-saving and first-aid involving her male colleagues at the ground. She commented on the difficulty of her role, describing how 'It is impossible to remain detached—each time it is like losing one of your own'. In particular, she recounted one traumatic case where she 'felt the tears coming and had to turn away to the window ... I stood there pretending to look out until the tears stopped and I had got myself under control again.'<sup>68</sup> Both officers fit into contemporary stereotypes regarding gender roles within the police: male officers put themselves in danger on the frontline in order to spontaneously protect life, while female officers provided counselling that was removed from the immediate danger of the fire. Indeed, McLean is described in terms related to her gender and age (the *Sun* patronisingly refers to her as a 'pretty policewoman' and 'bachelor girl'), rather than her skills.<sup>69</sup>

The construction of heroes within media narratives of the disaster provided audiences with active figures of resilience who were able to remain calm in the face of a mass casualty disaster. While stories of supporters' heroism offered a buoyant counterpoint in the coverage of the tragedy, the steadfast actions of emergency services personnel became a prominent feature in the public response to disasters. For example, Kevin S. wrote: 'The positive "working together" of police and members of the public to aid the injured is something we should never forget. The bravery was something to behold'.<sup>70</sup> While Kevin S. saw first responders' role as something of a spectacle, ten-year-old Richard from Cardiff made a clear link between the actions of the emergency services and the potential scale of the disaster. He asserted that 'If it wasn't for the brave police and nurses it could well be more than two hundred killed the[y] were real heroes to run in to the fire and save lives'.<sup>71</sup> In describing these heroic acts carried out by police officers and others present during the fire and its immediate aftermath, these correspondents show how the footage of the disaster, and the subsequent mediation of police actions, shaped contemporary understandings of how the events unfolded. Moreover, the qualities of resolution and bravery in the face of catastrophe were ascribed to a broader group of people who responded to and were affected by the disaster. As David M., a deputy head teacher, wrote in a note to accompany the money raised by the children at his school: 'The fortitude of families, the heroism of the rescue services, the devotion of our doctors and nurses, and the generosity of the people have inspired the best in all of us'.<sup>72</sup> Clearly, correspondents used examples of heroism and inspiration to focus on the positive aspects of the disaster's aftermath. This was especially important to people like Lara L., who felt 'unable to express my true feelings in this incident' but nonetheless sought to acknowledge the 'true heroism people showed'.<sup>73</sup> Thus, while for some people letters to the disaster appeal afforded an opportunity to express their feelings and advance narratives of selfhood, others felt unable to do so. If, as Brooke argued, 'Emotion provided a framework of knowledge and a language for understanding', then the inability to articulate those emotions *at that moment* likely indicated the ongoing processing of one's personal response.<sup>74</sup> Under those circumstances, the media's narratives provided a formula for understanding upon which individuals could draw.

Human tragedy and heroism were equally compelling media material, providing the opportunity to write 'colour pieces' to appeal to readers' emotional investment into the story. Working under editorial pressure to win the 'circulation war' between rival tabloids,

journalists went to great lengths to interview survivors, utilising intrusive and aggressive tactics to gain entry to hospitals. At the Bradford Royal Infirmary, for instance, nurses complained of the flashbulbs of cameras distracting them from caring for patients. One patient, David, recalled how, as the nurses 'pulled the curtains round, there were cameras coming up to the windows, flashing.' Some members of the press had brought stepladders to the hospital to gain access to the first-floor ward on which the majority of the patients were being treated. David could only lie face down on the bed as his nurse, who was 'doing her nut', had the photographers removed.<sup>75</sup> Similar concerns were raised by the arrival of journalists at the Pinderfields Burns Unit. Its director, Dr John Settle, recalled how journalists camped 'around the outside . . . wanting to get in', repeatedly telephoning the unit 'demanding information' from his staff. Eventually, Settle agreed to let a small news camera crew into the central unit, accompanied by a nurse who limited their access to the patients with life-threatening injuries.<sup>76</sup>

Journalists defended their behaviour as being in the public interest, claiming that readers wanted first-hand accounts from survivors. When the patients were transferred to nearby St Luke's Hospital, journalists rushed onto the ward and 'grabbed somebody to talk to' before they were removed by security. Recognising that they were unlikely to leave without a story, David agreed to be interviewed 'for the sake of a more general peace and quiet'.<sup>77</sup> His interview, with accompanying photograph of him sitting up in his bed with his arms bandaged and hoisted up in what later became known as the 'Bradford Sling', appeared in multiple newspapers. David subsequently became the civilian face of the fire, an unlikely hero who put others' safety before his own. His story was both dramatic and heroic, and suited journalists' appetite to generate a compassionate story from the horror, shifting the focus from community despair to pride. He first helped evacuate his section of the stand; then, in his escape, assisted a 69-year-old woman over a six-foot high barrier, before dragging a disabled man to safety, during which he received burns to his back and head from a flash over. He then beat out the man's burning jacket with his bare hands, suffering serious burns which required skin grafts and weeks of physiotherapy. Later awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal for Bravery, David's story was critical to newspaper accounts of disasters because it made such events more realistic and knowable to readers from similar social backgrounds.<sup>78</sup> His story also reassured readers that cherished values such as courage and compassion were in evidence at a time that some newspapers and politicians conflated the fire with hooliganism.<sup>79</sup>

## Defining community, signifying belonging

Notwithstanding some of the difficulties posed by journalistic intrusion and demands for up-to-date briefing information, the media can also play a positive role in mediating post-disaster relief efforts with compassion. It does so by regularly sharing safety advice from the emergency services as well as relaying contact information to the general public anxious to help the authorities and the bereaved.<sup>80</sup> The local media in Bradford was intimately involved with the launch of the Disaster Appeal Fund following the fire. With its operation based at City Hall, the Fund received the backing of the *T&A* and Pennine Radio: the latter held on-air auctions to raise money, while the former extensively covered fund-raising events, publicised the appeal and Helpline telephone numbers, and monitored the total sums raised. Fund-raising events included a charity football match between the 1966

football World Cup finalists England and West Germany at Leeds United's Elland Road ground, a benefit concert at Bradford's St George's Hall headlined by local rock band Smokie, and the release of a charity single with the intention to raise a lot of money 'on similar lines as the Band Aid single did for Ethiopia'.<sup>81</sup> As Lucy Robinson has argued, the charity single connected the tradition of philanthropy with a yearning for a sense of community and collective identity 'in the face of Thatcherite Authoritarian Populism'.<sup>82</sup> The response to Bradford was little different. A group of celebrities from the world of music and light entertainment known collectively as The Crowd recorded a version of Gerry Marsden's 1963 hit single, and widely recognised football anthem, 'You'll Never Walk Alone', which spent two weeks at number 1 in the UK Singles Chart and raised £100,000 to help launch a burns research unit at the University of Bradford.<sup>83</sup> Nor was the *T&A* only interested in reporting significant sums of money; in fact, it arguably gave more coverage to the small sums of money raised—from school-children's pocket money donations to a pensioner's bingo prize winnings. These smaller sums, it suggested, were indicative of the strong level of community spirit evident in the city.<sup>84</sup>

This stress on community spirit, presumably designed to calm its grieving readers, distinguished local newspapers from their national counterparts. Journalists from national outlets did not remain in the city for longer than a few days—even reporters for specialist football magazines quickly moved on to cover the FA Cup Final, aware of their core readers' interests in the big match—but returned to cover official visits by the Prime Minister and the Prince and Princess of Wales, and to report on the public inquiry.<sup>85</sup> Such visits, whilst newsworthy events, were carefully managed affairs, which inevitably shielded most journalists, and the public figures themselves, from any potential confrontations. The itinerary for Thatcher's visit to Bradford, for instance, included meetings with civic dignitaries at City Hall, the chairman and club officials at Valley Parade, representatives from the emergency services, as well as visits to St Luke's and Bradford Royal Infirmary, where she met privately with handpicked patients. National newspaper coverage overwhelmingly concentrated on her visit to the stadium, where she praised the spirit of Bradford and was photographed, flanked by her husband Denis, laying a wreath of hand-picked flowers from Chequers outside the burned stand.<sup>86</sup>

The *T&A* interpreted its role as speaking on behalf of the city, regularly reporting on the efforts of the Bradford Metropolitan District Council, the football club and other civic institutions in coming together to help rebuild grieving communities. Its first editorial following the fire reproduced the text of the sermon given by the Bishop of Bradford at a memorial service held in the city's cathedral the previous morning. The Bishop spoke of a celebratory occasion that had been 'cruelly turned to tragedy.' Yet even at its lowest ebb, there was hope for 'this noble city of Bradford', which had 'endured varying degrees of tragedy both economic and commercial' in recent years, not least the collapse of its textile industry, rising unemployment, the shadow of the 1981 urban disorders, and the torment of the Yorkshire Ripper murders. Moreover, this was an opportunity for the city to unite around its grief, whereby the football club, 'with the help of the community', could 'triumph over tragedy', and for 'all Bradfordians' to 'surround all those who suffer with love, sympathy and practical support'.<sup>87</sup> By referring to 'all Bradfordians', the Bishop was referencing the city's multiple faith and ethnic communities at a time when the city was subject to negative external perceptions about its growing Asian population. Bradford had one of the largest ethnic minority populations of British cities by the early 1980s, with just under 50,000 resident South Asians by 1981, of which around fifty

per cent were Muslim. A large proportion of this population was concentrated in the inner city, especially in the Manningham area surrounding Valley Parade.<sup>88</sup> Though significant in number, Bradford's British Asian communities were relatively newly established.<sup>89</sup> The initial, albeit limited, focus on the role of the Pakistani community in responding to the disaster should therefore be seen within the context of the race relations paradigm, through which local civic leaders, including a growing number of British Asians and in this instance supported by the local press, sought to manage and improve the connection between the predominantly white football fans and the largely Pakistani community on the stadium's doorstep.

This emphasis on the city's multiple faith communities coming together intensified following the appointment of Councillor Mohammed Ajeeb as Bradford's Lord Mayor a week after the fire. The significance of Ajeeb's appointment—the first British Asian man to hold such an office—cannot be understated. Born in Kashmir, Ajeeb arrived in Britain in 1957 at the age of 18, initially labouring in a Nottingham soap factory, before working in public transport. He moved to Bradford in the early 1970s, becoming director of Shelter's Housing and Renewal programme and chairman of the local Community Relations Council.<sup>90</sup> Ajeeb went on to become chairman of the Council's Labour Group in 1984, from where he was elevated to the mayoralty the following year. 'Mohammed the healer', as one newspaper described him, subsequently became the public figurehead of the appeal fund, regularly pictured in the *T&A* alongside his wife, receiving donations raised by community groups and occasionally featured in national newspapers. Ajeeb publicly spoke of his hope that the tragedy would unite the city, touring its many communities and meeting with community leaders as well as national and foreign leaders. In his inaugural speech in City Hall, he proclaimed that 'Class, creed and race does not divide us. There are only the helpers and the helped' and went on to predict that 'we will remain united and the typical Bradford spirit with all citizens pulling in the same direction will come through.'<sup>91</sup> As former chairman of the Community Relations Council, Ajeeb was acutely aware of the limited extent of everyday multiculturalism in the city, and thus used his position to rhetorically construct a multi-ethnic civic identity based on communities' responses to the disaster.

Ajeeb was not alone in calling for collective unity as an emotional response to the fire. Through letters to the editor, a self-selecting group of community activists used the tragedy to perform a sense of belonging to the city of Bradford and British society more generally.<sup>92</sup> This belonging was not 'won' through individual or collective acts of heroism, but through participating in public and collective mourning in the pages of local newspapers. In the days following the fire, the *T&A* printed numerous letters sent to the editors by a range of authors, some of them also enclosing money for the disaster fund. The language used invoked a sense of collective belonging within Bradford's emerging multicultural civic community. C. M. Khan, President of the Council of Mosques, offered his 'profoundest sympathy and condolences' on behalf of his members and the Muslim community in Bradford. He went on to say that the Muslim community 'share[s] their grief and misfortune in their loss'.<sup>93</sup> Councillor Mohammad Riaz, Secretary of the Bradford Pakistan Community Centre Association, invoked similar language.<sup>94</sup> Nor were these assertions of grief and belonging limited to British Asian community organisations. On behalf of the Bradford Branch of the Federation of Ukrainians in Great Britain, V. Smereka wrote: 'We are all mourning the dead, and feel deeply with the families who have lost loved ones ... We Ukrainians who came through the war deeply understand the suffering



and pain of loss and injury'.<sup>95</sup> Faith and cultural organisations also responded to the disaster by contributing money. For example, the Sikh Youth Federation raised £50 during a special day of prayer to commemorate the 1984 storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. Bradford West MP Max Madden asked that the *T&A* be informed of this donation to highlight the cross-faith, cross-community response to the disaster, perhaps aware of the positive impact this might have on local community relations.<sup>96</sup> Community associations played a variety of roles in post-war British urban society, but in the aftermath of the Bradford fire, we can see how they used their self-appointed role as representatives of a particular 'community' to speak on its behalf. In doing so, they performed a type of collective citizenship through which the disaster could be re-cast as a tragedy affecting a multi-cultural city, rather than being isolated to the stadium and its community of football fans.

Others rationalised their response to the disaster by invoking ideas of community based around football, the city of Bradford, and personal links to the tragedy, including friends and relatives having been present during the fire. The communal pull of football was especially strong in letters to the disaster appeal; as one correspondent, the secretary of a small club in Liverpool, reasoned: 'Football and sport generally forge close links between communities'.<sup>97</sup> As such, contributors to the fund frequently invoked their support of Bradford City and other clubs. Margaret S., whose father had played for and subsequently worked as a trainer at Bradford, felt unable to 'put down on paper all that the City fire means to me'. This was because 'We have been involved with them so long haven't we?'<sup>98</sup> Other respondents were less emotive, simply signing their letter as a fan of whichever club they supported. Just as football provided a means to articulate a personal connection to the disaster, numerous respondents articulated a connection to the disaster through having lived in Bradford. As one correspondent put it: 'I originally come from Bradford, and even though we have lived in numerous places, Bradford is still "Home"'.<sup>99</sup> While the media, especially the local press, played an important role in the construction of civic and other communities, people responded to this by invoking their own narratives of belonging, and football provided one of these communities that united the nation in its collective grief.<sup>100</sup>

Local newspapers repeatedly returned to the idea of a Bradford spirit in their evocation of the city's recovery in the weeks following the fire. Civic officials, football club officials and medical professionals were all quoted speaking about the importance of loyalty and togetherness in helping the bereaved families and communities recover.<sup>101</sup> The club was central to the city's recovery, which helps explain why anger was rarely directed towards club officials, particularly in letters from supporters printed in the *T&A*.<sup>102</sup> Mervi Pantti and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen have argued that expressions of anger following the Bradford fire were less frequent compared to other human-made disasters, especially within the local press. This did not reflect an absence of anger in any sense of the term, but a focus on publicising the Disaster Appeal as well as a desire amongst supporters to urge the government to urgently fund the ground's redevelopment with a memorial stand to remember the victims.<sup>103</sup> One leading psychiatrist who had studied the aftermath of the Aberfan mining tragedy in 1966 noted that the fire had already been 'built into the history of Bradford', much as the coal slip had scarred the mental landscape of the Welsh village, and would need to be harnessed to positive effect in order to help the city 'grow through its mourning'.<sup>104</sup> While some expected this growth might come quickly, for many, mourning was a long process.



## Personal resilience and communal bereavement

In 1989 one *Mass Observer* lamented that, in the aftermath of disasters, 'It is left to the Social Services to cope [...] The world has lost its sensitivity'.<sup>105</sup> While their concerns reflected the rise of individualism within British society in the 1970s and 1980s, the increasing role of social services in responding to the long-term effects of disaster was particularly remarkable in the aftermath of the Bradford City stadium fire.<sup>106</sup> Social workers' activities in the aftermath of the fire were notably varied and have been called a 'watershed in welfare responses to disaster in Britain'. This breakpoint, Tim Newburn argued, was in response to the 'terrifying images of death and destruction' which were heightened from the mid-1980s by the 'proximity of the mass media to the events as they unfolded'.<sup>107</sup> Bradford social workers' response to the fire was therefore shaped by people's experiences of the media reporting but, as this section demonstrates, also facilitated the mediation of individual and collective emotions. Following the fire, Bradford social services established three principal forums for the discussion of bereavement and trauma: the *City Link* newsletter, a special programme of counselling at the Link Centre, and the Helpline.<sup>108</sup> These three forums provided dedicated spaces for the discussion of injury and bereavement within a community of people affected in a myriad of ways by the fire. What is more, they brought together different elements of welfare provision and became a model for social workers responding to later mass casualty disasters through the transmission of expertise to other local authorities.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, the duration and depth of engagement which people affected by the disaster had with a specialist newsletter established by Bradford social workers set the stadium fire apart as a tragedy experienced through diverse media.

In October 1985, the first *City Link* newsletter arrived through the letterboxes of over 300 families injured or bereaved by the fire. Set up by three medical social workers at St Luke's Hospital in Bradford, *City Link* was a specialist publication which enabled people to narrate their own experiences, rather than having their stories limited by the established formats of letters to the editor, sensationalised reporting, or 'vox pops' mediated by journalists. The reach of *City Link* was limited to those defined by the St Luke's social workers as having been directly affected by the tragedy—usually those who were themselves injured or lost a close relative. Even then, it was only sent to those whose addresses the social workers had on file. 'It is not a newspaper to satisfy the curiosity of onlookers or even inform', they reasoned. 'It is only for those involved'.<sup>110</sup> Limiting the readership in this way established the parameters for the public discussion of bereavement and injury, in which potential contributors were reassured that sharing their experiences could aid in their own recovery, as well as providing reassurance to others, reasoning that 'It could be that just knowing others have the same problems will be welcome news'.<sup>111</sup>

Newsletter contributors largely responded to the editors' intentions, perhaps incentivised by the boundaries of readership set by the social workers. One mother, who lost her daughter in the fire, wrote about how friends, family, neighbours and colleagues rallied around to support her and her husband in the months following the disaster. Reflecting on their luck, she allowed her telephone number to be published in the newsletter for anyone who might be lacking such support.<sup>112</sup> Another wrote of her guilt after realising that the death of her parents had 'solved the [financial] problems' of caring for them in their old age.<sup>113</sup> These public discussions of the feelings which resulted from the bereavement

process—luck and guilt on top of sadness and numbness—provide an important insight into what is more typically a private experience. They also challenge the narratives of heroism and resilience published in national and local newspapers. While some wrote of the strength they had found, the *City Link* forum enabled people to express their stories of *not* coping and still feeling angry months and years after the disaster. One contributor wrote, two years after the fire, about how they ‘don’t feel to be getting over the shock and grief’ of losing their father.<sup>114</sup> While explicit statements of anger were largely absent from *City Link*, there were frequent references to others having experienced it and acknowledgements that anger, along with other feelings, were ‘a normal reaction to the death of a loved one’.<sup>115</sup> The ability to discuss ways in which people were not coping with the tragedy extended to the issue of mental health, with individuals freely acknowledging ‘feeling depressed, nerves on edge’, or taking anti-depressants.<sup>116</sup> To an extent, limiting the audience of the newsletter facilitated a communal experience which enabled people to more freely discuss topics and feelings which, in other forums, may have been considered taboo. This was especially important given the preponderance of mental health issues among people who have experienced burns injuries.<sup>117</sup>

While some people appear to have taken solace in expressing their grief on the pages of *City Link*, others were content with reading the stories of other people’s experiences of burns injury, which engendered a sense of community within their private bereavement and recovery. This was especially important for people who lived alone.<sup>118</sup> The newsletter thus enabled people injured in the stadium fire, and their families, to learn from others’ experiences of burns injuries. Peter Proctor, a professional racing driver who experienced 65% burns following a crash in 1966 wrote of his twenty-year recovery.<sup>119</sup> Simon Weston, a British Army soldier who experienced 46% burns following the bombing of the RFA Sir Galahad during the Falklands War, along with his mother Pauline Hatfield, wrote of their experiences in the third issue of the newsletter. Hatfield, in particular, wrote of being Weston’s ‘whipping boy’ for several months after his injury, as he came to terms with their effects on his body, appearance, and sense of self-worth.<sup>120</sup> These accounts of well-known people’s experiences of burns injuries and care augmented the reflections of Bradford’s survivors and bereaved, providing longer-term perspectives which emphasised improvement over time. They were, in effect, messages of hope. Several people who were unable to write about their own personal experiences of the disaster expressed the benefits which reading others’ accounts had had on their wellbeing. As one reader was quoted as saying: ‘I get lots of comfort from it, reading other people’s letters, though I can’t put my feelings down on paper yet’.<sup>121</sup> The affective benefits of the newsletter therefore came, not just from cathartic expressions of grief and recovery from injury, but the assurance that there were common experiences; that people were not suffering alone.

Save for the annual memorial events publicised in the local press and the occasional mention in relation to other news stories, including articles on the continuing work of the Link Centre, the Bradford City stadium fire had, by the late 1980s, largely disappeared from the pages of the national newspapers. While *City Link* provided a dedicated space for the public discussion of bereavement and recovery, its content drew on the experiences of a small pool of contributors. In 1988, three years after the fire, the newsletter ceased publication, with a final issue celebrating the work which had been done, including winning an award from the magazine *Social Work Today* for the newsletter’s ‘major contribution to the public image of professional social work’.<sup>122</sup> But the pain caused by the fire continued, with some people

receiving counselling at the Link Centre for five years after the fire, when the dedicated disaster bereavement programme was to be wound down.<sup>123</sup> Barbara Hudson, of the National and Local Government Officers' Association, contended that the coverage of the Valley Parade fire in the national and local media facilitated people's recovery by allowing for the open discussion of the effects of injury and bereavement, and removing part of the stigma of needing to use social services.<sup>124</sup> Media reporting of disasters, however, was of limited advantage to the psychological and emotional health of survivors. The successive tragedies which beset Britain's decade of disaster brought the memories of the Bradford City fire to the fore, and some people walked through the doors of the Link Centre for the first time several years after the event.<sup>125</sup> The Hillsborough tragedy was particularly resonant. On 15 April 1989, 96 Liverpool football fans were killed and hundreds more injured in what is now the worst sporting disaster in modern British history. Like Bradford, the disaster unfolded live on television; clips were repeatedly broadcast on the news; and newspapers carried horrific images of the injured, dead, and dying.<sup>126</sup> Two weeks later at Valley Parade, Bradford and Lincoln City played their first match since 1985, raising funds for the Hillsborough Disaster Appeal; the matchday programme stressed the 'special bond of friendship' between the two clubs.<sup>127</sup> The emotional impact of the Bradford fire, then, was not limited to its immediate aftermath, and the psychological effects not only shaped by the reporting of the singular tragedy. As still more disasters occurred during the 1980s, and after, the experiences of survivors and the bereaved continued to be affected by the media.

## Conclusion

The legacy of the Bradford City fire was secured with the installation of three permanent memorials to commemorate the tragedy and conjoin the club and the city. The first, in Centenary Square outside Bradford City Hall, is a sculpture by Joachim Reisner depicting three figures symbolising life, upon which are engraved the names of the 56 victims. Donated by the City of Hamm, Bradford's twin city in Germany, it was unveiled by Councillor Ajeeb, the Oberbürgermaster of Hamm and the Labour party leader, Neil Kinnock, on the first anniversary of the fire.<sup>128</sup> The second, a sculpture by Patricia McAllister of a kneeling woman surrounded by young footballers, was donated to the football club for its reopening and placed above the entrance to the executive suites; it was later moved to the main stand near to where the fire originated.<sup>129</sup> A third memorial, a black marble fascia with the names of the 56 victims inscribed in gold, was donated by the club itself and sited near the main entrance to the ground following its refurbishment upon the seventeenth anniversary of the disaster. In addition to these fixed memorials, an annual service is held outside City Hall, a minute's silence before the club's final home game of the season, and ongoing fundraising for the Bradford Burns Research Unit, which ensure that the disaster is remembered in a dignified manner.<sup>130</sup> This memorialisation continues to unite a community affected by disaster. That community was defined, albeit in different ways, within the mass media and specialist publications like *City Link*. Though before the disaster the city's British Asian population was growing in size as well as cultural, civic, and commercial importance, the fire helped to forge a multicultural civic identity in Bradford against a backdrop of significant social unrest. While racialised disparities remain, this multicultural civic identity continues to be performed and reinforced through local newspaper and television coverage of the major anniversaries.<sup>131</sup>

The Bradford City stadium fire was the first in a series of disasters which unfolded live—or near live—on television and became a mass media event. As the 1980s wore on, the accelerating frequency of mass casualty disasters came to define the decade, and their media reporting shaped the way these tragedies were understood and experienced. People's knowledge and understanding of the fire was influenced by their personal experiences and connections, however close, with the city, football club and the supporters who were injured or killed during the disaster, but was also clearly shaped by media coverage from newspapers, radio and television. Media coverage certainly varied in terms of its quality and sympathy, with some publishing graphic images false stories. As the emotional environment shifted, the stories published by national newspapers became less sensationalist, but the legacies of this reporting lived on in some people's understanding of the disaster, and in the everyday experiences of the survivors and bereaved. This was especially clear on the pages of *City Link*, through which people affected by the disaster described how their grief was continuing long after others expected them to have moved on and was even heightened by the reporting of subsequent tragedies.

The Bradford City fire raises significant—and largely unresolved—questions about the efficacy of the state's retreat from enacting life-saving regulations and investment. It occurred on the cusp of the Conservative government opening consultations on its proposed reform of fire precautions, seeking to reduce the level of government regulation of public safety to a minimum by introducing a greater degree of choice and flexibility for individual firms and industry bodies to regulate their own affairs.<sup>132</sup> The legacy of the subsequent public inquiry chaired by Sir Oliver Popplewell was more pronounced in his recommendations to improve crowd control by addressing the game's widely reported hooliganism crisis. Many of Popplewell's key recommendations, including all-seater stands, greater use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) to identify troublemakers, and installation of new turnstiles and stairways, were adopted in the £2.6 million rebuilding of Valley Parade, and Popplewell himself was invited to open the stadium in December 1986.<sup>133</sup>

## Notes

1. Bradford City Official Souvenir Programme, 11 May 1985, 2.
2. University of Bradford Special Collections (UBSC): POP 6/18, Popplewell Inquiry on Safety at Sports Grounds, 5 June 1985, 44.
3. *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1985, 5.
4. For example, Sharpe et al., "Treatment of Burns Casualties," 945–8; Sharpe and Foo, "Management of Burns in Major Disasters," 41–4; Vaghela, "Plastic Surgery and Burns Disasters," 755–63; and Turnbull, "The Bradford Stadium Fire," 54–73.
5. For example, Taylor, "Putting the Boot into a Working-Class Sport," 171–191; Walvin, *The People's Game*; Taylor, *Association Game*; Darby, Johnes and Mellor, "Football Disasters: A Conceptual Framework," 125–33; Johnes, "Heads in the Sand," 134–51; Baker, "Have They Forgotten Bolton?" 120–51; and Warner, "Working-Class Culture and Practice," 145–200.
6. *T&A Supplement*, 11 May 1985. All local and regional news stories are taken from the Bradford Local Studies Library scrapbooks and as such are not paginated.
7. Taylor, *Association Game*, 251–2, 318–19; and Walvin, *Football and the Decline of Britain*, 6–7.
8. Popplewell's interim report deals exclusively with the Bradford and Birmingham events; the final report responds to the Heyssel disaster. On criticism of the inquiry's terms of reference, see *Yorkshire Post* (YP), 14 May 1985.

9. *Firefighter*, Oct. 1991, 11; Newburn, *Disaster and after*, 9; Robinson, "Collaboration In, Collaboration Out," 416–17; McLean and Johnes, *Aberfan*, 96–97; and Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen, "Not an act of God," 105–22.
10. University of Sussex Special Collections (USSC): SxMOA2/28/1, Spring 1989 Part 1: Disasters, 13 February 1989. Observing the 80s. [http://www.massobs.org.uk/images/Directives/Spring\\_1989\\_Directive.pdf](http://www.massobs.org.uk/images/Directives/Spring_1989_Directive.pdf).
11. On the developmental state, see Edgerton, *Rise and Fall of the British Nation*; and Wetherell, *Foundations*.
12. McLean and Johnes, *Aberfan*, 96–97; Brooke, "Living in 'New Times'"; and Conboy and Bingham, *Tabloid Century*.
13. Jemphrey and Berrington, "Surviving the Media," 469–483.
14. Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday," 113.
15. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*; and Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*.
16. Cushion, "Journalism and Current Affairs," 509.
17. Rozario, "Making Progress," 32, 35.
18. Langer, *Tabloid Television*, 76–7; ITV Archives Y/0182/0001, 'The Bradford City Fire: A Special Report', first broadcast 11 May 1985 on Yorkshire Television, production notes and synopsis.
19. *T&A*, 29 August 1985; ITV Archives: Y/0253/0006, 'Calendar Magazine: Bradford City—A Year of Healing', first broadcast 9 May 1986, available at Yorkshire Film Archive YFA6097, <http://www.yorkshirefilmarchive.com/film/calendar-magazine-bradford-city-year-healing>, last accessed 21 October 2019.
20. Dixon, "What is the History of Anger a History of?" 1–34.
21. Most pointedly, this includes Martin Fletcher's thorough criticism of the club and its then chairman, Stafford Heginbotham, published to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the fire; see Fletcher, 56.
22. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1274, Letter from Mr and Mrs T., n.d.
23. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1266, Letter from Malcolm B., n.d.
24. Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, 263–78.
25. Williams, "Doing Media History," 36–7.
26. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1273, Letter from Debbie S., 24 May 1985.
27. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1265, Letter from Joanne H., 13 May 1985.
28. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1271, Letter from David P., n.d.
29. Ahmed and Siddiqi, "Healing Through Art Therapy," s28–s29.
30. Plaisance, *Media Ethics*, 114–16.
31. *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 May 1985, 1; *The Times*, 13 May 1985, 1.
32. *News of the World*, 12 May 1985, 1; *Daily Star*, 13 May 1985, 15; *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1985, 6.
33. *Sunday People*, 12 May, 4.
34. *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1985, 1, 28; The National Archives, London (TNA): PREM 19/1448, Maxwell to Thatcher, 12 May 1985.
35. Pendleton, *Paraders*, 78–9.
36. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1279, unnamed card, n.d.
37. Interview with James Turnbull, Ilkley, 22 January 2019.
38. *T&A*, 15 May 1985.
39. BUSC: POP 6/19, Popplewell Inquiry on Safety at Sports Grounds, Andrew Collins, QC, 5 June 1985, 1. See also *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 7 June 1985.
40. *T&A*, 14, 24 May 1985.
41. On the use of photographs as evidence, see Hanna, "Photographs and 'Truth'," 457–80.
42. *Daily Star*, 13 May 1985, pp. 1, 4.
43. Canter, ed., *Fires and Human Behaviour*; and Hodgkinson and Stewart, *Coping with Catastrophe*, 50–52.
44. Cocking and Drury, "Talking about Hillsborough," 86–99; and Drury, Novelli and Stott, "Representing Crowd Behaviour," 18–37.
45. Popplewell, *Interim Report*, 14, 36.

46. Taylor, *Association Game*, 318–19; *Shoot*, 11 May 1985, 5; *Daily Mail*, 15 March 1985, 1–2; *The Police Review*, 22 March 1985, 576, 581.
47. See note 38 above.
48. *Daily Star*, 14 May 1985, 1–2; *The Sun*, 14 May 1985, 1–2; *Daily Mail*, 14 May 1985, 1–2, 6.
49. T&A, 20 May 2012 Jun. 1985.
50. Pantti, “Disaster News and Public Emotions,” 221–36.
51. *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1985, 1; 14 May 1985, 1; *Daily Star*, 13 May 1985, 2–3; *Daily Express*, 13 May 1985, 2–3; T&A, 13 May 1985; 12 June 1985; *Fire*, Jun. 1985, 9.
52. See note 31 above.
53. *Sunday People*, 12 May 1985, 2–3; *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1985, 1.
54. *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1985, 2.
55. See, for example, *Daily Star*, 13 May 1985, 5. On tabloid readers, Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, 187–95. On British Asian participation in sports and presence in crowds, see Panayi, *An Immigration History of Britain*, 292–3. For photographs of the crowd, see National Science and Media Museum (NSMM) C1/56 2010–5011/1-2, Photographs of the Bradford City Stadium Disaster.
56. T&A, 17 May 1985; *Sun*, 17 May 1985, 5; *Daily Star*, 17 May 1985, 5; *Daily Mirror*, 25 May 1985, 7; *Daily Mail*, 17 August 1985, 2.
57. T&A, 18, 25, 27 May 1985; 25 March 1986; *YEP*, 12 May 1986; Fletcher, 56, 92–3.
58. *Daily Mirror*, 15 May, 4; T&A, 27 May 1985.
59. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1273, Letter from Cecily W., 16 December 1985.
60. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1274, Letter from S.J.N., 14 May 1985.
61. Pierre, “The New Cross Fire,” 162–75.
62. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1279, Card from V.F., Parent of the New Cross Fire, n.d.
63. *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1985, 1; 14 May 1985, 1.
64. *Police Review*, 17 May 1985, 999.
65. Ewen, *Fighting Fires*, 84–89; and Price, *Everyday Heroism*, 176–9.
66. For example, *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1985, 2; *Daily Star*, 13 May 1985, 4.
67. *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1985, 2.
68. *Sun*, 15 May 1985, 4. See also *YP*, 15 May 1985; *Daily Mirror*, 15 May 1985, 5; *Daily Star*, 16 May 1985, 2; *Police Review*, 24 May 1985, 1051.
69. *Sun*, 15 May 1985, 4.
70. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1277, Letter from Kevin S., 23 May 1985.
71. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1274, Letter from Richard, 13 May 1985.
72. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1271, Letter from David M., 19 July 1985.
73. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1274, Letter from Lara L., n.d.
74. See note 14 above.
75. Firth, *Four Minutes to Hell*, 112–113; and Conboy and Bingham, *Tabloid Century*, 19–20.
76. Interview with Dr John Settle, North Yorkshire, 30 November 2018.
77. Firth, *Four Minutes to Hell*, 113–115.
78. Price, *Everyday Heroism*, 9. For newspaper coverage of David’s story, all dated 14 May 1985: *Daily Mail*, 18–19; *Sun*, 4–5; *Daily Mirror*, 3. Local and regional coverage also appeared on 14 May.
79. Taylor, “Putting the Boot,” 173–4.
80. For example, Pantti, “Disaster News,” 228–9.
81. T&A, 17 May 1985; T&A 29 July 1985; *YEP*, 29 July 1985.
82. Robinson, “Putting the Charity Back into Charity Singles,” 405–25.
83. T&A, 20, 24 May 1985; *YP*, 17 January 1986. A further £2000 was donated by the international copyright owners of the song; see WYASB: 54D85, Box 1273, Letter from Chappell International, 19 February 1985.
84. T&A, 14, 18 May 1985.
85. For example, the 18 May 1985 issue of the weekly *Match* magazine was devoted to the FA Cup Final, and the Bradford fire only covered in its following issue, as part of a special report into stadium safety: 25 May 1985, 13. The Prince and Princes of Wales’ visit to Pinderfields



- Burns Unit was widely covered: *The Sun*, 21 May 1985, 5; *Daily Star*, 21 May 1985, 5; *Daily Mail*, 21 May 1985, 9.
86. TNA: PREM19/1448, Bradford City Football Club Fire, May 1985; *Daily Mail*, 20 May 1985, 9; *The Sun*, 20 May 1985, 2.
  87. T&A, 13 & 14 May 1985; Russell, "Selling Bradford," 49–68.
  88. Gunn, "Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism," 849–69.
  89. See, for example, Khan, "Migration and Social Stress," 37–57; and Willis, *Lovers and Strangers*, 242.
  90. On the upward mobility of Bradford's Pakistani communities, see Willis, *Lovers and Strangers*, 324–5.
  91. T&A, 13, 21, 27 May 1985, 12 September 1985; *Daily Mail*, 14 May 1985, 6; *Daily Mirror*, 22 May 1985, 11; *Sunday Times Magazine*, 20 April 1986, 82.
  92. Wahl-Jorgensen, "From Letters to Tweeters," 571–81.
  93. See note 38 above.
  94. Ibid.
  95. T&A, 20 May 1985.
  96. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1277, Letter from Max Madden, n.d.
  97. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1279, Letter from M.A.S., 8 July 1985.
  98. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1273, Letter from Margaret S., n.d.
  99. WYASB: 54D85, Box 1271, Letter from L.S., n.d.
  100. Conboy, *Tabloid Britain*, 87.
  101. For example, T&A, 21 May 1985, 27 May 1985.
  102. T&A, 21 May 1985, 22 May 1985, 24 May 1985.
  103. Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen, "Not an act of God," 105–22.
  104. T&A, 12 June 1985.
  105. USSC: SxMOA2/1/28/1/1/81, Mass Observer C108 (06/03/1989). Observing the 80s. [https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0Bz-9hs\\_TdzGPZ3JmdGtkaEtwNU0](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0Bz-9hs_TdzGPZ3JmdGtkaEtwNU0).
  106. Robinson et al., "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain," 268–304.
  107. Newburn, *Disaster and after*, 9.
  108. The Link Centre was established in the 1970s by the Bradford Social Services Department. Located on the first floor of a terraced house in the city centre, it employed one full-time and one part-time social worker; Pat Cummings, the Centre's co-ordinator, was a specialist disaster counsellor.
  109. Newburn, *Disaster and after*, 9–10.
  110. WYASB: BMD4, Malcolm Pritchard, Janet Reynolds and Michael Stewart, 'Introducing City Link', *City Link*, issue 1, October 1985, 1.
  111. Ibid. In order to respect this anonymity, where individuals directly affected by the fire have been quoted below, they are identified using only their first name (if given) and initial. Other public figures who wrote of their own, past experiences for the newspaper have been identified.
  112. WYASB: BMD4, Jean S., 'An Outstretched Hand', *City Link*, issue 4, c. May 1986, 2.
  113. WYASB: BMD4, Gill S., 'In memory of Fred and Edith H.', *City Link*, issue 4, c. May 1986, 6.
  114. WYASB: BMD4, Letter by Joyce J., *City Link*, issue 6, c. April/May 1987, 5.
  115. WYASB: BMD4, Connie W., 'On Grieving', *City Link*, issue 2, c. December 1985, 2. Similar statements were made in other contributions to the newsletter, including in one by the wife of a Bradford-born racing driver who had been burned following a crash in 1966; see Shirley Procter, 'Moving On', *City Link*, issue 3, c. February/March 1986, 4.
  116. WYASB: BMD4, 'Harry L. writes', *City Link*, issue 7, n.d., p. 4; WYASB: BMD4, Letter by Joyce J., *City Link*, issue 6, c. April/May 1987, 5.
  117. White, 'Psychiatric study of patients with severe burns injuries', *British Medical Journal*, 13 February 1982 as cited in WYASB: BMD4, Bradford City Fire Disaster: long term strategy—a discussion document, 11 June 1985, 4.
  118. WYASB: BMD4, Letter from Mrs Petty, *City Link*, issue 3, c. February/March 1986, 5.
  119. WYASB: BMD4, Peter Procter, 'Twenty Years On ...', *City Link*, issue 1, October 1985, 4–5.



120. WYASB: BMD4, Simon Weston, 'Simon's War ...', *City Link*, issue 3, c. February/March 1986, 2; Pauline Hatfield, '... Pauline's War', *City Link*, issue 3, c. February/March 1986, 3.
121. WYASB, BMD4, Editorial, *City Link*, final issue, 1988, 1.
122. *Ibid.*, 4.
123. WYASB: BMD4, Patricia Cummings, Disaster work done at the Link Centre, May 1985-May 1990, n.d.
124. WYASB: BMD4, Newspaper clipping: 'Helping hand at Link Centre', *Star*, 22 January 1991.
125. WYASB: BMD4, Report by Pat Cummings, May 1990.
126. On the Hillsborough Disaster and its aftermath, see Taylor, *The Association Game*, 338–45; and Scraton, "Death on the Terraces," 183–200.
127. *Bradford City v Lincoln City, Official Programme in Aid of the Hillsborough/Liverpool Disaster Appeal Fund*, 23 April 1989, np.
128. *Target*, 8 May 1986; *T&A* and *YP*, 12 May 1986.
129. *YEP*, 7 January 1987; see also WYASB: WYB283 Box 1, *Bradford City vs England XI Official Souvenir Programme*, 2.
130. Dewhirst, *History of Bradford A.F.C. in Objects*, 290.
131. For example, 'Bradford Remembers 25 years on ...', *T&A supplement*, 11 May 2010. The 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary memorial service broke with tradition and was held online during the national Covid-19 lockdown: Bradford City F.C., 'Online Memorial Service to be Held on Monday', [www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk/news/2020/may/online-memorial-service-to-be-held-on-monday/](http://www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk/news/2020/may/online-memorial-service-to-be-held-on-monday/).
132. See, for example, the comments of Lord Young of Graffham in *Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Lords)*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 466, 16 July 1985, col. 615.
133. Pendlebury, *Paraders*, 92–3; *T&A*, 2 December 1986.

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