

March 2025

Television



The Leopard reborn

From Italian literary masterpiece to prestigious new Netflix series



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RTS PROGRAMME AWARDS 2025

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From the CEO



The RTS Television Journalism Awards are always a milestone in the RTS year, and this month's event was a moving evening of celebration.

Our brilliant host, ITV's *News at Ten* anchor Tom Bradby, told everyone "to let their hair down". The buzz in the room moved up a notch after his well-received opening speech.

Huge congratulations to all our worthy winners and nominees. A special thanks goes to Jury Chair Adrian Wells and to all the jurors for the hard work that makes the evening possible.

It was heartening to see a number

of journalists praising "their teams at home" for constant support in a working life that invariably involves long and unpredictable hours. A full list of all winners and their citations is published inside.

Our cover story this month is dedicated to Netflix's sumptuous new period drama, *The Leopard*, set in sun-soaked Sicily and based on Italy's beloved novel of the same name, written by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. I can't wait to watch it.

This month is the 100th anniversary of John Logie Baird's demonstration of the "Televisor" at London's Selfridges. John was one of the RTS founders, so it is only fitting that Simon Bucks uses this occasion to

canvas opinion on what television might look like in 2125, 100 years from now. Don't miss Simon's article.

There's a lot of anticipation around *Adolescence*, the new thriller starring Stephen Graham and written by Stephen and the prolific Jack Thorne. Inside we profile the Sheffield company, Warp, that co-produced it.

Returning to awards, I hope to see as many of you as possible at the RTS Programme Awards later this month, one of the Society's most glamorous nights of the year.

Theresa Wise MBE

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TV diary



Marcus Ryder finds inspiration in the commitment of UK media companies to improving employees' mental health

A few weeks ago, the Film and TV Charity published its latest Looking Glass survey, the largest study of its kind, examining the mental health and wellbeing of people working in the UK's film, television and cinema industries. The results were not unexpected, but they were still deeply troubling.

■ More than a third of respondents rated their mental health as “poor” or “very poor”, while 30% reported having thoughts of taking their own life in the past 12 months. Only 12% of respondents believed the industry was a mentally healthy place to work. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, almost two-thirds (63%) said their work in film and TV has a negative effect on their mental health.

■ As CEO of the Film and TV Charity, these findings weigh heavily on me. My role is not just about reacting to crises but also about transforming the industry to be a healthier, more supportive environment. Our work falls into two categories: “downstream” – helping those in immediate need through our 24-hour helpline and free counselling services – and “upstream” – addressing the root causes of poor mental health in the industry.

■ This morning, I began my day with an “upstream” focus. I hosted a breakfast with representatives from major production companies to gather feedback on our work towards creating a pan-industry set of mental health standards. The

response was overwhelmingly positive and constructive. Even after a year in this role, I remain inspired by the goodwill and commitment that so many UK media companies have towards improving mental wellbeing in our industry. I am hopeful that we will soon have a set of agreed standards that will make a tangible difference.

■ Later in the morning, I had a stark reminder of our “downstream” responsibilities. A senior television executive reached out regarding a colleague in urgent need of help. While I am not a mental health expert, I know the value of having a strong team, and I was able to connect them swiftly with our head of client services.

Being able to delegate such critical situations to experienced professionals is something that I deeply appreciate as a CEO. It allows us to respond quickly and effectively to those who are in crisis.

■ The rest of the day was a whirlwind of activity. I worked with our research team on a new report examining international tax and benefit policies for creative freelancers. This research could lead to better financial security for UK industry workers.

I also finalised details for the next round of “Reel Impact”, our grants scheme supporting black and global majority creatives to overcome systemic barriers. And, in-between, I advised our fundraising team on a comedy night being organised by Avalon to raise much-needed funds for our services.

■ As the day drew to a close, I was reminded of how mental health challenges affect all of us – even those of us working to solve them. I received a text regarding complications following my 88-year-old mother's knee surgery. Immediately, I cancelled my plans to attend an industry event at Bafta and rushed home.

Caring for a loved one is rewarding but undeniably stressful. People with caregiving responsibilities often experience heightened mental health struggles. Today, I felt that firsthand.

This moment reinforced an important truth: if we truly care about mental wellbeing in the industry, we must extend that care to ourselves as well. We cannot support others effectively if we are running on empty. In the words of airline safety instructions: “Put on your own oxygen mask first.”

Tomorrow is another day. And the work continues.

Marcus Ryder is CEO of the Film and TV Charity.

COMFORT CLASSIC

Steve Clarke unlocks the secrets of a consummate spy thriller adapted from a classic John le Carré novel

For more than half a century, film- and television makers have been drawn to the novels of John le Carré. The 2016 serialisation of *The Night Manager*, soon to re-emerge as a co-production between Amazon Prime and BBC TV, was the latest in a long line of TV treats inspired by le Carré's prose.

Alec Guinness's portrayal of George Smiley, the donnish, bespectacled spook who wouldn't look out of place in a rural rectory, remains a defining performance of the television age.

Less well known than *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) and *Smiley's People* (1982) – both starring Guinness – is BBC TV's third le Carré adaptation, *A Perfect Spy*, first shown as a seven-episode series on BBC Two in 1987.

The screenplay is written by the late Arthur Hopcraft, a former sports journalist who also brought Dickens' *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* to the small screen. Those who have read *A Perfect Spy*, the most autobiographical of le Carré's books, will need no reminding of its complexity. The author never underestimates the reader's intelligence, shifting the narrative constantly as past and present are woven together in a story that, at times, can be confusing.

Locations switch between London, Oxford, the Home Counties, East Anglia, European cities including Bern and Vienna, and the island of Corfu.

Turning this massive book into a cogent screenplay was itself a considerable feat. Hopcraft did it with exemplary skill by taking the novel to pieces and rearranging it chronologically. Wisely, he drew extensively on le Carré's often spellbinding dialogue.

This was a smart move as the author rarely wrote as well as he did in *A Perfect Spy*. And le Carré never wrote badly. Not for nothing did Philip Roth



'Deeply conflicted': Ray McAnally and Peter Egan as conman father and spook son

describe *A Perfect Spy* as "the best English novel since the war".

Arguably, le Carré's characters have never been as rich, and Hopcraft's dramatisation brings many of them vividly to life. No fewer than four actors are cast as the eponymous perfect spy, Magnus Pym, whose life story

is told from early childhood to middle age: Nicholas and Jonathan Haley, who play Pym as a boy, Benedict Taylor (the teenage Pym) and Peter Egan as Pym the man.

We watch agog as this quintessentially charming middle-class Englishman double deals his way through life,

corrupted beyond redemption by his amoral father, Rick (Ray McAnally), a conman of epic proportions. Sadly, McAnally died aged 63, two years after *A Perfect Spy* was shown.

This is no conventional TV spy yarn, but rather a masterly and disturbing study of human frailty and betrayal. At the heart of it lies Pym's deeply conflicted relationship with "his old Dad".

Rick surrounds himself with a court of criminals and a steady supply of "lovelies". This is a seedy world that is not without its humour. His chutzpah is such that – despite having a criminal record, including a stretch inside – he still stands as an MP.

By today's lavish Netflix-inspired production standards, the production values cannot match those of contemporary spy thrillers such as the brilliant *Slow Horses*, so don't expect sumptuous set pieces or much in the way of glamour and a sense of place.

A Perfect Spy is focused firmly on the mostly brilliant acting. Huge credit to

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AND BETRAYAL

director Peter Smith. Both Egan and McAnally are superb as their very different qualities jump out of the screen. Both inhabit their parts totally.

Pym's recruiting officer, Jack Broth-erhood, is depicted with just enough menace by Alan Howard, and German actor Rüdiger Weigang shines as Axel, aka Poppy, the Czech double agent Pym can't get out of his system.

Mention must also be made of the late, great Peggy Ashcroft, cast superbly as Pym's surrogate mother, Miss Dubber, whose modest, welcoming Devon boarding house Pym takes refuge in.

There have been two subsequent BBC Radio adaptations of *A Perfect Spy*. I wouldn't be surprised if a streamer was developing a new version for TV. If that were to end up only half as good as this version, it would still be a must-watch. ■

A Perfect Spy is available on BBC iPlayer.

Ear candy

Talk of the Townsends

Reality TV is one of the great inventions of the modern world, if only because it gives an ethical loophole to all of us who love a good gossip but don't want to slander our mates. And that's probably about 99% of the population: the recent series of *The Traitors*, with all its bad actors and diplomatic bachelors, was certainly the talk of the town.

But a married couple of podcasters have proved themselves a cut above all of us amateur tattlers. Benedict and Hannah Townsend's analysis in *Talk of the Townsends* was so enjoyable, and so thorough, that some of their listeners weren't even watching *The Traitors*.

The podcast soon reached number two in Spotify's Top TV and film chart, second only to *The Rest Is Entertainment*. That's not bad for a podcast recorded at home on a sofa. And, speaking of armchair criticism, the Townsends strike me as an ideal *Gogglebox* couple.

Now they've turned their attention to *The Apprentice* for another watch-along mini-series. They have apparently spent years watching what Benedict glowingly describes as "the greatest comedy show on TV", and that dedication tells in their hilarious unpacking of its tropes.

"If you've never watched *The Apprentice* before," Benedict says, "you might think: 'Oh, this is a show about people trying to do business'. My friend, maybe in 2005 it was. Now it is purely about stitching up whoever is silly enough to come on this show."

Hannah reckons that the essence of *The Apprentice* lies in the contestants' opening lines, which amount to a competition to describe yourself as the most competitive person who has ever lived.

"But it's very hard to reinvent the wheel each time," she notes, "so this year we had: 'I am the human equivalent of a tank!'"

Another cliché: Lord Sugar's groan-worthy dad jokes, which Benedict thinks "the boss" delivers so flatly that he must be reading them all off flash-cards for the very first time.

But these days reality TV is often so fast-paced, and the editing so TikTok-ified, that it's just nice to be reminded of its funniest moments. Especially when watching a show, such as *The Apprentice*, that is full of them.

I laughed out loud when they discussed Carlo – who put himself forward for "Sub Team Leader", citing his sales expertise – trying to sell an electric bike tour of the alpine city of Innsbruck, Austria, to a 97-year-old man.

Both Townsends make for fun company, with banter that puts Sugar's ghostwritten one-liners to shame. But the podcast is a natural progression for Benedict. His much-loved YouTube series *YouTuber News* has since transmuted into the excellent *Scroll Deep*, "the show that keeps up with internet nonsense, so you don't have to".

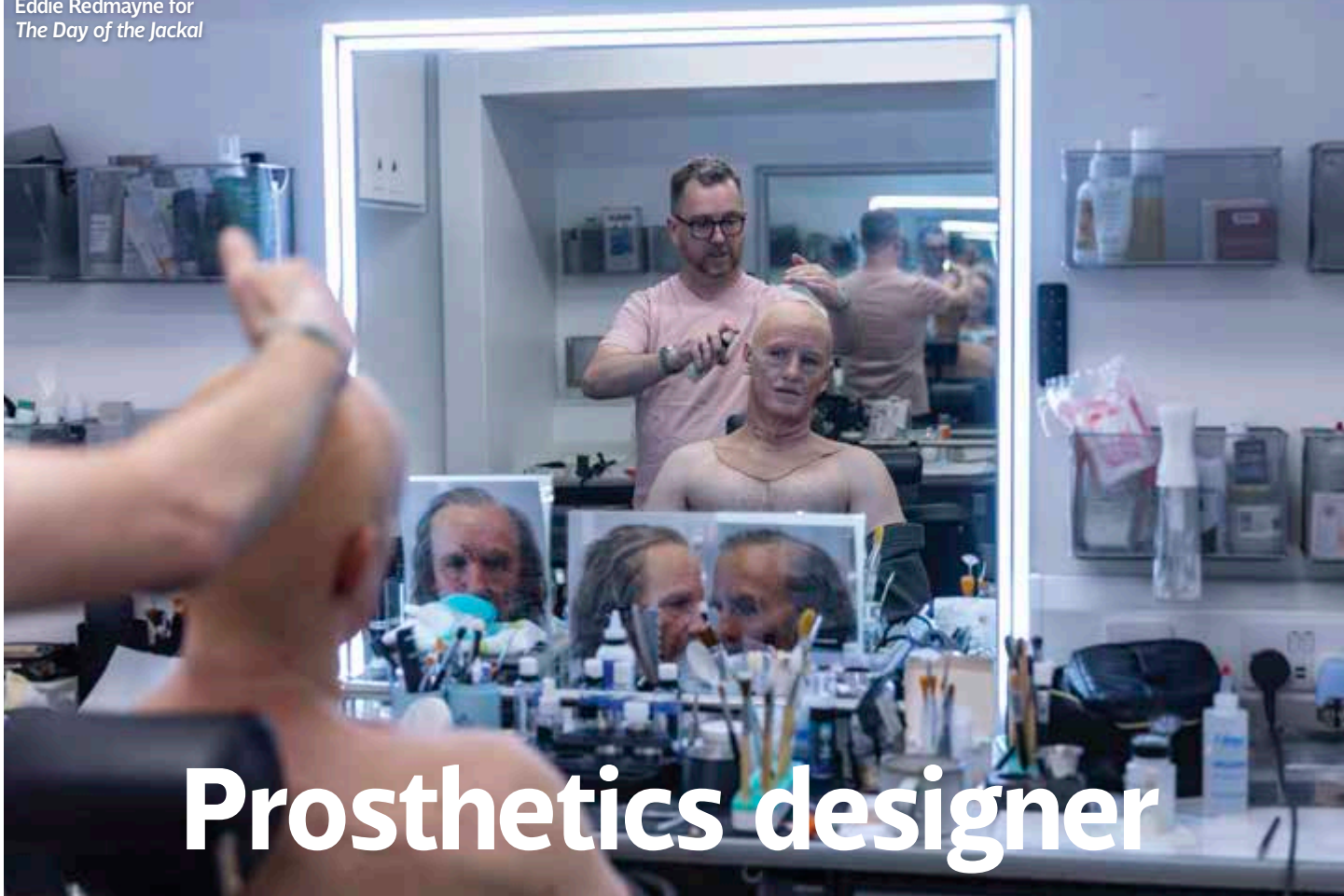
Benedict seems to be steadily carving out an impressive career through covering content that is, rightly or wrongly, often scoffed at. ■

Harrison Bennett



WORKING LIVES

Richard Martin transforms Eddie Redmayne for *The Day of the Jackal*



Prosthetics designer

Richard Martin made Eddie Redmayne unrecognisable in *The Day of the Jackal*, leaving the icy assassin free to take out his targets. His prosthetic skills were also used to great effect in *Gangs of London* and the new season of *The White Lotus*.

What does the job involve?

Every job is different but essentially you are designing and making prosthetics – for people and creatures – to realise the director's vision.

Is it a new role?

It goes back to the start of film: Jack Pierce creating Boris Karloff's face for *Frankenstein* in 1931 – there were no casts in those days, so he built the make-up every day with glue and cotton. Years later, Dick Smith, the “god-father of make-up”, worked on *The Godfather* and moved the art forward.

Did you always want to work in prosthetics?

Yes, from very young. I was watching films that were grossly inappropriate for my age, staying up late for *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi, *Terminator*, the *Friday the 13th* movies – I used to have nightmares! I found the transformative nature of special effects fascinating: you could have something on screen that doesn't exist in the real world. But it was a pipe dream: that was Hollywood... and I lived in Birmingham!

So how did it happen?

I got into TV late, at the age of 29. I was working as a car salesman. I'd fallen into it because I came from a family where everyone said, “Get a proper job”. So I did. It gave me financial stability and the time to have a hobby.

I was self-taught. I painted, sculpted, and used the internet to join forums

and learn about special effects and make-up. I took a week's course at Millennium FX in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, then applied for a Skill-Set-funded apprenticeship. I got the call, jacked in the motor trade, bought myself a little car and drove 180 miles a day back and forth from Birmingham to Millennium in Chesham.

What was your first show?

Doctor Who in the David Tennant era. Then a couple of low-budget movies, including the vampire film *Dead Cert* with Danny Dyer and Craig Fairbrass. There was no money, so the filmmakers just let us loose – it was a great learning experience.

How did you build your career?

I freelanced all over the place, then my wife had our daughter so I took a step back while she grew up. Now I'm back,

and I've done two seasons of *Gangs of London*, two episodes of *A Ghost Story for Christmas* with Mark Gatiss, the third series of *The White Lotus* in Bangkok and *The Day of the Jackal*.

Tell us about working with Eddie Redmayne...

Best job I've ever done. Creature prosthetics are great fun but you always know you're looking at something that's not real. With the Jackal, my job was to change this famous, instantly recognisable actor into someone completely different. It took about three hours to put Eddie's make-up on. To sit still for that long is quite a task but he was brilliant – so respectful of the prosthetics process. He was an absolute gent and made it a joy.

What is a typical day on set?

You're first in and last out. It can take three hours to put the make-up on, then you could be on set for 12 hours. As soon as you stick a prosthetic on, the body tries to reject it – actors sweat, and they have to eat and drink – so I'm on set all day, having to retouch, glue and paint. On *Jackal*, we were filming episode one (in which Eddie is disguised as Ralf Becker, an elderly German cleaner) in the height of summer in Budapest. After several hours, bubbles of sweat started to appear under Eddie's prosthetic.

What do you bring to work with you?

The essential tools of my trade are glues, thinners, sanitising fluids, paints, brushes, powder, tissues, cotton buds, wet wipes, scissors, tongs. It's a huge amount of stuff.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

I love every facet. It's a privilege to do it. It's something I always wanted to do but never thought I could. I suppose the worst thing can be taking off the make-up at the end of a long day, when you and the actor are tired, and you know you'll be back again in seven or eight hours for the next day.

What makes a good prosthetics designer?

You can go to university and get a degree in prosthetics but that doesn't



Another disguise for the Jackal.

All photographs: Sky/Carnival

mean anything – you progress on the job, building your skills. To call yourself a prosthetics designer, you need to be able to do every element of the job. You've got to have a fantastic amount of patience and enthusiasm. The hours are long and it can be stressful. It's a way of life, and you'll either fit it or not.

Plus, you need imagination – there's no manual that tells you how to design an exploding head.

What advice would you give to someone starting out now?

Go beyond your coursework. Don't be scared to do our own stuff – you've got to have a strong portfolio (quality not quantity is the key) of independent work. Send your portfolio and a covering letter to studios and hope your timing is good – if someone's crewing up, you might get your foot in the door. Then it's a case of soaking it up. Don't go in with an ego – learn and develop your craft.

What's your career highlight?

The Day of the Jackal. It was a dream job. I still pinch myself that I got it – there were a dozen people who should have got that job before me. I also freelanced for a brilliant company, BGFx, and got to do *The Rings of Power*. I'm a massive *Lord of the Rings* fan, so to create fantastical creatures like orcs, elves and dwarves on screen was another real highlight.

What show would you love to work on?

Hellboy. I'm a huge fan. There was another lovely film version of it last year. If we're talking about something that's got no chance of being made, I would love to do a live action *ThunderCats*. It was one of my favourite cartoons as a kid. I made a make-up demo of a character for fun, which was quite well received. So if anyone's interested... ■

Richard Martin was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

OUR FRIEND IN WALES

This month marks 20 years since the first BBC Wales-made episode of *Doctor Who* was broadcast, effectively creating the Welsh drama hub we enjoy today. Aside from a *Children in Need* special and a TV movie starring Paul McGann, the series had been off-air since 1989 until it was revived in 2005 by the then Controller of BBC One, Lorraine Heggessey.

Production was bestowed on Julie Gardner, Head of Drama for BBC Wales, under the penmanship of Russell T Davies.

It wasn't the first network show to come from Wales – successes in the 1980s included *The Life and Times of David Lloyd George*, starring Philip Madoc, and *The District Nurse*, starring Nerys Hughes. *Doctor Who*, however, was a very different beast and its technical requirements meant an overhaul of the post-production department in Cardiff, with all-new edit suites and a dubbing theatre.

It was an attempt to revive family viewing for a Saturday night and its instant success was far bigger than everyone's expectations.

By the summer of 2005, two more series had been commissioned, plus a couple of spin-offs – *The Sarah Jane Adventures* for CBBC and *Torchwood* for BBC Three. By January of the following year, the drama department in Wales was employing several crews all year round. That's when I made the journey from Television Centre in London to Broadcasting House in Llandaff to join the expanding team that looked after the brand and marketing of the shows.

I'd planned to spend just a year in Wales, the country where I was born and had left when I was a child. But



Edward Russell in the Tardis

Doctor Who brought Edward Russell home to Wales... and, like the Time Lord, he's still there two decades later

the success of the Who family of shows grew and grew, and I ended up staying another year, then another.

When *Merlin* also came to Wales, followed by *Sherlock*, it became clear that the country was carving out a niche as a centre of excellence for drama. Before leaving the BBC, Head of Drama Jane Tranter arranged for the continuing drama *Casualty* to move production from Bristol to Cardiff, which saw the development of

'IT BECAME CLEAR THAT WE WERE CARVING OUT A NICHE AS A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR DRAMA'

vast studios at Roath Lock in Cardiff Bay. They officially opened in the summer of 2011 and also housed Welsh-language soap *Pobol Y Cwm*, *Doctor Who* and a reboot of *Upstairs Downstairs*, written by Heidi Thomas.

There were also huge developments with Welsh language drama during this period, including bilingual shows where an English version of the show was shot side by side. For the Welsh version of S4C/BBC series *Keeping Faith*, Eve Myles learned the script phonetically in Welsh.

But it wasn't just the BBC that was telling stories made in Wales. Indies such as Urban Myth Films set up base here, and Julie [Gardner] and Jane [Tranter] established Bad Wolf in 2015 to make high-end television for an international audience.

Here we are in 2025 and, despite a difficult year or two for the industry, things are picking up. Sky has a new show called *Prisoner* (no relation to the 1960s cult series) shooting out of Roath Lock, a second series of *Paris Has Fallen* is being filmed in Newport for Canal+ and Bad Wolf has just turned over on the fourth series of BBC/HBO drama *Industry*. Jack Thorne's new drama for Channel 4, *Falling*, begins production next month across locations in South Wales.

When I left the BBC in 2017, my first thought was to return to London, but I wanted to stay in drama. In the end, I remained here in Wales, first retraining as a script supervisor and recently starting directing. There is a wealth of talent here, with some of the most experienced crews in the world. No one tells stories quite like the Welsh do, and I'm proud to be part of this highly creative hub. ■

Edward Russell is Chair of RTS Cymru Wales.

‘You can almost taste the lemons’



Passion play: Deva Cassel as Angelica with Saul Nanni as Tancredi

A ravishing Netflix adaptation of Italian literary masterpiece *The Leopard* brings a fresh dimension to period drama. **Matthew Bell** soaks up the Sicilian sunshine

It is among Italy's most treasured novels and was memorably filmed by the revered director Luchino Visconti. You would have to be brave, foolhardy even, to make *The Leopard* for TV, especially if you're not Italian.

But that's exactly what UK producers Moonage Pictures have done with a superlative new version for Netflix of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's masterpiece. What's more, the sumptuous six-part drama – set in mid-19th-century Sicily as Italy becomes a nation – was shot entirely in Italian.

“We started in English, which was the norm at the time with dramas like *War and Peace* and *Chernobyl*,” explains Moonage co-founder and producer Will Gould, “but brilliant shows like Netflix's *Squid Game*, *Money Heist* and

Lupin have changed the way we watch and what we watch.”

The decision to “go all Italian” – in casting and language – was reached in December 2022 before filming began the following spring. By then, *The Leopard* had been in development with Moonage since 2018 – and with Italian co-producer, Indiana Production, which owned the rights to the novel, for a couple of years before.

“Casting is all about cohesion, building a world through your cast, and using [a mix of] Brits, Italians and Americans wasn't going to work,” says Gould. “Later, when we started watching rushes, I thought, ‘How could this have been any other way?’ It felt so good to see this absolutely pure version of the material.”

Fortuitously, but unknown to

Gould, director Tom Shankland speaks more than passable Italian, thanks to a father who lectured in the language and a Sicilian wife.

“Tom is lab-built to direct this show. He's a Brit, but he knew the book well. I took him out to see Netflix in Italy, and he did an amazing pitch, all in Italian. He's so enthusiastic. He gets people to do their best work, and we needed that for something as ambitious as *The Leopard*.”

Gould continues: “Tom was clear that there was a modern audience for [a series] which would not be drawn to Visconti's film. I think of the film as a beautiful poem, but not everyone likes poetry. And, in terms of language, it is a bit of a mess. Burt Lancaster [the eponymous Leopard, the Prince of Salina] is amazing but it's ▶

On the shoot...

Tom Shankland was born to direct *The Leopard*. As the son of a Durham University Italian lecturer, he travelled around Italy as a child. 'We'd pile into this ropey old Ford Transit van,' he recalls. 'Dad was passionate about Italian cinema, so he would get prints of movies and VHS tapes to show his students. I was a big Visconti fan – *Death in Venice* and *Rocco and His Brothers* are amazing films.'

Shankland's wife, Leila Mauro, is Catania-born and has relatives on the island; he had already been on a road trip around Sicily, re-reading *The Leopard*. So he jumped at directing the Netflix series and 'leapt for joy' at the decision to make it in Italian. 'It meant it could be authentic. We could embrace Sicilian slang,' he says, adding, laughing: 'It could sound like *The Godfather Part II*.'

Shankland decamped with his family to Italy for the eight-month shoot in

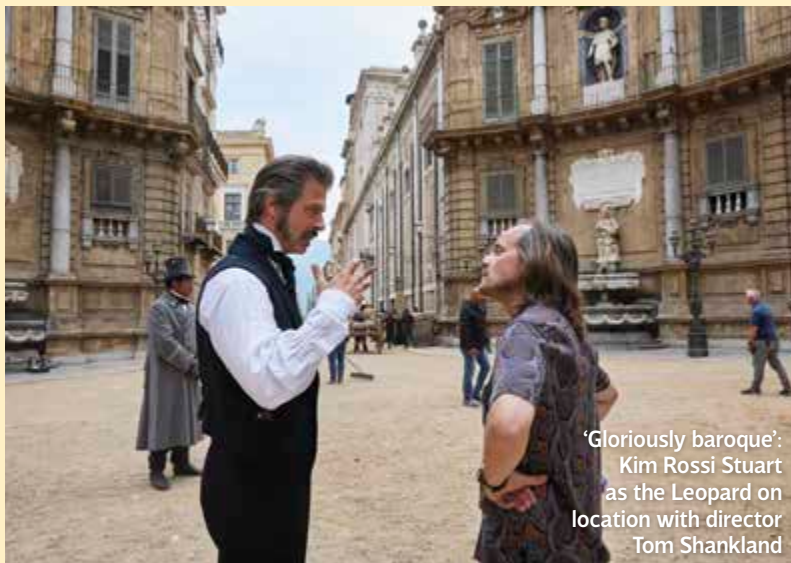
so audiences know what the prince is fighting for.'

Shankland and cinematographer Nicolaj Brüel were the only two non-Italian crew. 'Nic has three words of Italian, which he speaks with great passion and marvellous imprecision.'

Brüel, though, had experience of shooting in Italy on *Dogman* with *Gomorrah* director Matteo Garrone. 'Bringing in Nic from Denmark, which has a tradition of cinema that's a little grittier than southern Europe, was good. It's a beautiful world but people are also going to sweat; there's dust and crumbling stonework.'

The duo used anamorphic lenses for a 'classically widescreen [effect] – it's an epic story on a big landscape. It also gives it a vintage vibe, although we never wanted to go super-nostalgic.'

The music, eschewing the pounding modern soundtrack Shankland used on *SAS Rogue Heroes*, was composed by Paulo Buonvino. 'It's not only posh people in the novel – you also get



'Gloriously baroque': Kim Rossi Stuart as the Leopard on location with director Tom Shankland

Sicily (principally Palermo, Catania and Syracuse), Rome (doubling for Sicily) and Turin. 'We shot as much as we could in the gloriously baroque and wonderfully shabby, decadent parts of Palermo,' he says, praising the local authority. 'As soon as they knew we were doing *The Leopard* – the crown jewels of Sicilian literature – they did so much. They closed down the Quattro Canti area in Palermo for four days, which had never been done before.'

Interior scenes were shot in magnificent palazzi, including Palazzo Biscari in Catania and Palermo's Palazzo Comitini. 'We wanted to show the opulence of the Sicilian nobility's lives,

poor, rustic Sicily.' So there's Verdi and classical themes for the Salina family, but also a soundtrack for the timeless Sicilian landscape. 'I love what he did with the music – our tastes were similar, even though he was born in Catania and I was born in rainy County Durham.'

Shankland, who now lives in London, is dismissive of his excellent Italian: 'I spoke on set in what became known as "Iomliano", not quite "Italiano".' But he says his Italian improved hugely, and his children benefited too. 'The kids are hopefully going to be bilingual. We're trying to make Italian the language of the house, although I slip into my lazy Walthamstow ways quite often.'



'Maelstrom of change': Garibaldi's Redshirts on the march

▶ such a mash of dubbing and original dialogue. That's [another] reason to do a pure Italian version."

So, Italian it was, yet writer Richard Warlow had penned the script in English. That was no problem, thanks to an expert translation by Luca Briasco, the Italian voice of Stephen King, and his team of linguists.

Gould had sent Warlow a first edition of *The Leopard* to tempt him but he needed no persuasion, having read the novel in a single sitting. "It's endlessly rewarding; the more you dig, the more you discover," recalls Warlow.

"Whatever reputation I have comes from writing crime dramas, and [the producers] were excited by the idea of someone who is comfortable with genre coming to a classical drama."

The screenwriter is being far too modest, having created the critically lauded BBC dramas *Ripper Street* and *The Serpent*, working with Gould on the former and Shankland on both.

Warlow's approach to adapting *The Leopard* was to flesh out the under-explored characters, including the prince's daughter Concetta, who he felt would have real resonance now. He also needed to add pace: "The film is almost funereal in pace... it had to have snap, otherwise contemporary audiences wouldn't watch it. It needed a sense of peril to make the characters' lives feel urgent."



On the page...

The Leopard (Il Gattopardo) is Italy's *War and Peace* in scope and renown, albeit over many fewer pages. Set amid the Risorgimento, Italy's mid-19th-century unification, it focuses on a Sicilian aristocratic family at the centre of a maelstrom of change.

As Lampedusa's novel (published posthumously in 1958) begins, Garibaldi's Redshirts have invaded Sicily, determined to unify Italy. Among their number are Tancredi Falconeri (Saul Nanni), nephew of the Leopard, Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina (Kim Rossi Stuart). While Falconeri stands for modern Italy, the prince is of the old order, determined to preserve his family's and Sicily's traditions.

The threat, though, is not just from mainland Italy: Calogero Sedàra (Francesco Colella) – a ruthless, corrupt mayor, a prototype for the nascent mafia – is also out to topple Sicily's ancien régime. And his daughter Angelica (Deva Cassel), like the prince's daughter Concetta (Benedetta Porcaroli), is in love with Falconeri.

The Leopard is producer Will Gould's favourite novel: 'An uncle gave me a copy years ago. When I eventually read it, I discovered a masterpiece, and I've re-read it many times. After setting up Moonage Pictures seven years ago, [co-founder] Matthew [Read] and I were talking about bucket-list projects and this was mine. I thought, "If it works for me, it will work for a lot of people."

'The idea was to adapt the book, not the Visconti film. The film is obviously a masterpiece but it's not the book, which has so much more in it. It's one of the biggest small books; it's slim but packed with [incident].'



Benedetta Porcaroli as Concetta

All photographs: Netflix

'WE HAD FULL RESPECT FOR BOTH THE NOVEL AND THE FILM, BUT BEING OUTSIDERS HELPED'

When *Television* spoke to Warlow, he had just finished tweaking subtitles: "You can see your lines on the screen and that felt exposing as a writer – I wanted to make sure they were right. It's been an amazing process: I write something in English, it's translated into Italian, the actors and directors do their version of the translation, the Netflix subtitles team translate it back into English and then I go back over that. But I'm really pleased we made it in Italian."

The British input to *The Leopard* was crucial for Indiana. "Collaborating with production companies from different countries brings enormous advantages," says Indiana producer Daniel Campos Pavoncelli. "Being firmly rooted in Italy allowed us to deeply understand *The Leopard*, while having a British partner provided us with a global perspective.

"Nowadays, with an increasingly international audience, having different points of views is not just useful

but essential to create content that resonates everywhere."

Warlow, who was assisted by a co-writer, Benji Walters, adds: "If it's successful, one of the reasons will be that we are not Italian. There's so much freight over there about the book and the director. We came at it with full respect for both the novel and the film, but being outsiders was helpful."

Whether viewers choose to watch it with English subtitles or in an excellent dubbed version, they will be drawn to a gripping family saga, gorgeous baroque palaces and a brutal but stunning Sicilian landscape. "The family story at the centre is so compelling, especially the father-daughter relationship. If you can invest in that, you'll have a lovely time. And it doesn't hurt that it's in these extraordinary locations – you can almost taste the lemons," says Gould.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, the politics of Italian unification are still relevant today. "When I first took on *The Leopard*, we were only a year and a half out from Brexit. This is a novel about an island choosing to join a unification process... while we were actually leaving a union," says Warlow.

"What is a nation state? Are we better together? Who are the losers and winners? These questions have echoes in the novel – *The Leopard* grants you wisdom about a lot of these things." ■

Warp factor 10



'Bold and authentic': Stephen Graham and Owen Cooper face the music as father and son in *Adolescence*

Netflix

Over two decades, the ambitious, Sheffield-based independent production company Warp has built an enviable reputation for making edgy, compelling content, often featuring marginalised voices, and made for both the big and small screen. Titles include the award-winning feature film thriller *Dead Man's Shoes* and, for Channel 4, *This is England* and *The Virtues*.

Warp has helped nurture the careers of such key talent as Stephen Graham and Jack Thorne, who have returned to work for them again and again.

This spring sees the debut of two new projects for television. *Adolescence*, a story of teenage knife crime, is Warp's first commission for Netflix and is co-written by Graham (who also stars) and Thorne. And *Reunion*, a revenge story for BBC One, is scripted by deaf writer William Mager and made in part with a deaf crew.

Adolescence is co-produced by Matriarch Productions (co-founded by Graham) and US producer Plan B. The series explores what happens when

Sheffield-based indie Warp has forged a name for making edgy drama. Steve Clarke hears about its latest shows, *Adolescence* and *Reunion*

13-year-old Jamie (Owen Cooper) is charged with the murder of a teenage girl who goes to his school. The four-parter is directed by Philip Barantini, who again deploys the continuous, one-shot style he became renowned for with the 2021 film *Boiling Point*.

These two characteristically adventurous projects seem sure to further cement Warp's envelope-pushing credentials. "The scripts were jaw-droppingly incredible," enthuses the company's co-founder and joint CEO, Mark Herbert. "I read *Reunion* on the train back to Sheffield from St Pancras. By the time I got to Leicester, I said, 'Let's do it'. There's great talent involved with each of these series. We've always wanted to work with the

best talent around, internationally as well as in the UK."

What was it like working for Netflix, whose values are very different to the UK's public service broadcasters. "It was refreshing because, as a producer, 'maybes' are really difficult," says Herbert, who began his career in TV and film as a runner before becoming a location manager. "Netflix were decisive and clear in what they wanted.

"I'm a practical producer, so it was helpful that with both shows we had a clear pathway to production. Given that budgets are being squeezed, that's very important." It helped that Warp had worked before with Netflix's British drama chief, Anne Mensah, in her previous incarnation as Sky's Head of Drama; at Sky, she had commissioned Jack Thorne-scripted *The Last Panthers* from Warp.

Filming each episode of *Adolescence* in one single take sounds challenging. "Everyone was nervous about doing it," says Herbert. "In the past, I'd done long takes. *This is England* had a 19-minute scene, but this was totally different.

"Not having a time limit for the drama was a blessing in disguise and

was liberating because there were no breaks to accommodate commercials.”

He adds: “As a producer, you’ve often got multiple partners involved because getting TV series made in today’s climate is tricky. In film, there are sometimes as many as seven partners. Putting the finance together can be very time-consuming. On *Adolescence*, there was only Netflix, which meant that we could get on with it.”

Emily Feller, Warp’s Chief Creative Officer, says: “Netflix made us feel we were their most important show. It was a fantastic working relationship.”

The story is told over 13 months, with each episode picking up the story at a different stage as events unfold in real time. “Jack and Stephen had a

“We’ve worked on things with multiple languages, but we’d never done anything like this before. The BBC made sure we got the resources and support we needed. We had to make sure the set was as inclusive as possible.”

Much time was spent in pre-production. “It’s a learning curve and you discover things all the time,” says Herbert. “This is mainstream, prime-time international drama. It’s important that a deaf audience can identify with it, but *Reunion* is for everyone. Ultimately, it’s an incredible thriller.”

The company aims to make outstanding British drama possessing global appeal. “Audiences are smart, wherever they are,” says Herbert. “The films that have done well for us [inter-

low-budget independent films such as *Dead Man’s Shoes* and black comedy *Four Lions* – Chris Morris’s directorial debut – Warp needs no lessons in working on tight budgets. “It’s tough out there,” says Herbert. “Unlike budgets, production costs keeps going up.”

Warp, set up in 2002, was born out of Warp Records, known for championing bleep techno artists and ambient musicians such as Brian Eno. Today, the two are separate entities although Herbert remains close friends with Steve Beckett, who set up the company with the late Rob Mitchell. “One thing Warp Records taught us is the importance of good business practice,” says Herbert. “If you don’t have that in the music business, you won’t survive.”

The company has known tough times, having ridden out the 2008 financial crash. “We’ve got people working for us who know in their bones how to cut their cloth,” says Herbert. “We know how to make something for less if we have to – and we’ve got the battle scars to prove it.”

Herbert is on record, from several years ago, as saying: “As soon as you’ve got an atrium or a mezzanine level in your office, you’re screwed. We just want to invest in talent.”

Thankfully, that approach seems to be equally true today. ■

***Adolescence* launched on Netflix on 13 March. *Reunion* will be on BBC iPlayer and BBC One later this year.**

‘WE KNOW HOW TO MAKE SOMETHING FOR LESS IF WE HAVE TO, AND WE’VE GOT THE BATTLE SCARS TO PROVE IT’

huge mountain to climb to make sure the one-shot works,” says Feller.

“There’s no edit, and it was a bold approach to storytelling. I hope other people will see it and attempt something similar –although [laughing] no one will be as good as us, obviously.”

Key to Warp’s ethos is to trust the talent and let them get on with their jobs. A teenage murder is a familiar topic for film-makers. Herbert explains that Graham and Thorne’s approach to the script trained a new lens on the subject. “There’s a lot of heart in the story,” he says. “We want our work to be authentic, bold and provocative, but you really care for these characters.”

Feller adds: “Hopefully, people will see it as less about the murder than the story of why it happened. At the end of the first episode, I hope parents who are watching will ask themselves how they would feel if it were their child accused of murder. The boy comes from a very stable background.”

Turning to *Reunion*, the drama features deaf actors, including Matthew Gurney as Daniel, a former prisoner consumed by isolation and anger, who is determined to get to the bottom of why he was jailed. *Strictly* winner Rose Ayling-Ellis also appears, alongside Anne-Marie Duff and Lara Peake.

It was made on a bilingual set featuring British Sign Language and spoken English. “This was the first time we’d run a bilingual set,” says Herbert.

nationally] are the ones that have a true sense of place.”

Reunion is set in Sheffield and the surrounding Peak District. “I live on the edge of the Peak District and it’s the most beautiful countryside,” says Herbert. “For Billy [scriptwriter William Mager], it was important to have almost a Western feel to it. Visually, it’s stunning.”

Having won a reputation for



‘An incredible thriller’: Lara Peake and Matthew Gurney in *Reunion*

BBC

The hidden world of witness protection is fertile ground for programme-makers. “When I started work on *Protection*, I began to see how clandestine witness

protection is,” says Kris Mrksa, lead writer on a new ITV six-part drama.

“I hadn’t grasped how completely witnesses cut ties and start over. And police officers need to hide their own identities – if criminals knew who they were, they could follow them to safe houses. That aspect made it feel like espionage; they were spies rather than cops.”

We’ve seen witness protection as the central narrative in international TV hits like *Lilyhammer* and *In Plain Sight* and providing key storylines in *Line of Duty* and *EastEnders*. Now a UK drama series gives audiences an authentic view of this murky environment.

Protection stars Bafta-nominated Siobhan Finneran (*Happy Valley*, *Alma’s Not Normal*) as DI Liz Nyles, who is protecting an accountant and his family before he testifies against his ex-boss, a drug trafficker.

Their location is compromised and the family is found shot dead at the safe house. When Nyles hears that her secret lover (Barry Ward) was also murdered at the same location, a shadow is cast on his motivations and her future in the police. “Is there any chance you slipped up here?” her boss (Ace Bhatti) asks in the first episode. “I always follow protocol,” Nyles replies, losing her last chance to come clean.

The realities of witness protection were gleaned from Gary Madden, a police officer for more than 30 years, who approached New Pictures (*Catherine the Great*, *The Missing*, *Indian Summers*) about making a TV drama that gave a deeper insight into the process. Charlie Hampton, Executive Producer at the company, says: “We took the concept to Kris, and he was intrigued. He was drawn to the secrecy element and wanted to explore it in a le Carré-esque way, leaning into the moral compromise that witness protection officers accept. They must keep people safe, no matter who they are.”

The timing was perfect. Just as Madden approached New Pictures, Mrksa and the production company were wrapping on ITV’s *White House Farm* and were ready for another crime story. Madden’s concept, fleshed out by Mrksa, proved a natural fit.

Compromised:
Siobhan Finneran as DI Liz Nyles



A blurred line of duty

Cop show meets spy tale as two *Happy Valley* actors are reunited in a tense ITV drama set in the shadowy world of witness protection. **Shilpa Ganatra** reports

Hampton says: “ITV has a strong history of crime dramas. Polly [Hill, Head of Drama] responds to stories that are authentic but also have emotional truth. That’s what came through when Kris developed the characters.”

Mrksa’s success in his native Australia with true-crime series *Underbelly* and novel adaptation *The Slap* encouraged him to try his luck in Britain. He says: “Crime drama is a genre the UK does very well. Even in the US, where

the industry can be insular, there’s enormous respect for UK police shows and crime dramas.”

The character of DI Nyles was pivotal. “I was thinking about the ‘sandwich generation’, who have kids while also caring for ageing parents. That often falls to women, and I wondered how a witness protection officer would handle it. It made sense for her adversary to be a woman of a similar age, and without those domestic pressures.”

Stepping into that role is Katherine Kelly as DCI Hannah Wheatley, who is investigating the shooting at the safe house. This reunites the two *Happy Valley* actors, which was a coup for New Pictures, says Hampton. "Their chemistry on screen is great."

Mrksa led a writing team of three; Polly Buckle and Giula Sandler helped develop story arcs and each wrote episodes. This approach has some of the benefits of the US-style writers room while not straying too far from the UK's preference for a single writer's voice. It's Mrksa's preferred way of working. "It's something we've always done in Australia and is becoming more common in the UK," he says. "I've only once worked in a full-scale US writers room and, while some see it as a luxury, I don't miss it."

"A small room is more effective. It speeds up development and ensures the additional writers are involved in shaping the story. That gives them

'PROTECTION OFFICERS MUST KEEP PEOPLE SAFE, NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE'

ownership and a deeper understanding of the show."

The production was funded by ITV and All3Media's international distribution arm. "Budgets are always a challenge," says Hampton. "As always, we aimed to deliver more than what the budget strictly allowed for, which is just part of the job."

Norwegian director Simen Alsvik (*The Nest*, *Fenris*) agrees: "We don't have huge budgets in Scandinavia so we're used to making the most of our resources," he says.

Filming took place in summer 2023, in and around Liverpool, which offered several very different locations, all close to one another. "It's small, so it's easier to do unit moves there compared with London," explains Alsvik. "Liverpool has a great visual quality, with the river, eclectic city centre, gorgeous bridges, and architecture that's very British."

To set a tense visual tone, Alsvik drew from series such as *Mare of Easttown*, *Homeland* and *Sharp Objects*. The



Adversary:
Katherine Kelly as
DCI Hannah Wheatley



Jeopardy: Tilly Kaye as
safe house survivor Amy

All photographs: ITV

family life of Nyles was key. "It was important to tease that out, but it's also a bit of a spy show, and [we needed] to explain how the protection unit works, so it was a challenge to establish all that without being too expositional."

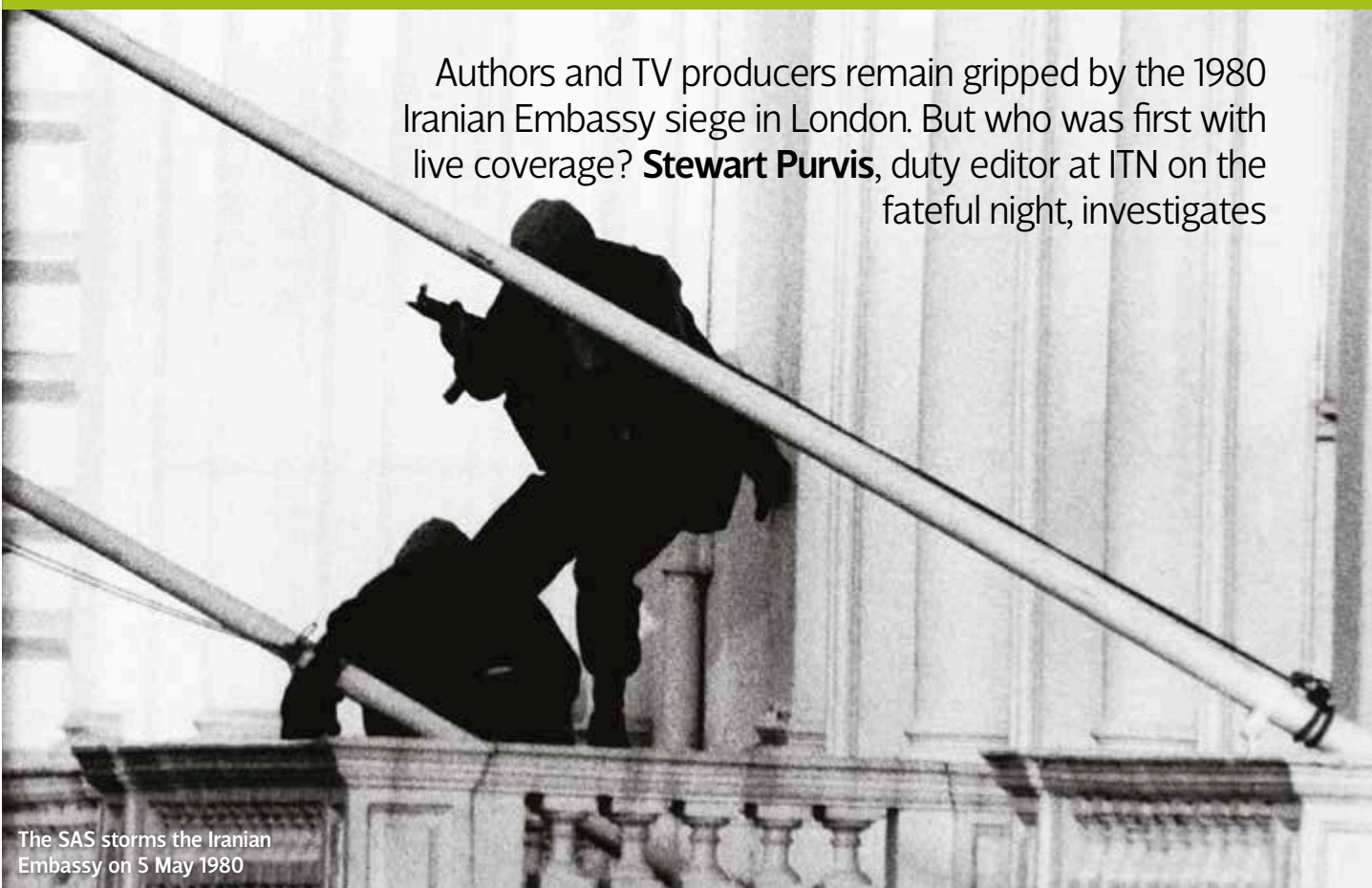
Maintaining dramatic tension across the six episodes, as Nyles's professional wranglings invade her home life, was essential. "The threat becomes more personal for Liz," says Hampton. "Her family, as well as Amy [the surviving daughter of the accountant], find themselves in jeopardy. Liz questions which of her colleagues she can trust, especially as she tries to uncover what her lover was really up to."

Protection has already been aired to acclaim in Scandinavia and to more mixed reviews in the US. "There's been a lot of positive feedback," says Alsvik. "People are seeing it as binge-worthy, especially with a female audience, because of Siobhan playing this strong female lead."

Yet, says Hampton, "because this was an ITV commission, our focus was on what works for ITV. We wanted to embrace the Britishness. But, of course, it's great when a show resonates internationally. You always hope that a show will travel." ■

Protection is on ITViX and airing weekly on ITVi from 16 March

Authors and TV producers remain gripped by the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege in London. But who was first with live coverage? **Stewart Purvis**, duty editor at ITN on the fateful night, investigates



The SAS storms the Iranian Embassy on 5 May 1980

‘Put me to air... this is incredible!’

Nearly 45 years on, the climax of the Iranian Embassy siege in London on 5 May 1980 still excites TV producers and authors. Paramount+ is streaming *Operation Nimrod*, a documentary narrated by Tom Hardy and produced by Scottish indie Two Rivers. Ben Macintyre’s book *The Siege*, published last year, is being adapted for TV. And, by my count, this will be the fifth drama or documentary on the subject.

The storming of the embassy by the SAS became one of the TV events of the 80s because all three channels (there were only three then!) covered it live. Nothing like it had ever been shown before.

The hostages were freed, and the kidnappers killed. Everyone who

watched seems to recall the switch to live coverage from a John Wayne movie on BBC One, the World Snooker Championships on BBC Two or Coronation Street on ITV.

But in preparing for my bit part in the Paramount+ documentary (I was duty editor in the ITN newsroom that bank holiday Monday night), I found a curious absence of cold, hard, written facts. Even Macintyre’s masterly account told of TV coverage that had ITN outside broadcast director David Goldsmith and me baffled.

Reminiscing last year in the Bafta lounge about David’s 1981 award for actuality coverage, we wondered if we’d both suffered false memory syndrome for four and a half decades.

“Put me to air, put me to air, this is incredible,” David had shouted down the line from the OB scanner as the

live-linked camera that he and engineer Peter Heaps had secretly installed at the back of the building showed two men in black starting the attack by abseiling down from the embassy roof to a balcony. “You need to come to us now,” I told the ITV network transmission controller at Thames Television. “Coronation Street is just ending,” he replied. “We’ll come straight to you.”

Soon we were live on ITV. In the control room I had one eye on our output and one on the monitors showing the two BBC channels. They were still showing John Wayne and the snooker. But now, in 2024, it seemed that somehow the opposite had become the accepted version. Apparently, it was ITN that had delayed showing the longest newsflash in British television history, not the BBC.

I set to work in the TV archives to

seek the truth. Progress was slow. The corporate offices of ITN and ITV had no files from that period, the video archives of ITN and the BBC had clips of the best sequences but no continuous recordings with timecode. All I had was my own VHS recording showing the end titles of *Coronation Street* with the familiar music interrupted by a continuity announcer handing over to ITN. The first sound viewers heard was of explosions as Jeremy Hands and then Anthony Carthew provided commentary.

My research breakthrough came when I remembered the BBC Written Archive Centre, a large bungalow on the outskirts of Reading that “looks after the working papers of the BBC”. The staff were carrying out an extensive audit of their collections and were cautious about taking on new enquiries, but they were kind enough to help tidy up this small part of TV history.

They discovered a list of the timings of the BBC News transmissions on the relevant day. Then I nudged them towards what were known at the BBC as “Television Weekly Programme Reviews”. I had discovered from past research projects that these minutes of BBC bosses discussing each other’s programmes often provide fascinating insights into life at the top of BBC TV.

What the archive researchers found was a debrief and post-mortem, two days after the event, on not just the BBC’s coverage but ITN’s too. The contents put to rest any doubts about our memories. ITN on ITV was first with live coverage.

The BBC had a particular interest in the story because two of its news staff were in the embassy, applying for visas to visit Iran, when the gunmen burst in. Chris Cramer and Sim Harris became two of the 26 hostages.

Cramer was told he would be killed if he moved. On the second day, he appeared to be seriously ill, and Harris persuaded the gunmen to release him. Cramer staggered out to safety and was able to brief the authorities on the dispositions inside. Harris became an important intermediary in negotiations between police and kidnapers.

The first of the minutes of the 7 May meeting record that “warm congratulations were due, not only to the BBC hostages... to all BBC staff involved”. Great skill had been shown by all concerned. The executives would talk about the coverage itself after they’d done their normal business. They



Sim Harris, one of the hostages, is rescued

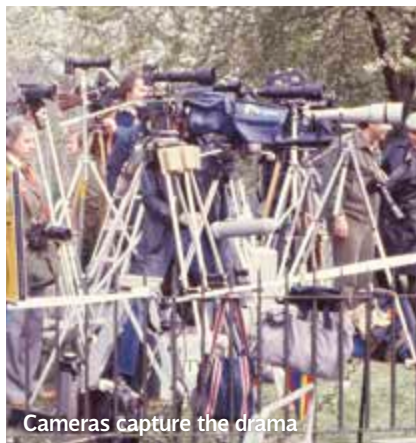
All photographs: Alamy

noted that weekly network ratings were “back on course”, heard how the showjumping on *Sportsnight* was “rather disappointing” and that there had been a “very good dance routine” on the variety show *Lena*, starring Lena Zavaroni. The substantial discussion about the embassy siege began with “general praise for the way the BBC had responded to an enthralling event, which had been nearly as excit-

THERE WAS PRAISE FOR KATE ADIE, WHO FLUNG HERSELF UNDER A CAR

ing for the dedicated Television News staff to cover as it had been dangerous.” But soon an executive with no responsibility for the coverage brought a rather large elephant into the room.

Graeme McDonald was Head of Drama Series and Serials at BBC Television; he would later become controller of BBC Two, the first appointed



Cameras capture the drama

from a drama background. McDonald was “surprised at how much later the BBC had come up with its coverage”, even allowing for “the fact that ITV had had the good fortune” to go over at “a natural programme break at the end of *Coronation Street*”. He said that “ITN seemed to have had some camera coverage that had been nearer and better placed”.

The Controller of BBC Two, Brian Wenham, explained that he was on duty that bank holiday, “coordinating both networks to deal with the emergency”. He did not dispute McDonald’s version of events. “Coverage of the storming had been shown simultaneously on both BBC One and BBC Two by halting the film and leaving the snooker for the time being at 7.31”.

Wenham didn’t make any excuses, but it looks as if the logistics of creating a simultaneous newflash on two separate networks was what caused BBC viewers to see live pictures about six minutes later than ITV.

Discussing the actual coverage, there was praise for the BBC’s Kate Adie, who “flung herself under a car” and immediately called out: “Get me a mike”. Head of Features, Desmond Wilcox, welcomed the fact it “was taken for granted a woman reporter would cope as well as she had done”.

But to Head of Current Affairs, John Gau, “the tragedy remained that at the end of ITN’s coverage, the viewer had a slightly better idea of what happened than at the end of the BBC’s.” ■

Stewart Purvis is a former Editor-in-Chief of ITN. Special Forces: Most Daring Missions, episode one, Operation Nimrod is on Paramount+. The Siege by Ben Macintyre will have an amended account of the TV coverage in its paperback edition.



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Full speed ahead to total immersion



Alamy

On the centenary of John Logie Baird's demonstration of the Televisor, **Simon Bucks** imagines what television might look like in 100 years' time

Try this thought experiment: time-travel to the year 2125 and imagine watching TV. What is it like? Now buckle up for a mindbending vision from Google's Director of Emerging & Enterprise, Faz Aftab: "Neural interfaces could bypass screens altogether. The narrative would go straight to your brain via a neural implant."

Isn't that a bit mad? "Thinking about 100 years' time, I don't dismiss anything. Elon Musk is already trying this with Neuralink," says Aftab.

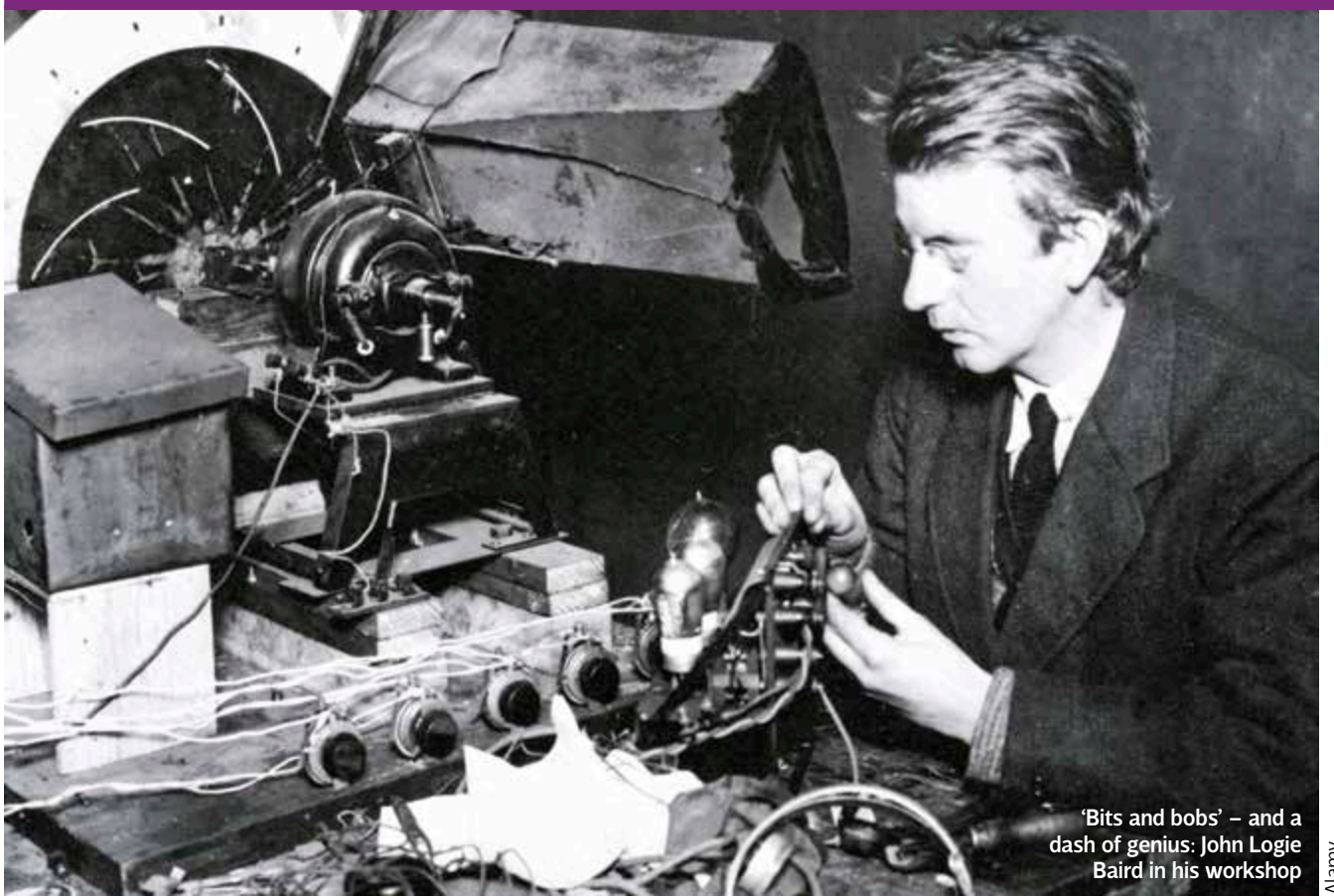
Predicting the long term for what we today call television is undoubtedly hazardous. When "Father of TV" John Logie Baird tried to persuade the *Daily Express* to take him seriously, the news editor apparently barked: "Get rid of that lunatic. He says he's got a machine for seeing by wireless. Watch him, he may have a razor."

Undaunted, 100 years ago this month, Baird was at Selfridges in London's Oxford Street, demonstrating his "Televisor", a Heath Robinson contraption of bits and bobs, including a tea chest, cardboard and bicycle

parts. Initially, it only produced shadowy silhouettes, but it wasn't long before Baird had perfected a 30-line system to transmit recognisable pictures with synchronised sound.

Soon afterwards, in 1927, Baird was a key figure in the formation of the infant Royal Television Society.

Could he have imagined 2025 TV, with its wafer-thin, wall-sized, 16k screens, infinite channels delivered via the internet, AI-generated content and the power to inform and entertain billions? His grandson, Iain Baird, a TV historian, thinks he might have ►



'Bits and bobs' – and a dash of genius: John Logie Baird in his workshop

Alamy

► done. “He got pretty close with the Telechrome to where we are today with colour television. He demonstrated a two-colour version and would have had a three-colour one if he had lived beyond 1946. He would have seen digital compression as a natural progression of what he was trying to do, to get more realistic pictures. He even had the idea of doing 3D.”

Today, Google’s Aftab says the pace of change is so rapid that genuinely immersive, virtual reality TV is close. “You could be watching *The Traitors*, and the letter ‘T’ would appear on screen, and you would put on goggles and be able to walk round the table like Claudia Winkleman does. And my daughter could put on her goggles but have a different experience.”

If that sounds like science fiction, remember the prescience of veteran sci-fi pioneer Hugo Gernsback. “Movies by radio! Why not?” he demanded in 1925. His magazine *Radio News* imagined a future TV set resembling an Edwardian-style dressing table. He even demonstrated prototype goggles strapped to his head.

Sci-fi certainly inspired John Logie Baird, says his grandson. “He read HG Wells and the science fiction magazines. He would have loved *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* – anything technical.”

So, what do today’s Gernsbacks think 2125 will bring? It’s all about physics, contends Allen Stroud, Chair of the British Science Fiction Association and a Coventry University academic, whom the Ministry of Defence has consulted for ultra long-term forecasting. “The issue is not about how much data we can push but how fast we can push it: latency. We can’t get past the speed of light.”

And yet, concedes Stroud, physical laws may already be bending. “There was research recently where they had some quantum states where light particles were affecting another particle before they made contact. So, it seemed to be negative time, which was, kind of, wow!”

“Quantum messes with my head, but it’s real,” agrees Richard Lindsay-Davies, Chief Executive of the Digital TV Group and Chair of the Infrastructure Working Group advising the

Government on the future of UK television. “An academic told me you’ll be able to spin up a quantum instance here and – with no connection – it will be matched 1,000 miles away, and they will just be the same.”

For TV technologists, the big thing is “form factor” – the capacity, size and shape of components. For the non-scientist, all you need to grasp is that they are constantly getting smaller, faster and more efficient.

“I don’t see technological advances slowing down,” says Paul Kane, ITV’s Director of Technology, Content Supply and Distribution. “I remember attending partner meetings with Arm, the semiconductor firm, and they were predicting 7 and 5-nanometre chips. Now we’re talking about 3, 2 and even 1-nanometre chips, a billionth of a metre, and at this point we’re breaking some of the perceived laws of physics.”

“In 100 years, TV will be almost invisible,” thinks Iain Baird. “You might have a TV which is basically your clothing. The barriers will disappear in terms of portability, recordability and visibility of television.”

So, by 2125 we may have debunked Einstein and built semiconductors you can’t see, but what will it actually mean for viewers? More immersion, predicts Lindsay-Davies. It will be the

**‘TV WILL BE
INVISIBLE. YOU
MIGHT HAVE A TV
THAT IS BASICALLY
YOUR CLOTHING’**

natural progression made possible by faster computing and fewer technological constraints. “I wonder if we might even have the technology to allow us to experience those additional senses beyond video and audio, like temperature and smells,” he says.

Haptics, the science of reproducing physical sensory experiences remotely, will be possible over virtual reality television, confirms Stroud, with AI’s interpretative capabilities helping smooth over any latency hiccups. Cooking programmes, for example, could become a participatory experience for viewers. “You just have to find a way of accessing people’s taste receptors using chemicals.”

Aftab at Google thinks that haptics will be perfect for sports events and concerts. “If you could pump in the sense of smell and taste of people around you, it would give that feeling of being in the crowd.”

More personalisation is coming, agrees Lewis Pollard, Curator of Television and Broadcast at the National Science and Media Museum. He points to BBC Research and Development’s “Object-Based Media” project, which, theoretically, would enable every viewer to get different versions of the same show. “A programme can be split up into all its constituent pieces and reshaped. Some parts can be made longer, some shorter, to appeal to you as an individual,” explains Pollard.

The project began more than a

decade ago but remains in the laboratory. That won’t surprise Paul Lee, Head of Research in technology, media and telecommunications at Deloitte. “I don’t see the TV screen changing very much. In 100 years, people will still be watching with other people. I don’t see it becoming more immersive,” he says.

“Technology is often written about as if it’s autonomous and it absolutely isn’t. Technology only thrives when humans thrive as a result of its application. Its adoption is always going to be constrained by the extent to which people can change behaviour.”

Lee isn’t alone in being sceptical about immersion. “The multipath concept is interesting, but you have to

‘PEOPLE LIKE TO LAUGH TOGETHER. THAT WON’T CHANGE IN 100 YEARS’

be an active participant in the experience,” says ITV’s Kane “And I’m not sure people really want that – they want to relax and be entertained.”

“I don’t like goggles. They make me nauseous,” says Jeff Jarvis, the veteran American media academic and former TV critic. “I don’t think they are going to be as big as Mark Zuckerberg does.”

Yes, the technology is still too young, concedes Google’s Aftab, but it will get better. On a 100-year horizon, she thinks the answer will be “holographics” or “volumetric” displays which project 3D pictures without goggles or even a screen. “You could be watching rugby with it playing around you, and you’d be immersed in it. It’s totally achievable. By immersive, I don’t mean just eyes. I mean everything.”

Lindsay-Davies agrees: “We’ll have technologies for a deeper immersion in the content without it being 3D or a full virtual experience or wearing glasses. It will be much more tailored to individual needs and pretty seamless. We won’t realise that we are getting a very personalised experience.”

Maybe, says ITV’s Kane, who experimented with “holographics” at Sky more than 10 years ago. “But for me, it’s still about content and storytelling. It’s still about sitting down and having a communal experience.”

Deloitte’s Lee adds: “Being entertained along with other people is a fundamental human need. People watch funny videos on FaceTime, and they time it so that they look at their phones and laugh together. That’s humans being human, and that’s not going to change in 100 years.”

Jarvis has doubts. “The grand shared experience was a myth. When I grew up we had only three networks, and you might think it was fun to watch [US sitcom] *Gilligan’s Island* together. It wasn’t. It was hell – but it was all we had. The future is one of collaboration, interactivity and discourse. Pay attention to TikTok because of its collaborative nature. Even if it isn’t there in 100 years, its essence will be.”

Jarvis’s US compatriot Michael Rosenblum, the video journalist guru and TV innovator, argues that existing TV models are broken and ripe for reinvention. “Everyone will have the tools to make video. This vast democratisation is similar to the impact on society of the printing press. It was the end of the supremacy of the Catholic church and feudalism, and the beginning of the Enlightenment.”

If this all sounds scarily dystopian, relax. Lindsay-Davies is confident that, in 2125, our descendants will be watching TV, one way or another. “People will still want entertainment, sport and news. However, the word ‘television’ may feel outdated, so it could be called something different.”

How about the Televisor? ■



Visionary: Hugo Gernsback in his ‘teleglasses’

Alfred Eisenstaedt/The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock



Excavation for the nation: another find in BBC Two's *Digging for Britain*

BBC

Throw in the trowel

Using the verb “to dig” with the meaning to like or understand something was first identified by lexicographers in the late 1930s, coincidentally the era in which an Anglo-Saxon burial boat was uncovered by archaeologists at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk.

Subsequently, British TV viewers have really dug shows about digs. Currently, BBC Two viewers are enthused by *Digging for Britain*, reporting from old and new excavations, and *Britain's Biggest Dig*, in which the gouging out of England for the HS2 rail route finds the past beneath the grass.

The fact that these shows are on a network with an older demographic invites cheap jokes about fossils watching fossils that certainly won't be made here and are, in any case, inaccurate because every network has spades in this ground.

Sir David Attenborough diversified from live animals to their old bones in *Attenborough and the Mammoth Graveyard*

Flick through the TV channels and you may end up knee-deep in archaeology. It was ever thus, finds **Mark Lawson**

(BBC One, 2021) and *Natural History Museum Alive* (2014, Sky). Channel 4's *The Great British Dig: History in Your Back Garden* (2020–23) saw Hugh Dennis leading a team knocking on doors around the UK, offering the prospect of treasures beneath the greenhouse. That was a continuation of the channel's long commitment to the subject which began with *Time Team* (C4, 1994–2014, YouTube/Patreon since 2022), in which Tony Robinson led a team spending three days looking for every splinter of history in a UK postcode.

My 5 has archive (TV's equivalent of archaeology) editions of *Digging Up Britain's Past*. And BBC Four memorably explored the comedic-dramatic aspect of citizen archaeology in *Detectorists*

(2014–22). Even drama has been delving deep: Agatha Christie's novel inspired by accompanying her second husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan, on digs is represented on ITVX by *Murder in Mesopotamia* (2002), starring David Suchet as Inspector Poirot.

And the crucial new TV test of relevance and profitability – are streamers interested? – is answered in the affirmative. Netflix offers *Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb*, a documentary about the opening of a five millennia-old Egyptian site, and *The Gift*, a 2019 drama in which a Turkish painter finds crucial truths in an Anatolian burial mound.

A little digging into television history reveals that each era of the medium, for eight decades, had its own archaeological exhibits. Why has the subject proved so enduring? Archaeology is a grown-up version of the “show and tell” lessons that are an important part of early education, in which a pupil brings in an object and explains its history and significance. So when BBC TV began seriously to develop in the 1950s, it was logical that, in seeking

formats that utilised the new medium's advantages over radio, "show and tell" was a popular approach.

Launched in 1952, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* was a version of the interrogative parlour game. Three academics were asked to identify ancient items from a regional museum. Bow-tied host Glyn Daniel held a relic up to camera, which was then identified in a caption shown only to viewers as, say: "40,000BC - elephant's toe bone". A trio of academics would then be charged with naming the display.

That show is identified by *Archaeology at the BBC*, a fascinating curated box set on BBC iPlayer as the first (or at least earliest surviving) BBC archaeology series.

Three other finds from beneath the archival tundra include later projects also featuring Mortimer Wheeler, an eccentric moustached archaeologist known for excavations in the British Empire, who, on *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?*, filled the role of what would now be called "team captain".

Clearly identified as the star of the emergent genre, Wheeler struck gold for a second time, again with Daniel in charge, in *Buried Treasure* (1954), which explored significant digs. He also led a group of scholars to great Greek sites in *Armchair Voyage* (1958) and explored the other key foundational civilisation in *The Grandeur That Was Rome* (1960), one of the earliest examples of the telly-lecture in which a chap (as it always was then) orated in enviable locations.

Dug up anew, these shows offer an intriguing counterpoint to our own viewing. The first line of each description - for example, "it's a dull brown colour" - reminds us, like replays of



Glyn Daniel hosts the BBC's *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?*

BBC

early football commentaries ("Everton are playing in the darker shirts") of a central frustration of pre-colour TV: this was a window on the world with the blinds down.

Daniel looks awkward on screen - the early 1950s was a period when radio broadcasters were adjusting to the younger medium - but had an instinctive sense of what television would soon want: he wrote murder

ARCHAEOLOGY IS ADAPTABLE TO DOCS, DRAMAS, SITCOMS AND GAMESHOWS

mysteries (including *The Cambridge Murders*) featuring an archaeologist sleuth called Richard Cherrington, who was widely assumed to be based on his screen co-star Wheeler.

Fittingly, the ability to watch 70-year-old TV shows at our ease - a luxury unimaginable to viewers until recently - is an example of how the digital archive has turned viewers into

broadcasting archaeologists. It seems likely that these 1950s and 1960s shows met a public interest in archaeology ignited by the uncovering and display of the Sutton Hoo grave boat, plus the 1942 unearthing of a huge hoard of Roman silver at Mildenhall in Suffolk. Regular discoveries in gardens of unexploded Second World War ordnance - underground shocks that, remarkably, continue to this day - may also have encouraged a sense in Britons of what lay beneath.

Baby boomers were fascinated by *The Treasures of Tutankhamun*, an exhibition that busted more blocks than any since. Running at the British Museum from March to December 1972, this world-touring show was the long consequence of British archaeologist Howard Carter's 1922-23 excavation of the burial chamber of an Egyptian boy-king. His gold death mask graced the front covers of the emerging Sunday newspaper inserts that were known as "colour supplements".

The 1982 raising from the Solent of Henry VIII's naval ship, the *Mary Rose*, was another headline archaeological event, as was the much-publicised discovery of the skeleton of Richard III under a Leicester car park in 2012.

Each new front-page discovery validated TV's excavation franchises, with the genre further strengthened by new entertainments based on old finds. Ralph Fiennes and Carey Mulligan starred in *The Dig* (2021, streaming on Netflix, Prime Video, Sky Store), while the re-emergence of Richard III also became a movie, *The Lost King* (2022, streaming on Apple+, Amazon Prime, Sky Store) - although it faces a defamatory action from one of the real-life participants in the dig. Amazon Prime also boasts a documentary take, *Richard III: The King in the Car Park*.

What archaeologists of TV conclude from this huge array of exhibits is that the popularity of historical finds as news stories encourages a passion for the subject that TV is well-placed to satisfy. Toiling in the soil is adaptable to documentaries, dramas, sitcoms, gameshows and panel discussions.

As suggested in the title, coined 73 years ago, of *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?*, what is returned from the earth can turn out, on television, to be one of a variety of things.

Perhaps, given the power of cosy crime, someone should look at televising the Richard Cherrington mysteries. You dig? They dig. ■



Carey Mulligan and Ralph Fiennes in Netflix film *The Dig*

Netflix

Going loco: Wilbur, Ramón García, Cristina López and La Vaquilla



It's bonkers... but we can't look away

El Grand Prix del Verano

This wildly popular Saturday-night show features a man dressed as a heifer (La Vaquilla) and a hairy bloke in a leotard called Wilbur. Welcome to primetime Spanish telly, truly *Living' la Vida Loca*.

I laughed like a drain at a shiny-floor *It's a Knockout* in which small towns compete in ridiculous games – knocking human ducks off conveyor belts, collecting coconuts from a floating palm tree, saving kittens.

El Grand Prix del Verano first aired in 1995 on Televisión Española's main channel La 1 (think BBC One) and ran for 14 seasons. It returned in 2023 and

There are some weird but wonderful shows out there in TV land. *Television* writers pick some of their favourites

has proved a huge hit, picking up six nominations at this year's Iris Awards, Spain's equivalent of our RTS awards.

Ramón García (Ramontxu), a host of Wogan-status fame, has been almost ever-present and was joined last summer by Cristina López (Cristinini); neither seem unduly concerned about

sharing presenting duties with La Vaquilla and Wilbur.

The show remains resolutely old-fashioned, which is its charm, save for one necessary – prompted by animal protection laws – but arguably disappointing change. The original show had real-life baby cows chasing contestants round the stage. Properly bonkers, very Spanish, much missed.

Could it work here? Probably, but I suspect the UK contestants would be the usual gym bunnies, social media influencers and wannabe celebs. We have quite enough of them on TV, thank you.

Matthew Bell

Nus & Culottés

The slogan says it all: “There's no point in running – you have to go naked!” With a simple but eye-catching premise, this French travel show has found a large and loyal audience who perhaps came for the nudity but stayed for the message.

In each episode of *Nus & Culottés* (*Naked and Cheeky*), two adventurers, Nans Thomassey and Guillaume Mouton, clearly kindred spirits in their lack of inhibition and passion for the natural world, set themselves a quest: a destination sometimes far away and a task when they get there.

To keep it interesting, they begin



life, it's all about the journey, where Nans and Mouts must rely on their wits, a little wisdom and the generosity of strangers they meet on the way.

Airing on France 5 since its debut in 2012, *Nus & Culottés* has reached audiences topping a million, and received critical praise for its positivity and avoidance of cliché.

But there's more to all this than uninhibited exhibitionism.

Nans and Mouts' mission is to help us re-engage with the world of wonder and adventure, and marvel at the kindness and solidarity of our fellow travellers.

Caroline Frost

© Bonne Pioche Television

each adventure naked (don't worry, it's family viewing) and with just a makeshift bundle of basic equipment. As in

Stasera Tutto È Possibile

If challenged to imagine your stereotypical Italian – black Ray-Bans? Elegantly creased linen? – the chances are they wouldn't be wearing mouth retractors and shouting indecipherable phrases on TV.

In a country obsessed with *fare brutta figura* (never publicly embarrass yourself), where social mores might even trump some laws of the land, Rai 2's *Stasera Tutto È Possibile* (Tonight, Anything Goes) seems seriously strange.

This popular gameshow, now in its 11th season, was adapted from a French TF1 format where a handful of celebrities compete in a series of bizarre challenges. That's it.

The game described at the start is Labbracadabra, *labbra* being lips. Hmm. Even dafter is the Grande Brivido (Big Shiver) round in which two celebs act out an improvised scenario... while lying on a vibrating bed.

Dafter still is the burger game, which sees contestants put on T-shirts representing burger ingredients. Then lie on top of each other inside a giant bun.

I know, right? But Italian TV is ever surprising.



RAI



Changes to broadcasting laws in the 1970s meant that television lurched from wall-to-wall politics and Pope Paul VI to *Stryx*, a camp Saturday evening musical extravaganza with added nudity and satanism, and featuring a young Grace Jones.

Stasera Tutto È Possibile, with the sort of party games to send even toddlers running screaming for the hills, might actually seem sedate.

Carole Solazzo

How To with John Wilson

I doubt that a show as weird and experimental as this would have seen the light of day – let alone on HBO, a network synonymous with prestige drama – without the involvement of Canadian comic and maverick Nathan Fielder.

How do you sell a series in a genre of its own? One that's ultimately about finding poetry in the utterly banal? And who, exactly, is John Wilson?

A quiet genius plucked from obscurity, Wilson was a modestly successful documentary-maker who had been building an archive of everyday

footage from the streets of New York. Now staggeringly vast, it's this archive that allows him to pick a mundane problem – finding a parking spot, cleaning your ears – and embark on a rambling meditation by weaving together disparate shots.

Cleaning your ears? Doesn't sound very appealing. But the beauty of the show (available on BBC iPlayer) lies in Wilson's eye for what he calls "glitches in the matrix" – those fleeting, ordinary-but-strange moments that reveal modern life to be a weird and wonderful place. One of my favourite "glitches" is when, having stalked the actor Kyle MacLachlan into the subway and watched him repeatedly fail to scan his ticket, he opens a nearby door on to an adult lightsabre fight club.

In Wilson's world, a strange subculture or a quirky character is to be found just around every corner: "Mandela effect" conferences, *Avatar* fan clubs-turned-support groups, anti-circumcision campaigners...

And he somehow disarms his contributors to the extent that they'll give him, say, a live demonstration of their foreskin-stretching machine.

Harrison Bennett



BBC

All the fun of the fair

Careers are a serious matter. But that didn't stop this RTS Futures Careers Fair being a hoot. **Matthew Bell** reports

The latest RTS Futures Careers Fair took an absorbing behind-the-scenes look at the Disney+ adaptation of Jilly Cooper's riotous bonk-buster *Rivals*. Writer and executive producer Dominic Treadwell-Collins opened the lid on the hit series for a packed room of young talent among the 1,800-plus people who registered for the fair. Making TV can rarely have felt such fun.

"I've wanted to put Jilly Cooper on the television for years and everyone laughed at me," he recalled. Setting up his own production company, Happy Prince, in 2019, gave him the opportunity. He wrote a pilot script and soon found himself in a bidding war.

Treadwell-Collins told the audience: "You wouldn't think Jilly Cooper and Disney would go together, but they've been the most amazing home for us. They allowed us to be naughty and poke [fun] at Britishness and class."

Attitudes to sex have changed since *Rivals* was published in 1988, as the experience in the writers room showed. "We talked about the themes of the book," said Treadwell-Collins. "There was this moment where a female writer in her early 20s and a writer in her 50s talked about sex. The younger writer said: 'You can't say you want to be thrown up against a wall and shagged.' The older writer went: 'I do and I did.' That was really useful."

Cooper gave her backing to the show – and notes on the script. Two



Packed full of talent: the RTS Futures Careers Fair

episodes were written by another of the series' executive producers, Laura Wade, also present on the *Rivals* panel.

Catriona Chandler played the high-spirited teenager Caitlin O'Hara in a pitch-perfect posh accent, far from her native Scouse. Caitlin, she said, "represents the youth of the 80s" and is "obsessed with the idea of sex. Jilly is unapologetic about younger people being obsessed by sex... Caitlin goes on and on about orgasms."

Rivals boasted a superlative ensemble cast, notably David Tennant, Alex Hassell, Katherine Parkinson, Danny Dyer, Nafessa Williams, Aidan Turner and Victoria Smurfit. Lead director, Elliot Hegarty, said: "It's a cliché, but if you cast it right, that's 90% of your job as a director done. And it's a cliché because it's true."

Treadwell-Collins added: "We had a 'No wanker policy'. I've always said: 'You can be a nice person, work hard and make great telly.' One reason the show has been such a hit is that you can feel the joy and the love through the screen. It's

important in this industry not to reward bad behaviour, and we didn't."

A session on BBC soap *EastEnders*, which celebrated its 40th birthday last month, offered a fascinating insight into the highly-tuned machine that produces more than 100 hours of TV a year. The panel from BBC Studios Scripted explained why the soap – which employs 130 staff and each year processes more than 30,000 days of freelance bookings – is the ultimate training ground for new talent.

Training Executive Kris Green said: "Soap provides end-to-end training opportunities, from story to script, production to post-production.

They're the unsung universities of our industry. The high volume of work and fast-paced environment sets the foundations for a solid career. If you can do soap, you can do anything."

The remaining two sessions were put on by the careers fair sponsors: "Kickstart your unscripted TV career" with National Film and Television School Head of Television Entertainment Simon Broadley; and "The future of sports



Playing posh: *Rivals* actor Catriona Chandler



TV: innovation and sustainability in broadcast production” with IMG Studios. Broadley said: “However competitive [the industry] is, somebody’s got to do this stuff. So if you’re passionate and motivated, just go for it. You’ll find a way – talent will out.”

He was joined on the stage by NFTS alumnus and RTS Student Television Awards winner James Lacy, who graduated in 2023 and has just completed a five-month stint as a researcher on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

The sustainability session explored IMG Studios’ approach to reducing the carbon footprint of live sport productions, including the use of remote production and green hydrogen.

The careers fair also featured an all-day CV clinic and career advice area where attendees could get their CVs tweaked by industry professionals and receive more general advice. Some 40 leading broadcasters, indies and TV organisations exhibited, many attracting long queues of young people keen to get the inside track on a career in the industry. ■

The RTS Futures Careers Fair was held at the Business Design Centre, London, on 4 February and sponsored by IMG Studios and the NFTS.

Unrivalled advice



Dominic Treadwell-Collins, who executive-produced *EastEnders* and the RTS award-winning *A Very English Scandal* about the fall of politician Jeremy Thorpe, advised the careers fair audience: ‘Keep asking questions. At first in this industry, I tried to bluff about knowing things, but you don’t learn that way. Be honest.

‘I didn’t know for years what I was going to do... I thought I wanted to be an actor. I remember coming out of a school play and saying: “Mum, was I good?” She went: “No, that boy there was good.” And it turned out to be Ben Cumberbatch! It took me a while to work out what I was best at and I learned that from lots of different people. So ... ask questions.’



Laura Wade started writing plays when she was four – ‘which my parents will tell you about in therapy, [discussing] the trauma of having to watch my early work.

‘I studied drama at Bristol University and carried on writing and sending off

scripts; working in offices during the day and writing at the weekend and in the evenings. [I was] cranking out plays, trying to work out my voice.

‘I went on the Royal Court Young Writers’ Programme, which was amazing and probably more useful than my degree, and I [built] a theatre career. When you start having some success as a playwright, TV people come knocking.’

She adapted her play *Posh* for film as *The Riot Club*, and enjoyed working with Treadwell-Collins on a project that, as so often in TV, failed to come to fruition. ‘When *Rivals* came up, it was a no-brainer.’ Wade advised:

‘YOU CAN SHOOT ON YOUR PHONE AND EDIT ON YOUR LAPTOP. YOU’VE GOT NO EXCUSES’

‘Write. People spend a lot of time talking about writing or having a great idea and then talking themselves out of it – just start writing and get it down.’



Elliot Hegarty did a politics degree but spent much of his time at university obsessing about film and starting a film-making society. He said: ‘I started making short films, then worked in camera departments and went to film school. I made a low-budget movie set in a pub [*County Kilburn*] – I ripped off a film called *Clerks*. It did all right and set me off, and I got work in [TV] comedy.’ Recently he directed *Ted Lasso* and *Cheaters*.

He advised: ‘Work harder than the person next to you. Absorb everything, write loads. Now that you can [shoot] on your phone and edit on your laptop, you’ve got no excuses.’

Don't underestimate us! Gen Z speaks out

How can broadcasters capture the attention and trust of a generation that is hooked on small screens and quick bites? Members of our expert panel had some ideas

The challenges that traditional broadcast news organisations face in finding an audience among a sceptical and media-saturated Gen Z were laid bare in a recent Channel 4/RTS panel discussion. “It’s all about the first five seconds... and stopping them scrolling on to the next video,” said former RTS Bursary Scholar Mahnoor Akhlaq, now working as a multimedia producer for Channel 4 News.

“And, crucially, aggressively seeking them out on their feed,” added Oli Dugmore, an author at Joe.co.uk, an online news, politics, sports and popular culture platform designed for young people. “We’re competing with every other piece of content that gets produced. Everything you make needs to be good enough to grab attention.”

Akhlaq and Dugmore were joined

by Nic Newman, Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for Journalism, University of Oxford, and Rachel Botsman, a teacher and author who runs a course on trust in the digital world at Saïd Business School, Oxford University.

Chaired by the BBC’s Analysis Editor, Ros Atkins, the panel’s task was to look at Gen Z’s relationship with news. They were speaking in the context of Channel 4’s latest research, “Gen Z: trends, truth and trust”, and a stirring speech, reported in the February edition of *Television*, from the broadcaster’s CEO, Alex Mahon, calling for regulation to curb what she regards as the damaging impact of news delivered by algorithm on social media.

All panellists agreed that TV news producers need to be TikTok-savvy or risk losing the young audience to platforms that have scant regard for either

truth or accuracy. “Attention is up for grabs,” said Dugmore, “so why aren’t people engaging with our journalism? For me, the answer is often because it’s not good enough.”

Akhlaq said: “Young people have an appetite for serious news. This week on TikTok, reporting on the Congo has been our most viewed content. Young people want to hear the stories that are rarely spoken about. It’s essential that news producers look at TikTok.”

Urging broadcasters not to underestimate young people, she acknowledged that *Channel 4 News* had a decent rather than a huge audience of teens and twentysomethings. “When they think of news, they might have negative associations and think it’s boring. It’s about the language and the pictures you use when you address Gen Z.”

It was a mistake to regard young people as a homogenous group; within



All photographs: Will Johnston

the age range (13 to 27), there were many different habits of media usage although certain trends were visible. TikTok was preferred by the youngest teenagers, while Facebook was more popular at the older end of Gen Z. "YouTube and Instagram are more in the middle," explained Akhlaq. There was also a gender divide, with young men favouring YouTube more than young women.

Newman echoed this. "There's a kaleidoscope of consumption [by Gen Z]. Not all young people consume TikTok. Some consume long-form, some short-form," he said. Tone was vital.

Dugmore agreed that tone was key. Gen Z was "looking for a sense of humour, irreverence, being a bit gonzo. That's how we form a connection with our audience and differentiate ourselves from

say things rather than what they say.

"The whole hierarchy of information has changed. We may not like that... We still assume that people are going to consume high-quality news. It's a shift that's happening fast."

This trend towards trust in individuals rather than institutions was taken up by Dugmore. "With fashion, for instance, do you follow a fashion house or a fashion vlogger? It would be unwise of us to think that trend won't affect journalism." On platforms such as Substack, subscribers paid to follow individual journalists, something also reflected in the podcast boom, he said.

Akhlaq pointed out: "Gen Z aren't automatically thinking: 'Let me have a look at what the BBC or Channel 4 has

does that resonate with Gen Z, asked Atkins. "Traditional media sometimes say that in a very top-down way," replied Botsman. "It comes across as: 'We are the traditional media industry, so you should trust us.'"

Atkins then asked if content was more likely to be trusted within its own environment, rather than alongside other kinds of content? "Gen Z doesn't even make that distinction," said Botsman.

Mahon had called for some protection for public service broadcasters in the digital sphere and raised the idea of having a "trustmark" displayed on PSB content. "I love the idea of a trustmark – I just don't think it will work," said Botsman. "I don't know



Rachel Botsman



Oli Dugmore



Nic Newman



Mahnoor Akhlaq

other content creators. Tone is almost as important as the first three seconds of a video."

In her speech, Mahon had referred to what Channel 4's research called Gen Z's "flatter hierarchy of trust" in institutions such as the BBC. Gen Z was more likely to have confidence in friends' social media posts than the national broadcaster when compared with older people – 58% against 43%.

Botsman is the author of the book *Who Can You Trust?*, looking at how digital technology has revolutionised the nature of trust. She told the audience: "It's dangerous to think of trust in traditional ways. It's no longer hierarchical or institutional. People won't look up to an expert or a journalist.

"Once you accept that trust no longer flows in a hierarchy or a pyramid, you start to understand the changing nature of trust. Trust is based on feeling over fact. It's how people

posted." She explained:

"TikTok is flipping into people's newsfeeds, so it's about getting people's attention and making content they want to see."

Newman added: "If something big like a terrorist attack happens, young people will go to traditional news providers like the BBC or *Channel 4 News*, but it's often about a passion or a personality that Gen Z trusts at a personal level. That's important for traditional media organisations to understand."

Botsman said it was a mistake to see institutional trust and individual trust as separate things. "It works best when they're combined... I was surprised, but when you look at trust in traditional media institutions, it's higher in younger than older generations." Similarly, older people were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than Gen Z.

Public service broadcasters take great pride in being "trustworthy", but

how you implement it. Having one might turn off younger generations."

Dugmore wondered how you would stop a trustmark being faked by AI.

What did Newman think of the idea of algorithmic prominence? "It's easy to say in a room full of public service broadcasters and people who consume a lot of public service broadcasting. But if you're Rupert Murdoch, you might think differently. The challenge is: who defines reliable content. What is it?"

"Trustmarks are a blunt instrument. It's about a brand that produces all kinds of content of varying reliability. Our own research shows the BBC is highly trusted, but other parts of the [established] media ecosystem are not trusted." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. 'Gen Z: trends, truth and trust' was a Channel 4/RTS event held at Underbelly Boulevard, London, on 30 January. The producer was Channel 4.

Sky News
News Channel of the Year



RTS Television Journalism Awards 2025

The awards were presented on 5 March at the London Hilton on Park Lane and hosted by journalist and novelist Tom Bradby

In partnership with:





Trump Assassination Attempt Breaking News

BBC

Breaking News

Trump Assassination Attempt

BBC News for BBC News Channel
 'A journalism masterclass. Gary O'Donoghue asked just the right questions to build a picture of the story that was breaking around him – one that was to become a defining moment in the US presidential election race.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Southport Stabbings**, Sky News
- ▶ **Lebanon Pager Explosions – Reuters Video News**, Reuters Television News for Reuters Television

Camera Person of the Year

Mohammed Abu Safia – ITV News

ITN/ITV News for ITV

'The winner may lack formal training but he delivered unforgettable images and incredible perspectives. The jury was blown away by his ability to live through and document events in Gaza with such accuracy, allowing the world to know what's going on.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Fernanda Pesce**, The Associated Press
- ▶ **Mohammed Salem**, Reuters Video News for Reuters Television



Mohammed Abu Safia Camera Person of the Year

ITV

Current Affairs – Home

Maternity: Broken Trust (Exposure)

Pulse Films (part of VICE Studios Group) for ITV1 and ITVX

'Groundbreaking current affairs – robust, assured and transformatory – harnessing the power of courageous parents in the face of "serious and systemic failures" in maternity care at Nottingham University Hospital Trust. Heartbreaking.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Al Fayed: Predator at Harrods**, BBC Current Affairs for BBC Two
- ▶ **The Base: A British Army Scandal (Exposure)**, Clover Films for ITV1



Fault Lines – 'The Night Won't End': Biden's War on Gaza Current Affairs – International

Al Jazeera

Current Affairs – International

Fault Lines – 'The Night Won't End':

Biden's War on Gaza

Al Jazeera English

'Exceptional journalism and expert analysis brought to life emotional raw footage. Produced under challenging circumstances, its high production values created a devastating, evidence-based, deeply insightful documentary.'

Nominees

- ▶ **Gaza – Al Jazeera Investigations**, Al Jazeera
- ▶ **Children of the Cult (Exposure)**, DM Productions for ITV1

Digital Journalism

Disciples – The Cult of TB Joshua

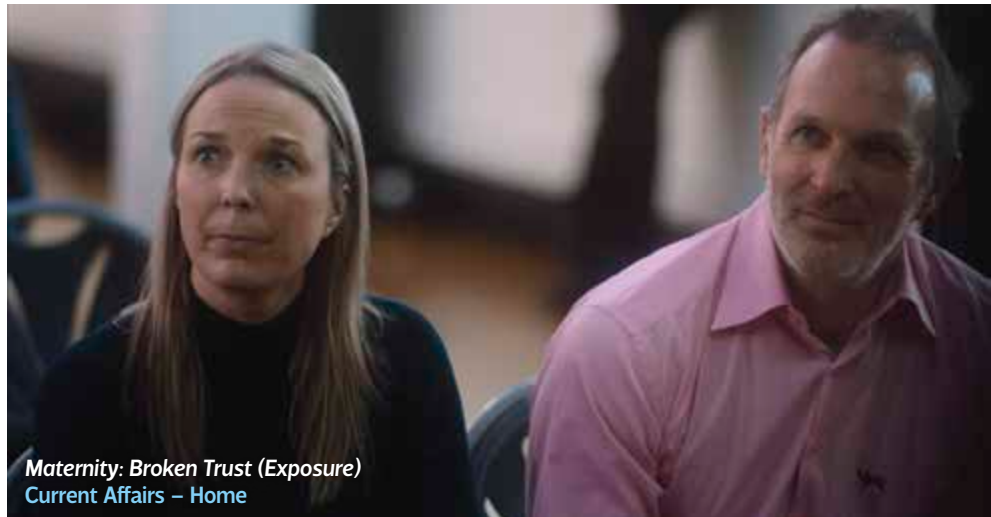
BBC Africa Eye, openDemocracy and BBC World Service Impact Team for BBC World Service

‘Outstanding storytelling that reached an audience known for news-avoidance via different digital platforms, including six videos for TikTok, a first for the BBC.’

Nominees

▶ **Lethal Restraint Online interactive**, The Associated Press/Frontline (PBS) with The Howard Centers for Investigative Journalism

▶ **BBC Verify**, BBC Verify for BBC News website and social platforms



ITV

Maternity: Broken Trust (Exposure)
Current Affairs – Home

Emerging Young Talent of the Year

Sam Leader – ITV News

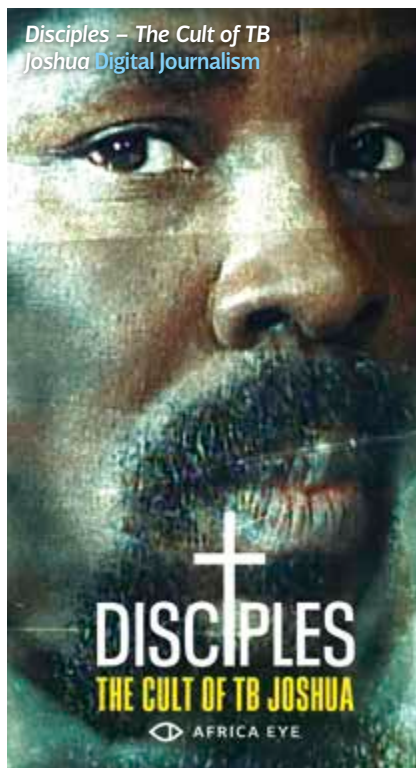
ITN for ITV

‘A very approachable and technically competent presenter who really understands his audiences. His piece on sextortion was chilling, while his exploration of the Maga Boyz helped explain Donald Trump’s success among young people.’

Nominees

▶ **Cree–Summer Haughton – ITV News**, ITN for ITV

▶ **Hind Khoudary**, Al Jazeera English



BBC

Disciples – The Cult of TB Joshua
Digital Journalism



Richard Kendal

Tom Bradby
Host

Nations and Regions Factual

Catching a Killer: The Murder of Emma Caldwell – Disclosure

BBC Scotland News for BBC One

‘A clear winner. The programme was the culmination of more than six years’ meticulous work by one reporter and her team, and led to the announcement of a public inquiry.’

Nominees

▶ **On Drugs**, Blair Black Films for BBC One Northern Ireland

▶ **I Am Not Okay – Spotlight**, BBC Northern Ireland



BBC

Nations and Regions Factual
CATCHING A KILLER
The Murder of Emma Caldwell

Nations and Regions News

Wales at Six – TATA

ITV Cymru Wales for ITV

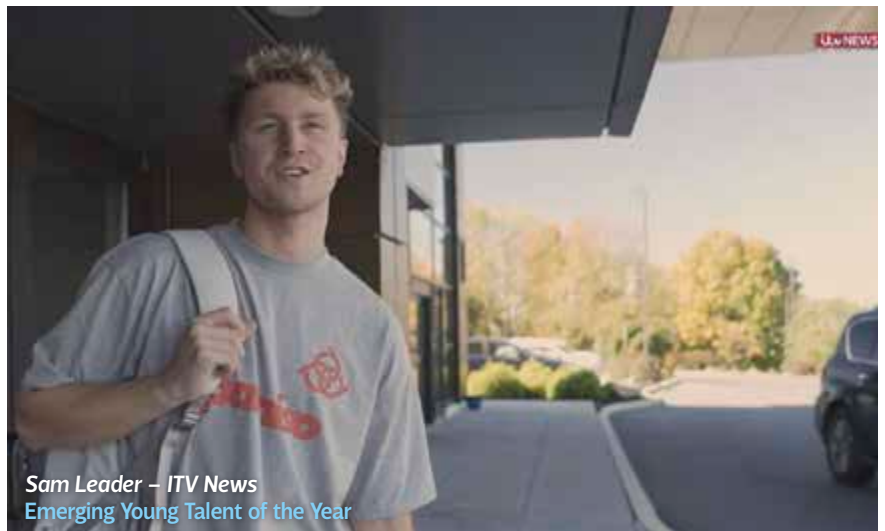
‘News teams across the UK impressed the judges with the level of ambition of their programmes in this category.’

In the end, one entry stood out for high-quality reportage that was rooted in the community as the team dealt with a major breaking story.’

Nominees

▶ **Smear Test Investigation – UTV Live**, UTV

▶ **Infected Blood Inquiry – ITV News Meridian**, ITV News Meridian for ITV1



ITV

Sam Leader – ITV News
Emerging Young Talent of the Year



All photographs: Richard Kendal

1 *Trump Assassination Attempt*
Breaking News

2 *Cathy Newman – Channel 4 News*
Network Television Journalist of the Year

3 *Investigating the War in the Middle East – ITV News*
News Coverage – International

4 *Catching a Killer: The Murder of Emma Caldwell – Disclosure*
Nations and Regions Factual

5 *Guy Lynn – BBC London News*
Nations and Regions Reporter of the Year

6 *Disciples – The Cult of TB Joshua*
Digital Journalism

7 *Gaza 101: Emergency Rescue – BBC Eye Investigations/BBC News Arabic*
On-Demand Journalism

8 *Fault Lines – ‘The Night Won’t End’: Biden’s War on Gaza*
Current Affairs – International

9 *Sophy Ridge*
Network Presenter of the Year

Nations and Regions Reporter of the Year

Guy Lynn – BBC London News

BBC London News for BBC One
‘Guy Lynn demonstrated an impressive range of skills in an entry that included lengthy and detailed investigations. The films’ quality and impact of the journalism led to real change.’

Nominees

▶ **Kaf Okpattah – ITV News London,**
ITN/ITV News for ITV1

▶ **Amelia Beckett – ITV Calendar,**
ITV Yorkshire for ITV1

Network Daily News Programme of the Year

Channel 4 News

Channel 4 News for Channel 4
‘The jury was particularly impressed with the depth and range of *Channel 4 News*’s agenda-setting journalism, both at home and abroad. It knows its audience and produces strong programmes night after night.’

Nominees

▶ **ITV News at Ten,** ITN/ITV News for ITV

▶ **The World with Yalda Hakim,**
Sky News

Network Interview of the Year

The Case Against the Archbishop – Channel 4 News

Channel 4 News for Channel 4
‘The winner provided a real “edge of your seat” moment. Under a barrage of forensic questions from Cathy Newman, viewers witnessed the world tumbling down around the interviewee who, just days later, finally resigned his post.’

Nominees

▶ **Laura Kuenssberg interviews Michelle Mone and Doug Barrowman – Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg,** BBC News for BBC One

▶ **Nick Robinson and Nigel Farage – The Panorama Interviews with Nick Robinson,** BBC News for BBC One

Network Presenter of the Year

Sophy Ridge

Sky News
‘In a strong field, this presenter stood out, combining disarming toughness with huge likeability. Moving effortlessly from politics to breaking news, she is in control, genuinely insightful and never domineering.’

Nominees

▶ **Susanna Reid – Good Morning Britain,** ITV Studios Daytime for ITV1

▶ **Anna Foster,** BBC News for BBC One and BBC News Channel



Michael Jermey
Outstanding Contribution

Richard Kendal

Outstanding Contribution

Michael Jermey

‘The recipient is an outstanding journalist and editorial executive who, more than anyone else in recent years, has been responsible for the shape, vigour and reputation of the news on ITV – where until recently he was the Director of News and Current Affairs.

‘He oversaw the reinvention of *News at Ten* as a single-presenter show, as well as creating the hour-long early-evening news.

He also originated ITV’s *Exposure* documentary strand. And with colleagues in the other national news organisations, he helped establish the 2010 election debates.

‘He drove a programme of modernisation and change in ITV’s regional newsrooms, partly to meet the financial challenges of the 21st century. An ITN trainee himself at the start of his career, he also established the ITV News trainee scheme.’



Guy Lynn – BBC London News
Nations and Regions Reporter of the Year

BBC



The Case Against the Archbishop
– Channel 4 News Network Interview of the Year

Channel 4



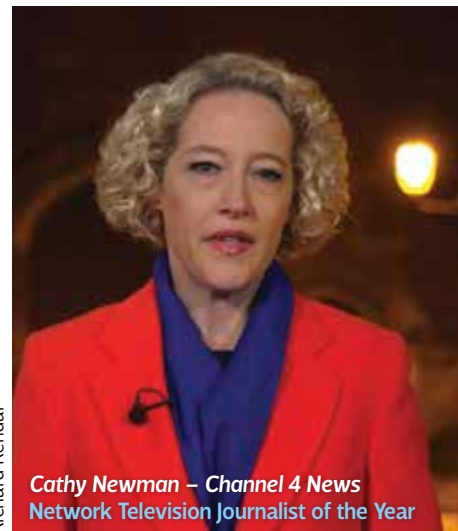
Sophy Ridge
Network Presenter of the Year

BSkyB



Wales at Six – TATA
Nations and Regions News

Richard Kendall



Cathy Newman – Channel 4 News
Network Television Journalist of the Year

Channel 4

Network Television Journalist of the Year

Cathy Newman – Channel 4 News

Channel 4 News for Channel 4
‘Cathy Newman delivered scoop after scoop on an issue that had lain fallow in one of England’s most important institutions and ultimately led to an unprecedented shake-up and resignation at the top of the Church of England.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Andrew Harding**, BBC News for BBC One
- ▶ **Stuart Ramsay**, Sky News

News Channel of the Year

Sky News

‘The winner was hard to beat for its excellent journalism, high production values and clear analysis. It had strong eyewitness coverage from around the world and produced highly watchable reporting on many UK stories.’

Nominees

- ▶ **BBC News Channel**
- ▶ **Al Jazeera English**

News Coverage – Home

The Post Office Scandal: ITV News Investigates – ITV News

ITN/ITV News for ITV
‘The exemplary reporting of this team never lost sight of the human dimension. They were also the first to broadcast the “smoking gun” tape which proved [Post Office boss] Paula Ven- nells knew about Horizon’s ability to hack the accounts of sub-postmasters.’

Nominees

- ▶ **The Case Against the Archbishop** – Channel 4 News, Channel 4 News for Channel 4
- ▶ **Southport: The Tragedy That Shook Britain** – ITV News, ITN/ITV News for ITV

News Coverage – International

Investigating the War in the Middle East – ITV News

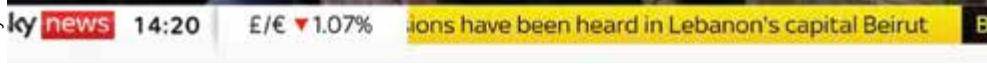
ITN/ITV News for ITV
‘Despite international journalists’ lack of access, *ITV News* reported with rigorous detail. Marshalling all available resources and with careful collaboration with on-the-ground videographers, the winner showcased investigative journalism.’

Nominees

- ▶ **The War in Gaza** – CNN Worldwide, CNN for CNN International
- ▶ **Sudan’s War**, Sky News



BSkyB



BBC



BBC



The Post Office Scandal: ITV News Investigates – ITV News News Coverage – Home

On-Demand Journalism

Gaza 101: Emergency Rescue – BBC Eye Investigations/BBC News Arabic
 BBC Eye Investigations for BBC iPlayer
 ‘The winner brought the viewer right alongside events unfolding with terrible repetition. Jurors praised the inspired commissioning of work they described as compelling, chilling, authentic and intense.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Britain’s Backstreet Surgery Scandal**, ITN for ITV
- ▶ **Democracy 2024**, Financial Times

Political Journalist of the Year

Paul Brand – ITV News

ITN/ITV News for ITV

‘A versatile and very talented journalist, with scoops and a strong interviewing style – arguably, the best political interviewer in Britain.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Beth Rigby**, Sky News
- ▶ **Sam Coates**, Sky News

Richard Kendall



Paul Brand – ITV News
 Political Journalist of the Year
 and Paul Brand – Assisted Dying – ITV News Specialist Journalist of the Year

Scoop of the Year

Al Fayed: Predator at Harrods

BBC Current Affairs for BBC Two

‘A hugely important piece of work that encouraged more women to come forward. Hearing many describe the same experience – their repeated descriptions of Al Fayed’s playbook – was extremely powerful. A true exclusive.’

Nominees

- ▶ **The Case Against the Archbishop – Channel 4 News**, Channel 4 News for Channel 4
- ▶ **The Post Office Scandal: The Secret Tapes and the ‘Smoking Gun’ – ITV News**, ITN/ITV News for ITV

Richard Kendall

Specialist Journalist of the Year

Paul Brand – Assisted Dying –

ITV News

ITN/ITV News for ITV

‘Sensitive and mature reporting on an incredibly divisive subject. Paul Brand’s writing was considerate, empathetic and measured but the reports were hard-hitting and got to the heart of issues that needed debate.’

Nominees

- ▶ **Cathy Newman – The Case Against the Archbishop – Channel 4 News**, Channel 4 News for Channel 4
- ▶ **Tom Cheshire**, Sky News



Investigating the War in the Middle East – ITV News News Coverage – International

ITV

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The period after the First World War is a rich source of material for TV producers, with stories of soldiers coming back from the front, broken mentally and physically by the horrors they endured and struggling to return to the lives they left.

Dope Girls, a new drama currently airing on BBC One, looks at the homecoming from a different perspective – that of the women left behind who stepped into the roles of the absent men and now don't want to step back.

Jane Tranter, executive producer and CEO of series producers Bad Wolf, was hooked by the idea of “telling that history through the female gaze, which hadn't been done before”. These women, she said, were waiting and working, then when the men returned, were horrified that “they were going back to their jobs and that the old order of the world was to be restored. The women were simply not ready for that”.

Created in association with Sony Pictures Television, the six-part drama is based on Marek Kohn's non-fiction book *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground*, on the drug and club culture of the early 20th century.

Emmy-winning US actor Julianne Nicholson (*Mare of Easttown*) stars as Kate, a destitute mother who becomes a player in London's burgeoning club scene after a tragedy leaves her and her school-age daughter (Eilidh Fisher, *The Outrun*) homeless.

“There were 150 clubs in Soho at that time,” said Bad Wolf executive producer Kate Crowther. “Pretty much every other basement was a nightclub. It was an exciting kind of scene where bohemian creatives would get



Dope Girls: Julianne Nicholson as Kate in Trafalgar Square

BBC

Angels of the night

Cymru Wales The clubs and criminals of Soho provide the bohemian backdrop for BBC drama *Dope Girls*. **Alison Jones** reports

together and have parties.” The series has been compared to *Peaky Blinders* but this time it is women who are rising up through criminality.

Visually, it travels from the muted tones of a backwater country village to the vibrancy and hedonism of alcohol- and drug-fuelled Soho. Soon we witness brutality in police cells as new women police officers seek to prove themselves every bit as tough and ruthless as the men.

In the opening scene, at the peak of end-of-war victory celebrations, Kate, dressed as an angel, plunges into the red-dyed waters of the fountain at Trafalgar Square, emerging reborn as an aspiring queen of London's nightlife.

Lead director Shannon

Murphy said she was focused on capturing the “anarchic energy” that was on the pages of the script by Polly Stenham and Alex Warren, rather than obsessing about the accuracy of the period details.

“I am interested in the details of that time but we are telling a story about fictional characters and we want to have creative licence,” she said. “The goal was to make a modern audience feel like the camera had just been dropped into that time and they were all experiencing this.”

Though set in London, much of *Dope Girls* was filmed in Wales, where the production team recreated the streets, alleyways and underground bars of bustling post-war Soho. The first “London” nightclub shown

was actually in the basement of a Welsh castle.

Production designer Sherree Phillips studied photographs from the era to build the backdrop for this new world: “We were looking at the people at the forefront of the artistic movement then. We show a small sliver of a taxidermy giraffe, and that's because we found a photograph from the time featuring a huge giraffe and were obsessed with it.

“They seem like radical images or ideas but they almost all stem from the amazing creative work of that period.” ■

Dope Girls was previewed at the Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, at an event hosted by RTS Cymru Wales Chair Edward Russell.

RTS news IN BRIEF

Unlocking the door in Norwich

More than 100 people from across the TV and film industry gathered at Ember Studios in Norwich last month for the RTS East/Norfolk Screen panel discussion “Unlocking the potential in production”. Charlie Gauvain, RTS East Vice Chair and MD of Eye Film, chaired a panel that included representatives from Ember Studios, Vine FX, the Production Bureau, Norwich University of the Arts film course and Epic Studios.

Sustainable TV in the Midlands

RTS Midlands held a sustainability workshop in Coventry in support of its new Sustainability Award. The award is open to productions principally shot or produced in the Midlands and to individuals, teams or organisations implementing sustainable production techniques or championing sustainability.

West Midlands creative industries body Create Central has worked in collaboration with RTS Midlands to develop the award, and both organisations will work together to promote sustainability in the TV industry.

Dinah Lord moves into East Chair

Dinah Lord, founder of factual producers Caravan, is the new RTS East Chair, taking over from Rachel Watson, who becomes the centre’s Secretary. Lord said: “I am delighted to take on the role of Chair and be given the opportunity to work with and showcase all the incredible talent the East has to offer.”

Animation award winner:
The Happy Pig Brand



UWE

UWE trio bring home the bacon

Film-makers from the University of the West of England (UWE) won three of the four main prizes on offer at the RTS West of England Student Awards.

The Animation prize went to UWE student Léo Bournas Milazzo for *The Happy Pig Brand*, of which the judges said: “We forgot this was a student film – we couldn’t

fault it. It had a sincere message but the right amount of comedy.” *Peace Process* was named Best Drama. The UWE film was “amazing, so professional looking – written, directed and acted very well”.

The Factual – Short Form award went to a team of UWE students for *Sonder*, “a very poetic film, with incredible access, well

researched and professional”.

Breaking the UWE stranglehold, students from the University of Gloucestershire took home the Entertainment and Comedy Drama award for *The Face*, a “clever and interesting film – the writing really stood out and it was funny and unexpected”.

A number of craft awards were also made on the night. The ceremony was held at Bristol’s Watershed cinema this month, and featured an address by Five Mile Films Executive Producer Jordan Maloy, whose credits include Channel 4’s *The Dog House*.

Matthew Bell

‘Curveballs’ can help freelancers

RTS Futures West of England took part in the BBC Academy’s Production Unlocked event in Bristol to explore how freelancers can build a “portfolio” career. The panel also highlighted the challenges freelancers continue to face during today’s testing economic climate.

Reema Lorford, COO of Gritty Talent, advised freelancers to spend time on

developing their LinkedIn profiles. “It’s your living, breathing self and it may throw up new opportunities in adjacent, or even other, industries,” she said.

Sas Bonser, Talent Executive at BBC Studios Natural History Unit, added: “There will always be ups and downs. Just be willing to work across different genres – slight curveballs can be instructive in a career.”

Ryan Francis, Creative Director at Bristol’s Latent Pictures, shared its work on an electronic press kit for BBC Three comedy drama *Boarders*, as well as his experiences working for corporate clients.

Latent has a “social-first approach”, and is committed to opening doors and offering paid work and training to under-represented film-makers.

Suzy Lambert

The two women behind TV's favourite North East detective received a standing ovation when they collected Outstanding Contribution awards at a sellout ceremony in Gateshead. Brenda Blethyn, who played Vera Stanhope on ITV for 14 years, and Ann Cleeves, who created the character, were honoured at the RTS North East and the Border Awards last month.

The Oscar-nominated actor and bestselling crime writer have become firm friends, and though Blethyn has stepped away from the role after more than 50 episodes, Cleeves says the character will feature in at least one more book to add to the 11 already published.

Guests heard that the *Vera* phenomenon on TV and in publishing had sustained drama production in the North East for more than a decade and brought in thousands of visitors to *Vera's* locations. The feature-length episodes and the books are popular around the world.

Blethyn – who also won for Best Drama Performance – said she was overwhelmed at the way people in the region have welcomed her into their hearts.

Peter Darrant and the team from Pride Media Centre in Gateshead celebrated winning the prestigious Centre



Ann Cleeves and Brenda Blethyn

All photographs: North News

Vera pair collar the top honours

RTS NE & Border Graeme Thompson reports from a star-studded Gateshead ceremony

Award in recognition of their work as a hub for studios and more than 16 businesses.

Theresa Wise, Chief Executive of the RTS, presented the award, praising the team's work with start-ups, schools and colleges to encourage interest in and access to the screen sector.

Their commitment to equity and inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community was impressive, she said.

Other winners included Fulwell 73's Netflix documentary series *Sunderland 'Til I Die* (Broadcast Factual) and BBC Three's *Smoggie Queens*, which won the Comedy

award for Hat Trick Productions. The writer and star of the Teesside-based series about drag queens, Phil Dunning, won Best Newcomer at a ceremony hosted by comedian and writer Jason Cook.

Gateshead production company Twenty Six 03 won the Factual Entertainment prize for *Joanna Page's Wild Life*, FilmNova received the Sport award for the *Great North Run*, and *The Red King* (Quay Street Productions) won Best Drama.

TV and film production spend in the North East has increased to more than £22m according to figures from North East Screen – and chief executive Alison Gwynn predicted there is more to come.

The event is the region's biggest creative industries gathering of the year, welcoming 400-plus guests to the Gateshead Hilton, including actors Jill Halfpenny, David Leon and Riley Jones, CBBC stars Danny Adams and Mick Potts, *Dragons' Den* star Sara Davies, boxing commentator Glenn McCrory, North East Mayor Kim McGuinness and cast from *The Dumping Ground* and *Smoggie Queens*.

Also on the red carpet were news presenters Amy Lea and Simon O'Rourke (ITV Tyne Tees), Dawn Thewlis (*BBC Look North*), Pam Royle and Jeff Brown. ■



Best Newcomer Phil Dunning

RTS North East and the Border Television Awards winners

Outstanding Contribution - Brenda Blethyn and Ann Cleeves

Centre Award - Pride Media Centre

Crew Award - 'La' Toyah McDonald, 1st AD, *The Red King*

Drama - *The Red King* - Quay Street Productions for UKTV

Drama Performance - Brenda Blethyn, *Vera* - Silverprint Pictures for ITV

Comedy - *Smoggie Queens* - Hat Trick Productions for BBC Three

Broadcast Factual Entertainment - *Joanna Page's Wild Life* - Twenty Six 03 for BBC One

Broadcast Factual Production - *Sunderland 'Til I Die* - Fulwell 73 for Netflix

Non-broadcast Scripted and Unscripted - *Watch the Lights* - North Wrestling

Newcomer - Phil Dunning, *Smoggie Queens* - Hat Trick Productions for BBC Three

News Programme - BBC Look North

On-screen Journalism - Gregg Easteal, *ITV Tyne Tees*

Presenter - Sharuna Sagar - BBC North East

Sport - *Great North Run 2024* - FilmNova for the BBC

Broadcast Short Form - *The Life's Work of Margaret Bradshaw* - Paul Kingston, *ITV News Tyne Tees*

Commercial - *We Are Premier Bet* - Future&Co Films

Professional Excellence: Cinematography - James Edward Cook, *Just 'Cause I'm Dead*

Professional Excellence: Post-production - David Fisher *High-end drama editor, Jackdaw/The Devil's Hour*

Student Awards: Animation - *Juicy Cat* - Teesside University

Student Awards: Drama - *Husk* - Northumbria University

Student Awards: Entertainment and Comedy Drama - *One Foot Out the Door* - University of Sunderland

Student Awards: Saving the Planet - *On the Edge: Saving the Iberian Lynx* - Megan Richards, University of Cumbria

Student Awards: Factual - Long Form - *Fleece to Fabric* - University of Sunderland

Student Awards: Factual - Short Form - *The Independent Cinema Crisis* - Gateshead College

It's known to its loyal fans as the car show with a heart, bringing a tear to the eye of many a petrol-head. And while the presenters of *Car S.O.S.* manage to hold it together on screen for the emotional finale of each episode, when they return a secretly restored car to its surprised owner, they have confessed that they are also deeply moved.

RTS Midlands held a premiere of the first episode of series 13 followed by a Q&A, at which ebullient presenters Fuzz Townshend and Tim Shaw revealed some behind-the-scenes secrets.

Shaw admitted: "I really struggled watching that episode. I've only watched about three because I get too emotional. We have done 130 reveals now, and that moment when the penny drops for the owner is what we exist for.

"We don't cry then, but I will ring Fuzz up on the way home and go, 'You all right mate? [chokes up]. Are you crying? No, me neither.'"

The show, which returned to National Geographic on 13 March, has been running for 13 years, with previous series also screened on More 4 and Disney+. The team is based at a workshop in Walsall and, for each



Car S.O.S. hosts Tim Shaw and Fuzz Townshend

Channel 4

They've been driven to tears

RTS Midlands **Car S.O.S. is back for a 13th series on National Geographic. It's going to be emotional, says Roz Laws**

season, it restores 10 cars in nine months, with each project taking between 800 and 1,000 hours of hard graft

from skilled experts. At what cost? "Oh, we don't talk about money," said Shaw. "It's not about that. We're not wheeler-dealers!"

Townshend, the Brummie former drummer in 1980s band Pop Will Eat Itself, said: "It's not a car show, it's a show about people and their love for each other. Any problems we've had working on the car pale into insignificance in those magical moments when we reunite it with the owner."

"The human story comes first, the car is secondary," series producer and director Steve Bonser told the RTS. "We have thousands of applications in our inbox and we wish we could tell more stories. They are amazing. We've

heard of cases where people weren't expected to live much longer – but then they carry on because the car gives them something to live for."

One of the most memorable episodes was in series six when Gary Horne, the owner of a Lancia Delta, died unexpectedly of heart failure mid-restoration, before the car could be returned.

Shaw remembered: "That was the most moving episode and I struggle talking about it. We were not prepared for that and we shut down the whole production for a week because it was so shocking."

The new series begins with "an absolutely ginormous job" as they rescue a Mazda MX5, transforming a filthy, rusty car covered in cobwebs and moss. It's 20 years old with the body of an 80-year-old," said Fuzz. The job is for Katey, for whom the car holds precious memories of her late sister.

It's clear that the onscreen rapport between the presenting duo is genuine. At the RTS event, they continually made fun of each other, with Shaw announcing that it was not just a premiere but also the unveiling of a new item of clothing for his partner. "For 13 years, I've had to suffer Fuzz wearing his hideous leather jacket, but tonight he's wearing a brand new one!

"Though he had to rough it up in the car park because it looked too new."

Townshend added: "There's no rehearsal – we just bounce off each other. For the first episode, they gave us a script but it was so wooden we threw it away. We'd never remember it anyway." ■

The RTS Midlands premiere was held on 4 March at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham. It was hosted by radio presenter Adrian Goldberg and produced by Jayne Rae.



Tim Shaw and Fuzz Townshend at the RTS Midlands event

Vivienne Bailey

New Channel 5 thriller *The Au Pair* sees the return of Sir David Suchet to the small screen after a gap of almost seven years.

After a few years working on the stage (save for a voice-only role in *His Dark Materials*), the RTS award-winning actor was pleased to be back – and, unlike his most famous TV role, Hercule Poirot, “playing English, which was nice”.

Suchet is George, a diabetic grandfather keeping a terrible secret: “What fascinated me, and made it different, was something that I first tapped into when I did [on stage] Arthur Miller’s great play *All My Sons*, where I played a man who did the wrong thing for the right reasons.”

In the four-part Channel 5 show, the au pair of the title infiltrates an apparently blissful Cotswolds family home and mayhem ensues.

The Au Pair is made by Anglo-French factual producer Pernel Media and Irish company MK1 Studios, in association with ITV Studios (worldwide distribution) and Canal+ (France).

Executive producer and Pernel founder Samuel Kissous was visibly thrilled in discussing Pernel Media’s first English-speaking drama series. “In France, we have an expression that says, ‘They didn’t know it was impossible, so they made it.’ It did feel like an impossible task at first. And then somehow it happened, so there is still magic in television.”

Pernel has made factual shows for Channel 5 over the past decade, which led to a chat between Kissous and the channel’s Deputy Chief Content Officer, Sebastian Cardwell, about making “a story that brings together elements from France and the UK”, recalled Kissous. He was speaking with the cast and director following the premiere of the drama’s first



The Au Pair: Ludmilla Makowski, Kenny Doughty, Sally Bretton and David Suchet

Channel 5

Enter the psycho nanny

RTS London A villainous au pair sparks chaos in the Cotswolds in Channel 5’s entertaining thriller. **Matthew Bell** reports

episode in central London.

The Au Pair is a departure for Sally Bretton (persecuted stepmother Zoe Dalton and George’s daughter), best known as Lee Mack’s wife in long-running BBC sitcom *Not Going Out*. “I haven’t done anything like [this] before,” she said. “This was a real dash at something very dramatic.”

Vera’s Kenny Doughty (DS Aiden Healy in the ITV series) plays Zoe’s doctor husband and was gripped by the script. “I’m a fan of late-80s/early-90s thrillers like *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, *Fatal Attraction* and *Basic Instinct*. I’m also a sucker for guilty, binge-reading pleasures. The script was a real page-turner,” he said.

Discussing the plot twists, Doughty added, to much audience laughter: “After years of being a detective, I still couldn’t work it out.”

French actor Ludmilla Makowski (Netflix series *Lupin*) plays the avenging au pair, Sandrine. Though admitting to finding working in a foreign language a “big, big challenge”, she jumped at the chance to appear in a UK drama. “It was a dream come true. Every actor in France has the ‘American dream’... movies [and TV] in the UK and America are bigger, and we want to be in them.”

She added: “For every actor, it’s a dream to play the villain because we want to play someone that we’re not – it’s more interesting.”

The drama was shot in the Republic of Ireland, doubling for the Cotswolds, and it looks beautiful, replete with bright, summer colour and a striking contrast to the murky secrets of the Dalton family.

Director Oonagh Kearney (Channel 4’s *Vardy v Rooney: A*

Courtroom Drama) said: “If you think about the colours in the [family’s] garden, just below the [flowers] you look down into the earth and the roots of the family’s story are dark, with a lot of dark secrets that get unravelled,” she said.

“We wanted to invite the audience to enjoy the villainy of Sandrine – and she does it with such va-va-voom – while at the same time not shying away from some of the more serious themes in it, which [include] the importance of family.

“Within the thriller genre, all of us were working hard to give the characters authentic stories and arcs.” ■

The Channel 5/RTS London event was hosted by the journalist Caroline Frost at Picture-house Central in central London. It was produced by Ian Johnson and Phil Barnes.

How to nab an arresting song

Northern Ireland There's more to compiling a TV soundtrack than simply throwing music at it. Aside from the creative decisions, there are also budgets to stick to and legal difficulties to swerve.

At an RTS Northern Ireland online event last month, "Clearing music for TV and film: the lowdown", music consultant and supervisor Catherine Grimes and Juliette Squair, co-founder of music library The Nerve, offered advice based on more than 30 years of experience each in music and TV.

"Allow plenty of time to clear music," advised Squair. Grimes had an instructive story from working on Romesh Ranganathan's BBC One comedy *Avoidance*:

"Romesh is a hip-hop fan, and one of the tracks he had scripted was Nelly's *Hot in Herre*. It took us five months to clear that – there were seven music publishers involved," she recalled.

Occasionally, approval can be almost instant. BBC One's Belfast police drama *Blue Lights* used Dolly Parton's *Light of a Clear Blue Morning* recorded by local band Dea Matrona, which was cleared in just two days. "That's as quick as it gets – it was almost miraculous," said Grimes.

The complications and vagaries of securing rights – and for the right price – mean that using a specialist is almost always the right decision. "If you're working on a production with



BBC

challenging music requirements, it's always worth hiring the services of a music supervisor," said Squair.

Grimes added: "I know from experience that publishers and labels will take advantage of people who don't seem to know what they're asking for and just throw a figure out in the air. Knowing the value of music is important." TV producers

don't always need to pay huge fees for well-known tracks, she said. "When the music is so in the background that you know pop music is playing but you can't hear what it is, there's no point in wasting tens of thousands of pounds on a piece of Adele music when there's library music that gives you the same flavour." **Matthew Bell**

The UPSIDE

Brutal truths from brilliant Bradby

The RTS Television Journalism Awards are always a compelling mix of celebration and poignancy, especially this year, after 12 months in which wars raged and steps to curb climate change stalled. The evening's host, ITV *News at Ten* anchor Tom Bradby, struck the right note from the moment he began speaking.

His gravitas and empathy shone through as he looked in despair at the news environment in the US, where "the information superhighway is broken". There was no

longer any consensus over what constitutes truth as people lived in parallel universes, each believing in their own version. "We know what the future looks like – let's not go there," he warned. Powerful stuff.

Cherish TV news ... it's not a given

The challenge facing TV journalism was a theme taken up by several of the night's award-winners. ITV's former Director of News and Current Affairs Michael Jermy took home the Outstanding Contribution award, and warned that we should not take for granted the free, impartial, eyewitness news of the kind available daily across the BBC, ITV, Channels 4 and 5 and Sky News. All this is under threat unless

regulators and policymakers move to protect it. Democracy itself, said Jermy, depends on a healthy public service news landscape.

Bravo Gary, the can-do reporter

One of the evening's most popular winners was Gary O'Donoghue, the blind BBC reporter whose live reporting from Pennsylvania last July on the attempted assassination of Donald Trump won the Breaking News category.

O'Donoghue thanked the colleagues who had championed him, such as Roger Mosey, when he edited BBC Radio 4's *Today*, and Deborah Turness, BBC News CEO.

"When I started out, I was told that a blind person could not be a reporter. It can be done," he said. His message

was this: disabled students considering a career in journalism must let nothing stand in their way and never take no for an answer.

Excuse me while I kiss the Sky

And finally, no surprise at the winner of News Channel of the Year. For the eighth successive year, Sky News took the trophy. Managing Director and Executive Editor Jonathan Levy dedicated the prize to veteran camera operator Martin Limbrick, who had died unexpectedly a week earlier.

"We never take winning this award for granted," he said, highlighting Sky's reporting from Sudan of a conflict often overshadowed in the media by events in Gaza and Ukraine. ■



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