

# Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True History – Coverage Report



You can listen to the interview [here](#)

# RadioTimes

Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story Monday 9.00pm BBC

## HAVE I GOT FAKE NEWS FOR YOU

In an age of "alternative facts", what and who can we truly believe? Ian Hislop investigates



**"Trump uses the phrase Fake News to describe stories that are critical of him – and in most cases true"**

THE SCREEN CRACK'D Ian Hislop dips a toe into the muddy waters of Fake News

COUPLE OF MONTHS ago, a package arrived in my office containing a set of Christmas spoons and a letter from an elderly lady explaining that she wanted me to have them. I was perplexed, until some days later my assistant pointed out that my Wikipedia entry dealt with the fact that I was a collector of antique spoons. I am not. I don't collect anything, let alone spoons, and I don't know why anyone would go to the trouble of making this up. It was Fake News, not a particularly sinister example. I'm pleased to say, but it had fooled a genuine person into believing something online that was nonsense and then acting on it in the real world. This was clearly wrong, and I obviously kept the spoons and sold them off for a huge amount of money. No, that is also Fake News. I sent them back. But it did remind me how easy it is to get lie up and running. Fake News seems to be getting more powerful, not just making people buy things but influencing elections and subverting democratic processes around the world. I wanted to make a programme looking at whether this has historically been a problem or whether our age is uniquely susceptible, because of the internet and social media. It soon became obvious that Fake News isn't new and people have been worrying about it for a long time. There's also a clear parallel between the periods following the invention of the steam-powered printing press and invention of the internet. Academic point out that mass-circulation newspapers starting in the 18th century were similar in effect to the new digital media in the 21st. Both were initially seen as democratic and populist, opening up the news to the ordinary members of the public, but both produced an explosion of Fake News. When I asked historian and academic Anita Tauer from Columbia University why this might be, she came up with a remarkably unacademic answer: "Lies sell". And nothing had ever before sold quite as well as the New York Sun's scoop in 1835 about the world's biggest telescope discovering life on the Moon. The Sun revolved in deadly serious prose that the lunar surface was populated by well-legged beavers, unicorns and flying man-bats. The public went wild for it and the book lasted for weeks before it was rumbled. The Sun and all the other papers who had copied the story made a lot of money and the public didn't seem to mind that they'd been fooled. They wanted the story and they were entertained, particularly the bits about the beavers and bat-women indulging in shamesome behaviour. "People want to be entertained as well as informed," said the defenders of

## THE INHABITANTS OF THE MOON,

AS VIEWED THROUGH THE TELESCOPE OF HIS GREAT GRANDFATHER



**19TH-CENTURY FAKES** Above: in 1835, New York paper The Sun ran a hoax about life on the Moon. Left: in 1916, fake news about the sinking of a US warship and believes what they read online instead. And yet online is where the Fake News really is, particularly in the extraordinary world of the American "alternative right" – the same adjective is used by Trump to describe his version of events as "alternative facts".

**"The Moon was populated by man-bats and unicorns"**

FAKE NEWS IN NEW YORK In Washington I interviewed the delightful owner of a pizza restaurant who was targeted by social media trolls for helping with a Democratic Party fund-raising event, who then built up a vast conspiracy theory about his restaurant being the centre of a Democratic Party psychiatric empire. The evidence for this was laughable, including the revelation that cheese pizza has the same initials as child pornography. The Fake News grew with one post claiming that this poor man's name, James Adefianis, was code for "James Is a pig". It was still picked up by more and more sites and platforms – even to Reddit to Twitter to Facebook to YouTube – and was eventually retweeted by the son of Trump's National Security Advisor. Despite being 100 per cent nonsense, Alex Jones, broadcast these lies and urged his viewers to investigate the restaurant. So one day a man with a rifle walked into Adefianis's restaurant looking for a basement full of child victims of Hillary Clinton. Fortunately, the only thing he shot before being arrested was a computer. This was an extraordinary metaphor for the whole Pizzagate phenomenon, as he literally shot the messenger of Fake News and then told the police he'd been given "snily intel". The programme isn't just about America; there are sections about Russia and even Britain where we are

Circulation: 519,603



3 October 2019 20p/25c

SINCE 1875  
140 YEARS  
OF THE WAR CRY

THE SALVATION ARMY

# WAR CRY

## Have I got fake NEWS for you

IAN HISLOP INVESTIGATES THE HISTORY OF MISINFORMATION FOR TV DOCUMENTARY

**MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND**  
Event encourages investment in environment

**'MY DAUGHTER WENT DAYS WITHOUT EATING'**  
Caring for children living with anorexia

**STORE'S VALUES SPEAK VOLUMES**  
The bookshop that supports its community

# History fakes the headlines

Will truth be told? asks Sarah Olowofoyeku

Ian Hislop investigates the history of fake news

**EXTRA**, extra! Read all about it! The term fake news currently has a high circulation, but a new documentary reveals that there's nothing new about it. The truth comes out on Monday (7 October) in Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True History, on BBC Four.

"Fake news was a problem long before our own uncertain and confused times," Ian reports, as the programme begins. He goes on to explain the origins of fake news, which hark back to the beginnings of mass-market media in the 19th century, when newspapers intentionally published stories that weren't true.

The documentary looks at the current fake news crisis through the lens of history, Ian unpacks the motivations for spreading fake news, which include profit, power, politics and prejudice. He chats to a manufacturer of fake news, as well as with someone whose business has been targeted as a result of wild rumours disguised as official news.

While each of his interviewees has different experiences, they share the opinion that fake news is dangerous and that somebody – whether individuals or tech companies – needs to be responsible for verifying the truth.

Such verification, however, is not always straightforward. The documentary features the recent phenomenon of 'deepfake', an AI-based technology that can be used to create or alter video content to portray an event that did not actually occur.

It may be frightening to learn about all the ways in which we can be deceived, and how, with technology, fake news seems to be on the increase. It is hard to know what the truth really is and it can feel impossible to know who to trust.

The problem of truth is not breaking news. The spread of false ideas goes back even further than the 19th century. As Ian Hislop suggests, perhaps the only way not to be deceived is to trust nothing and no one and to question everything.

One book that many people have questioned over the years but that many have found to be true is the Bible. And one story covered within its pages is that of the original doubting Thomas.

Thomas was one of Jesus' closest friends. However, when the news broke that days after his crucifixion Jesus had been raised by God from death to life, he wasn't buying it.

But rather than condemn him for his scepticism, the Bible reports that Jesus personally met up with Thomas and his other followers, proving that he was alive. He said to Thomas: "Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27 New International Version).

Many Christians have found that when they have experienced doubt, God has shown up and helped them to believe. If we find it hard to trust God's message of his love for us, we can be reassured that he can prove himself to be true.

And that's good news for everyone.

Circulation: 45,000

History

HISTORY ON THE BOX

“Private Eye was listed as ‘fake news’ on an academic site that was used by the American government”



Private Eye editor and long-standing *Have I Got News for You* panellist **IAN HISLOP** tells us about his upcoming BBC Four documentary, which explores the phenomenon of fake news from a historical perspective

Your programme mainly focuses on the US. Why is that?

The central thesis is that the adoption of the steam printing press in America meant you got three times as many newspapers for the first time. And this technological leap is equivalent to the internet providing a very different platform today - huge numbers and different sorts of readers.

The second reason is that the fake news explosion started in America. Although the term itself was essentially popularised by Trump, who happened to describe anything he didn't like, the fake news we're talking about consists of deliberately disseminated stories.

You start with a story about flying but people on the Moon, featured in *New York* tabloid *The Sun* in the 1930s. That's amusing, but things soon get more serious. Why does this happen? People print this stuff because you own and it obviously makes a great deal of money. Then proprietors think: "If I can fool people over the Moon then I can probably start influencing them over something more serious."

The Spanish-American War [when the US invaded Cuba in 1898] was essentially started by newspapers competing for circulation. That is the point where you get people trying to influence opinion for political ends, and that becomes more dangerous.

The film argues that fake news causes significant problems for the authorities...

When British propaganda says: "The Han is so beautifully boiling down cadavers", in the First World War, people believe it, because it's our cheap printing. But when the Second World War comes, when some-

thing really horrific is happening and there are factories with human bodies inside, there's a resistance to believing it because you've poisoned the well of the truth.

Did this make you think afresh about your work as a satirist? It did make me think, I genuinely find it disturbing that people say what is blatantly propaganda or fake news is 'satire'. As a satirist, you are announcing what your intention is. That's part of the problem with the internet as a platform - things are taken out of context. If you buy *Private Eye*, you know what we're doing. But if you take out a headline and put it online, there is a possibility that someone might believe it.

In fact, *Private Eye* was once listed as 'fake news' on an academic site that was used by the American government, which really made me laugh. I had to explain that I didn't have a source for the piece we'd run about the turkey as Thanksgiving approached Trump, because it didn't happen.

*Ian Hislop's Fake News* A True History is scheduled to be shown on BBC Four on 7 October



Ian Hislop's documentary fits the lid on the history of fake news and its real world consequences

Circulation: 94,583

DAILY STAR

Fake it until you make it



★ YOU might be forgiven for thinking the age of the internet or US President Donald Trump invented the idea of "fake news". But it seems to date back centuries, according to a new show on TV tonight, which sees journalist Ian Hislop examine 200 years of misinformation.

★ JAMES MOORE recalls some of the biggest whoppers from years gone by...

1 MAN BATS ON THE MOON: In 1835, news broke in the *New York Sun* that astronomer Sir John Herschel had looked through his telescope and observed human creatures with wings like bats moving around and unicorns roaming the Moon's surface. But Herschel knew nothing about it. The tales had been invented by writer Richard Adams Locke.

2 NOT PHARAOH: Roman ruler Octavian painted slurs about rival Mark Antony's drinking and womanising habits on coins and even produced a dodgy will to turn citizens against the general. However, Antony

he fell for fake news that his lover Cleopatra, played by Elizabeth Taylor below with Richard Burton as Antony, was dead - put about by the Egyptian queen herself!

3 LOCH OF NONSENSE: A photo supposedly of the Loch Ness Monster appeared in 1934, allegedly showing the creature's neck and head. It was exposed in 1975 as having been made using a toy submarine.

4 JUST MYTHICAL: In 1920, Sherlock Holmes author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote an article using a picture of fairies citing them as evidence of psychic phenomena. The photo had

by Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths. They admitted it was a fake in the 1980s.

5 ALIEN INVASION: In 1938, the news bulletin style of a US radio drama called *War Of The Worlds* from Orson Welles, based on HG Wells' novel, caused panic in America. Some thought it was a real emergency broadcast about Martians landing. Fake stories spread from listeners who had missed the announcement that it was all fictional.

6 PASTA JOKE: In 1957, the BBC ran an item about growing spaghetti on trees.

★ Ian Hislop's *Fake News: A True History* airs on BBC Four, 9pm tonight

ANOTHER FINE NESS: Just a toy sub. Inset, Hislop

examines 200 years of misinformation.

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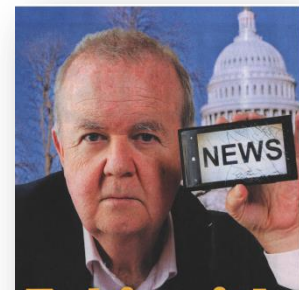
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TV & Satellite week



Faking it!

Ian Hislop reveals the history and dangers of fake news

NEW FACTUAL: Ian Hislop's *Fake News: A True History* Monday, BBC4 HD, 9pm

These days, it seems as though the phrase 'fake news' is never out of the headlines. But as *Private Eye* editor and *Have I Got News for You* sub-editor Ian Hislop discovers in his fascinating new documentary, fake news was actually around centuries before President Trump started bandying the term about.

Here, Hislop, 59, reveals more about his findings...

Fake news has been around a long time... In 1835 an American newspaper claimed that unicorns lived on the moon.

We're all more aware of fake news because of President Trump... but when he talks about fake news, what he means is real news that he doesn't like! What I mean by fake news is information that people know isn't true, which they deliberately disseminate for their own purposes.

People will believe anything they read online that some kid in a bedroom has put up... But then when authoritative sources say something's happened, they'll say, 'How can we tell?' Losing that



Donald Trump has popularised the term

I mean an American who makes up fake news... You think, 'Why are you telling thousands of people that the Pope supports Trump?' Is it funny? No, people believe it.

We have to stop believing fake news stories just because we want them to be true... And social media have to be treated as publishers and not just platforms. They have to accept responsibility for people telling lies online.

Fake news can have huge consequences... In 1896, William Randolph Hearst, one of the first big media barons, more or less started a war with a fake news story to boost circulation. He claimed the Spanish were responsible for a huge bomb blowing up a ship called the USS Maine, but in truth the ship blew itself up after a fire.

Circulation: 303,425

Circulation: 89,696



**TV Times Documentaries**

# Have got fake news for you!

**Ian Hislop on his surprise at discovering how the spread of baseless stories is as old as the media itself...**

**NEW FACTUAL**  
**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story**  
MONDAY 8BC1 5pm

Here, Ian, 59, tells *TV Times* the frightening impact fake news can have on democracy and reveals what to expect when *Have I Got News For You* turns 30 next year.

**What would your definition of fake news be?**  
Well, what I mean by fake news is information that people know isn't true which they deliberately disseminate for their own purposes – it's quite sinister really. That's different to Donald Trump's definition, though. When he talks about fake news, what he's talking about is real news that he doesn't like! He has this rather brilliant strategy of saying anything he doesn't agree with is fake news. He's an extraordinary pursuer of fake news himself, but then accuses everyone else of doing it!

**Why did you decide to look into fake news for this documentary?**  
I'd done a couple of these kinds of programmes where you look at an issue like immigration or benefits and you think, 'How we've been here before and is there anything to be learnt from last time?' When it comes to fake news, it seems to be that this vast explosion of digital technology is very similar to the creation of the first huge electric printing presses in New York in the 19th Century. Suddenly a million people who'd never read newspapers before were now reading them, but they were just full of stuff that was complete nonsense!

**In 1833 a US newspaper called The Sun even claimed that unicorns lived on the moon! Tell us more about that...**  
Yes, and the fact that it was a paper called *The Sun* was just so funny! They retailed this extraordinary story of unicorns and bat-like men on the moon and they made an unbelievable amount of money. Another one was in 1898 when William Randolph Hearst, one of the first big media barons, more or less started the Spanish-American war with a fake news story to boost circulation. He claimed the Spanish were responsible for a huge bomb blowing up a ship called the *USS Maine*, but in truth the ship blew itself up after a coal fire.

**These days it's social media that is responsible for the creation and distribution of fake news. What are the dangers?**  
Of course democracy is at risk. It's rather terrifying because we've got to the point where people will believe anything they read online that some kid in a bedroom has put up. But when authorities

source say something's happened they'll say, 'How can we tell?' I want to shake people and say other things happen or they don't, events take place or not, it's not just a matter of opinion! Losing that idea of what's true and what's not is incredibly dangerous.

**So how can we stop the spread of fake news?**  
As readers, we must stop believing in news stories just because we want them to be true. The way people coped in the past was essentially to gawp up as readers and say, 'I won't read any old rubbish.' Also social media and the internet have to be treated as publishers and not just platforms. They have to accept responsibility for people taking lies online.

**Have I Got News For You turns 30 next year and you've been team captain since the very beginning! Are there any anniversary plans for the show?**  
Not that I know of, nobody's told me, anyway! I imagine a lavish BBC party with one crisp and

'a single cupcake! No, I think everyone will probably ignore it. We had quite a troubled last series. We had a programme pulled and then I got blanked out with a little black square when I was talking about Boris Johnson in the last episode, so it was a bit of a roller-coaster. The show is always enormous fun, but you never quite know how popular we are with our commissioning editor.

**It must be hard to plan ahead as the news changes so quickly...**  
Yes, it's so difficult to predict anything now. Anyone could be PM by the 30th anniversary show. It could be Paul Merton! We even had a period where the news was moving so quickly that the floor manager, Steve, kept coming on in the middle of recordings and saying this person or that person has resigned. But it's certainly great material!

HASSAN DORNIS

**IAN HISLOP'S FAKE NEWS: A TRUE HISTORY IS PREVIEWED ON P52-53**

Circulation: 141,596

**FACTUAL** **BACK IN MONDAY**  
**IAN HISLOP'S FAKE NEWS: A TRUE STORY**  
One-off

Donald Trump is always going on about it and the internet is littered with some of the worst excesses, but fake news isn't a modern thing. It's been around for decades as Ian Hislop discovers in this thought-provoking documentary.

I felt it would be interesting to do a programme about fake news that had a historical parallel and shows how the pattern repeats itself, says Ian.

Finding echoes from the past that resonate today, he links the mass-market news boom in 19th century America to the invention of the internet.

'Lots of sensationalist newspapers were circulated and no checks were made on any of the stories, so journalists just wrote complete nonsense,' says Ian. 'In a way, it's similar to what's online today. There are libel laws for the press, but it's so difficult to police the web.'

One of the most popular stories from the early 1800s was in a populist New York tabloid that ran a piece about

causing the loss of 260 lives. Hearst's newspaper, the *New York Journal* implied the *Spanish* were responsible, despite no evidence.

The story resulted in record sales of the newspaper and, nine weeks later, on the back of a wave of patriotic fervour, America went to war with Spain.

While in the States, Ian meets Christopher Blair, dubbed 'the godfather of fake news,' who delights in posting stories online that he calls 'satire,' but which many people believe.

He was responsible for one of the most popular online stories during the last US presidential election when he posted an article saying the Pope backs Trump,' says Ian. 'It wasn't true and not particularly funny, but there were plenty of people who believed it.'

One of the most remarkable fallouts from a fake news story was when hacked emails from Hillary Clinton's campaign manager were published. It led to a conspiracy theory they contained coded messages connecting officials of the Democratic Party with a child sex abuse ring, and the owner of a Washington restaurant, where they'd meet, became the target for online hate.

It was madness. Complete nonsense,' says Ian. 'But things got very dark when a gunman turned up at the restaurant looking to save the children: With images as prone to fakery as much as words, Ian also gets a taste of what it's like to be 'fleeplaked,' which results in him performing an eye-opening ballet to the *Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy* Or so it would seem...

So, has Ian been the victim of fake news himself?

'There was a 'fact' on the web saying I was born in Zambias,' says Ian, who was actually born in Swansea. 'That would have been bag news to my mother!'

Jim Maloney

# The FACT of FICTION

Ian Hislop looks at bogus news stories that suckered people in...

**Have I Got News For You returns to BBC1 this Friday**

Just for click: Ian Hislop and Christopher Blair at work

**IAN HISLOP'S FAKE NEWS: A TRUE HISTORY IS PREVIEWED ON P52-53**

Circulation: 87,543

# Ephraim Hardcastle

Email: john.mcentee@dailymail.co.uk

BBC viewers will see Ian Hislop dance like Fred Astaire in his forthcoming Fake News: A True Story. 'As you can see I am now ready for Strictly,' he says. Hislop credits visual artist Eric Drass, who explains: 'This is created using a piece of software which learns your face known as Deep Fake, generally used for pornographic clips. You take the face of a famous actress and you map it into the body of a pornographic star and you send it out as a secret sex tape!'

## Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story

BBC Four, 9pm

In this documentary, *Private Eye* editor Ian Hislop traces the origins of fake news, from the birth of the mass media in late 19th-century New York through tabloids like the *Sun* to today's social media-fuelled fake-news frenzy. An illuminating look at our wilful misunderstanding of the truth. **AK**



True lies: the *Private Eye* editor squares up to the news

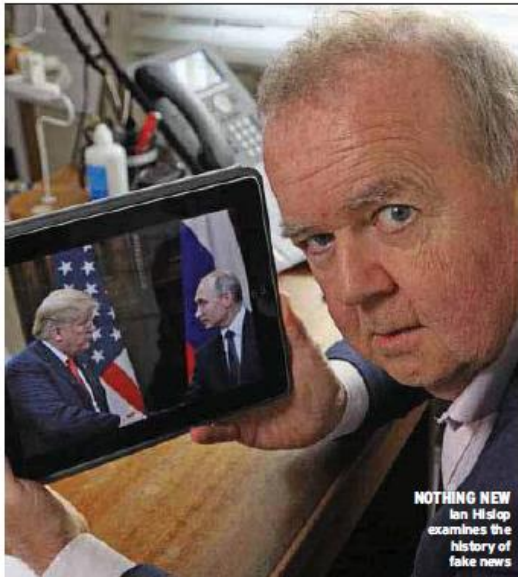
**IAN HISLOP'S FAKE NEWS: A TRUE STORY**  
BBC Four, 9.00pm

"Obviously you would never find fakery on the BBC and I would never mislead you," says Ian Hislop midway through this film, before embarking on a world-class, tour de force solo ballet routine. Every blink, smile and frown on his face appears to be his own, even as his body moves like Carlos Acosta beneath him.

It is a superb, hilarious and deeply troubling example of deep fake video manipulation (currently the subject of BBC's *The Capture*), and just one highlight in a film that is more than a history of fakery in the media, though it is that, too. From some of the earliest fake news stories

of the mid-19th century, when newspaper technology allowed people to be duped on a mass scale for the first time - usually to boost circulation - Hislop explores the methodology of faking news stories and the motivations behind those who do it. He comes up with many bizarre examples (stories of Hillary Clinton's secret child-sex trafficking ring beneath a Washington pizzeria might be funnier had they not resulted in an actual shooting) and many more where powerful people and unscrupulous politicians spread lies to suit their own ends. Essential viewing for our times.  
**Gerard O'Donovan**

## RadioTimes



### Ian Hislop's Fake News: a True Story 9.00pm BBC4

**DOCUMENTARY** Ian Hislop looks sceptically at Christopher Blair, an unapologetic purveyor of fake news, or rather, made-up nonsense that's simply designed, claims Blair, to provoke the American alt-right into a frothing frenzy. It's all done, he says, in the name of satire.

Of course, Hislop knows a thing or two about satire, and he is unconvinced, worrying that sending such pap into the universe means even sensible people doubt the truth of real and actual news stories.

In a jolly, occasionally serious history of fake news, which of course didn't begin with Donald Trump, Hislop goes back to 1835 and an American newspaper's pile of piffle about telescopes trained on the Moon spotting herds of bison and "flying man-bats". It was a sensation as crowds thronged the street outside the paper's offices, demanding more. Thus an important lesson was learnt: fake news sells. **AG**  
See feature page 22

**NOTHING NEW**  
Ian Hislop examines the history of fake news



### Ian Hislop's Fake News

● **FACTUAL** / 9pm / BBC4

**NEW** Thanks to Donald Trump, the phrase 'fake news' is rarely out of the headlines these days. But as Ian Hislop reveals, it's nothing new. He unearths historical fake news scoops, including a lurid tale of UK fake-news mongering during World War One, when stories were spread about German factories manufacturing soap from corpses. Scary stuff! **★★★★ HD**

**FACT OR FICTION**  
**Ian Hislop's Fake News:**  
**A True Story, 9pm, BBC4**

A GLEEFUL and thought-provoking romp through the history of fake news, in which Hislop merrily shines a light on made-up stories from the past to see what they can tell us about the fake news crisis today. These include the New York Sun's salacious 'reports' of life on the Moon in the 1830s.

**Mirror**



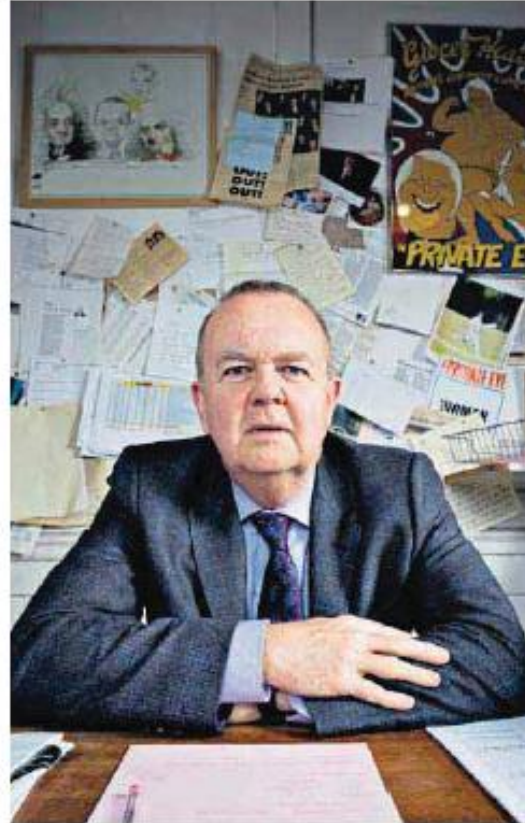
**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story**  
 BBC Four, 9pm  
 The Have I Got News For You team captain (left) explores the history of dishonest news reporting over the past two centuries.

**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story**

BBC FOUR, 9.00PM

❖ "Obviously you would never find fakery on the BBC and I would never mislead you," says Ian Hislop midway through this film, before embarking on a world-class tour de force solo ballet routine. Every blink, smile and frown on his face appears to be his own, even as his body moves like Carlos Acosta beneath him. It is a superb, hilarious and deeply troubling example of deep fake video manipulation (as seen on BBC One's *The Capture*), just one highlight in a film that is more than a history of fakery in the media, though it is that, too.

From some of the earliest fake news stories of the mid-19th century, when newspaper technology allowed people to be duped on a mass scale for the first time - usually to boost circulation - Hislop explores the methodology of faking news stories and the motivations behind those who do it. He comes up with many bizarre examples (stories of Hillary Clinton's secret child-sex trafficking ring beneath a Washington



Has he got fake news for you: Ian Hislop presents

pizzeria might be funnier had they not resulted in an actual shooting) and many more where powerful

people and unscrupulous politicians spread lies to suit their own ends.  
*Gerard O'Donovan*

DOCUMENTARY

**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story** BBC4, 9pm  
 The satirist unearths dishonest news reports from the past 200 years, including examples of early trick photography. ★★★★★



**7 IAN HISLOP'S FAKE NEWS: A TRUE STORY** 9PM MON, BBC4  
*Have I Got News For You* stalwart and *Private Eye* editor Ian Hislop turns his attention to the world's fake news epidemic. Looking over some historical examples - such as the 1835 report that flying man-bats had been spotted on the Moon - Hislop moves to more recent examples of media disinformation, and meets the Washington DC restaurateur who fell victim to "Pizzagate".



## Critic's choice Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story

BBC Four, 9pm

In 1903 two immigrant miners in Clarksburg, West Virginia, argued over a pet dog. In the ensuing fight one of the men, Mejk Swenekafew, was shot dead. The story was first reported in *The Daily Telegram* before being enthusiastically picked up by its rival, *The Clarksburg Daily News*. However, the *Daily News* had been duped – I'll let you work out the punchline – with the *Telegram* planting this fake news article to prove their rivals were stealing stories. This entertaining tale – one of many in Ian Hislop's excellent documentary – is a droll and relatively harmless example of fake news. Hislop, pictured, however, is on excoriating form as he trawls through the history of fake news, making it all too clear the insidious damage it can do – and is still doing. In the 1890s the media mogul William Randolph Hearst even managed to use

fake news to start a war, telling his illustrator: "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war." The historical examples are fascinating, but it is the modern-day instances that will make you sweat. Hislop heads to the US to meet the owner of the pizza parlour at the centre of the bizarre White House paedophile ring story, and a man who runs a website that publishes fake political stories under the auspices of satire. Hislop looks close to pulling his hair out as he puzzles over why people believe fake news stories even when they have been debunked. "The most pernicious thing about conspiracy theories is that they persist even after they have been thoroughly discredited," he says. It's a superb documentary. But then you shouldn't believe everything you read in the papers. [Chris Bennion](#)

TV&Satellite  
week

**Documentary**

**NEW**

**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story**  
BBC4 HD, 9pm

The journalist charts early instances of fake news, looking at its place in politics

**NEW**

**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story**  
DOCUMENTARY BBC4 HD, 9pm

The *Have I Got News for You* panellist investigates the phenomenon of 'fake news', a term popularised by Donald Trump but with a long, troubled history.

Times

What's on  
TV

**FACTUAL**

**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story**  
MONDAY / BBC4

**NEW** Fake news is on the rise, so I'm fascinated to see Ian Hislop explore its origins for this documentary. In our interview, he shares his discoveries. [See page 20](#)

**new**

**Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story** BBC4, 9.00pm

In this one-off documentary, the *Have I Got News for You* captain examines the 200-year history of dishonest reporting.



**Inside Soap**  
ALL OF THE SOAPS. ALL OF THE TIME.



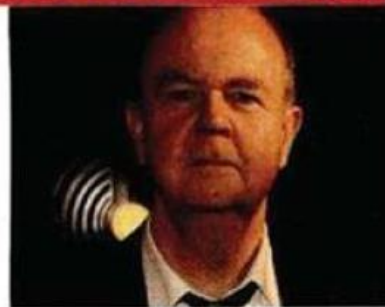
THE TIMES

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**Ian Hislop's Fake News:  
A True History**

9pm, BBC4  
There's nothing new about fake news, argues Hislop, as he delves back in time to earlier attempts at distorting and misinforming the public, right back to the circulation wars of rival newspapers in 1890s America – one particular fabricated report even helping to start a war. Doctored US Civil War photographs may have pre-empted today's "deep

**IAN HISLOP'S FAKE NEWS: A TRUE STORY | BBC4 9PM**

While it may sound like Trump territory, 'fake news' has, in fact, been kicking around since 1903. Here, the *HIGNFY* panellist explores how we can learn lessons about lying in the media from years gone by in this funny, but frightening film.



**Ian Hislop's Fake News:  
A True Story**

Mon, BBC Four, 9pm

Did you know that herds of bison and flocks of flying man-bats live on the moon? It's true, because a New York newspaper said so, or it did in 1835 – an early example of fake news, as explored by



THE SUNDAY TIMES

**Ian Hislop's Fake News —  
A True Story (BBC4, 9pm)**

"Confused? You're meant to be," says Ian Hislop in this astute overview of the history of misinformation and its deleterious effects on modern life. The presenter's deep-fake dancing segment is amusing, but it makes serious points about the nature of human vulnerability to new technology and the dying skill of being suspicious. (VS)

The  
Guardian

**Ian Hislop's Fake  
News: A True Story**  
9pm, BBC Four

Private Eye editor Ian Hislop is no stranger to the news. In this one-off doc, he traces the origins of fake news from the birth of the mass media in New York in the late 19th century to our own social media-fuelled fakery. An incisive look into our wilful misunderstandings of the truth. AK

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THE TIMES

**Ian Hislop's Fake  
News: A True Story**  
BBC Four, 9pm

**Top pick**  
In 1903 two immigrant miners in Clarksburg, West Virginia, argued over a pet dog. In the ensuing fight Mejk Swenekafew was shot

dead. The story was first reported in *The Daily Telegram* before being enthusiastically picked up by its rival, *The Clarksburg Daily News*. However, the *Daily News* had been

FINANCIAL TIMES

Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story, BBC4 – a long history of deceit



 INDEPENDENT

From Motherland to Ian Hislop's Fake News Story



what'sontv

Ian Hislop: 'Fake news is terrifying because people will believe anything they read online'



THE  THE TIMES

What's on TV tonight: Monday October 7, 2019



The Telegraph

What's on TV tonight: Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story, Motherland



Ten TV shows to watch this week, from Motherland to The



RadioTimes

Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True History



What's on? TV highlights for Monday





Sorting fact from fiction in the post-truth world

Carol Midgley TV review



Fake News: A True Story BBC Four \*\*\*\*\* Motherland BBC Two \*\*\*\*\*

There's nothing new under the sun and, as Ian Hislop showed in a highly entertaining documentary, that includes fake news. He opened with a case from 1903 when an American newspaper tricked a rival it suspected of stealing its stories with a false murder report, the victim being a Slav called Mlek Svetchekof ("We fake news" backwards). The rival swallowed it whole. However, Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story demonstrated how we are now in more sinister waters, where a gunman will open fire in a pizza restaurant in Washington DC because of a conspiracy theory claiming that it is linked to a child sex ring involving Hillary Clinton. Conclusion: some people don't question what they want to be true. The pizzeria owner, James Alifantis, said that denials, even facts, did not matter any more: the more he had there is on these platforms, the more people are engaged and the greater the revenue. Hate pays. Hislop was variously playful, concerned, droll and exasperated

in an intelligent film that treated viewers as if we have a brain, which makes a nice change. Donald Trump's version of "fake news", Hislop said, is "real news that he doesn't like". By denouncing real news as fake, he added, Trump and his supporters allow real fake news to flourish. More surprisingly Hislop chose to illustrate his points using the medium of ballet, pirouetting like a bouncy young fawn in spring. Except it was all camera trickery, the lesson being that we can take little at face value any more in a post-truth world where some people think their opinion holds as much weight as fact. The great strength of Motherland is that it is rooted in excruciating, humdrum truth. Its comedy resonates because it is, to use a slinker of a word, rotatable. Or at least it was. The first episode of series two was, for the second half at least, so crazed it was as if it had been at the crack pipe. Fresh blood Meg (Tanya Moodie) is a good addition and started well, but became a slapstick caricature hogging the plot before we had even got to know her. She was like Henry Sellers, the alcoholic TV presenter in Father Ted, who had one sip of sherry then went on a survival bender in the woods and was shot with a tranquilliser dart. How many alpha-mother businesswomen do you know who get fall-over drunk and vomit in a urinal while taking a 10.30pm conference call to Mexico in perfect Spanish, then flash their breasts from the top of a double-decker bus as police look on? Maybe I lead a sheltered life. However, if they had cut Meg's excesses by half she would have been twice as convincing. Nonetheless, the rest of the episode was as uncomfortably delicious as ever. Anna Maxwell Martin was perfect as the harassed, resentful, flawed working mother Julia, Lucy Punch an utter delight as ameb hell-woman Amanda, Diane Morgan the lugubrious font of funny lines as can-be-ard Liz, and



Ian Hislop was played by permission to be investigated. Fake news

Venom and stress: a vivid snapshot of the perils of parenting

Motherland BBC2, 10pm \*\*\*\*\* Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story BBC4, 9pm \*\*\*\*\*

Last night's television SARAH CARSON



Motherland's biggest triumph - and for some, its downfall - is that it captures the stress of parenting so vividly. It focuses of the screen almost too accurately to bear. This second series opened with Anna Maxwell Martin's terminally burdened Julia in a panicked search for some black school shoes. Cut to her teenager, Ivy, trotting unsteadily down the pavement in a pair of kitten heels. "I did tell you to break them in round the house," was Julia's irritated response. The power of this programme is that the children are mostly silent and secondary to the incursions their more astute parents make. I like Motherland's venom - some complain it pits women against each other but who wants to watch some soft, worthy comedy about women supporting one another? This new series addresses those complaints directly with the introduction of a cool new mum at the school gates, Meg (Tanya Moodie), who has five children and a full-time corporate job. Meg decided Julia, and her tormented Liz (Diane Morgan), and desperate dad Kevin (Paul Ready) were her "people", but her "ignorance" posed an affront to Julia - "I thought we all agreed that nowadays it's unfamiliar to have it

all". Still, she and the others were dragged to a nightclub as the secret to Meg's success was revealed - mad midweek benders - as she got tilted drunk, biggared a taxi, urinated in the street and tried to enter cocaine from Deliveroo. They wrangled her into bed eventually and she arrived at school drop-off the next morning fresh as a daisy, to their total incredulity and awe. Motherland is very good, each of its disparate parts is spiky and sharp - the intermissions between parents, the snarky, the wry cultural references, and the patterns of speech - a favourite here was Kevin's review of his camping trip, "great toilet blocks and sinks with taps, no more glamping really". But the sum of those parts can make it almost a labour to watch, which feels apt, given its message: having it all doesn't mean it's easy.

"Fake news" was an expression known to few of us before Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign, but Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story took us hundreds of years through the history of the press to prove it's been around for longer and that, in fact, Trump is using the term wrongly. His thesis, "news does not lie", when actual fake news - the spreading of mistruths -

has changed the course of history. I found this film fascinating, as Hislop ran exhaustively from the earliest tabloids discovering that "sus sex", to Facebook, Infowars, Putin's Russia, and Deepfakes, video manipulation technology which, an expert warned is "eventually going to be used for something really grim". It was full of alarming stories: Hislop recounted a hoax spread in the British press during the First World War about a German "vape factory", which cast such doubt over the media that years later, people didn't believe reports of the Holocaust because of "infowar horror tales of the last war". The consequences of fake news have always been severe, then, and like those infowar horror tales, are preventing us from believing anything - which is the point. In this impressively detailed film, which bound history and analysis of current affairs with our current climate of fear, Hislop was as smart, playful and authoritative as one might expect. The solution, he concluded, was a more sceptical public. The best defence against fake news is to remain sceptical - the problem is, most of us are not sceptical about the things we want to believe.



CHRISTOPHER STEVENS LAST NIGHT'S TV

Fake News: A True Story \*\*\*\*\* Motherland \*\*\*\*\*

It's bats! How Victorians trumped Donald with their own fake news

Lord preserve us from the sight of Ian Hislop dancing to jazz music. Pirouetting and high-kicking, the Private Eye editor looked like Mr Toad in a leotard. It wasn't really him, of course. And it wasn't a lookalike. Face-mapping software wielded by a hacker with a punk, mohican had superimposed Hislop's saggy features onto the head of a professional dancer, in Fake News: A True Story (BBC4). Fans of The Capture, the BBC1 high-tech surveillance thriller that concludes tonight, will know all about it. This is the so-called 'deep fake' video-acting tool, used by Finnish spymasters to manipulate CCTV footage. Hislop should count himself lucky he was seen apparently doing nothing worse than the splits. Best-known as a team captain on the long-running Have I Got News For You, Hislop was making a one-off foray into a subject whose history he clearly knew well. The sections on how Victorian newspaper editors competed to outsell their rivals by inventing outlandish stories were fascinating. An 1855 satire in New York's Sun newspaper, announcing that high-powered telescopes had found life on the Moon, was not so much fake news as fabulous pioneering science fiction. Decades before Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs imagined alien worlds, the Sun's wizards invented a race of bat-

winged humans who hunted uniforms and appeared to mate in mid-air. It was lurid stuff. For 40 minutes the documentary kept up a brisk pace, from spiritualism scans to World War I propaganda about German atrocities that had an unforeseen effect 75 years later: it made people in Britain who remembered the lies less likely to believe the true stories during World War II about Nazi death camps. But Hislop flagged when he came to modern-day fakes. For a man who makes his living in various ways from current affairs, he seemed bored by allegations of fake news tearing US politics apart. He covered it in a droling interview with former BBC director-general Mark Thompson, now boss of the New York Times, which was one of the dullest monologues I've heard in a while. Hislop briefly mentioned Private Eye's brushes with fake news, but he was referring to misunderstandings where drollish members of the public failed to realise they were reading jokes, not facts. "Some years ago, The Eye ran a cover photo of the Queen inscribing her name in a gilded book, with the headline 'Millions sign petition to stop Trump state visit'. Private Eye is now on a 'fake news' online blacklist. Talk about a sense of humour failure. The fake news in Motherland (BBC2) was that the new mum at the school gates, Meg (Tanya Moodie), was a superwoman. Apparently an international

Circulation: 371,559

Circulation: 228,754

Circulation: 1,164,025



## Ian Hislop's Fake News: a True Story, review: a fascinating and alarming history of lies



**Ian Hislop's Fake News: a True Story, BBC4, 9pm ★★★★★**

Fake news was an expression known to few of us before Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign but *Ian Hislop's Fake News: a True Story* took us hundreds of years through the history of the press to prove it's been around far longer and that in fact, Trump is using the term entirely wrongly.



Ian Hislop experiments with Deepfake technology on Ian Hislop's Fake News: a True Story (Photo: BBC)



## Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True Story review — sorting fact from fiction in the post-truth world



Ian Hislop was a playful presenter as he investigated fake news

However, Ian Hislop's *Fake News: A True Story* demonstrated how we are now in more sinister waters, where a gunman will open fire in a pizza restaurant in Washington DC because of a mad conspiracy theory claiming that it is linked to a child sex ring involving Hillary Clinton. Conclusion: some people don't question what they want to be true. The pizza shop owner, James Alefantis, said that denials, even facts, did not matter any more; the more hatred there is on these platforms, the more people are engaged and the greater the revenue. Hate pays.

Hislop was variously playful, concerned, droll and exasperated in an intelligent film that treated viewers as if we have a brain, which makes a nice change. Donald Trump's version of "fake news", Hislop said, is "real news that he doesn't like". By denouncing real news as fake, he added, Trump and his supporters allow real fake news to flourish. More surprisingly Hislop chose to illustrate his points using the medium of ballet, pirouetting like a bouncy young fawn in spring. Except it was all camera trickery, the lesson being that we can take little at face value any more in a post-truth world where some people think their opinion holds as much weight as fact.



## Ian Hislop's Fake News – BBC4



Ian Hislop's *Fake News* sets out to show that there's nothing new about what looks like a very modern phenomenon

Thanks to **Donald Trump**, the phrase "fake news" rarely seems to be out of the headlines.

But as Ian Hislop discovers in *Ian Hislop's Fake News*, a fascinating (and frightening) new documentary, fake news was actually around long before the current US President started bandying the term about.

The *Private Eye* editor and Have I Got News For You team stalwart unearths several historical fake news scoops, including one particularly lurid tale of official British fake news-mongering during WWI when stories were spread about German factories manufacturing soap from corpses.



Ian Hislop in fake-news-pic shocker!