

February 2018

# Television



**Dennis  
goes  
digital**



WGW Mitchell (left), honorary secretary of the Television Society 1929-44, with John Logie Baird, preparing for a demonstration

## Apply now for the 2018 Shiers Trust Award

The Trust can make a grant of up to **£4,000** towards publishing work on any aspect of the history of television

### Objectives

The promotion of public education through the study and research of the history of television in all its aspects and without regard to country of origin, including the development and encouragement of publications and associated projects such as bibliographies and monographs on particular aspects, provided that the results of such study and research shall be published and that the contribution made by the Trust shall be suitably acknowledged in any publication.

### Criteria

Grants will be given to assist in the completion of new or unfinished projects, work or literature specific to the objectives of the Trust. 'Literature' is defined as including audio-visual media such as DVDs and websites.

The Trustees must be satisfied that the work they are supporting either could not be finished or published without the grant and that, with it, the work will be completed, or, the grant will provide the initial phase of a project that will be continued and completed with other identified funding.

Applications will be considered broadly in support of research, development, writing, editing or publication. Grants for research will require that the results of the work will be made known and accessible through appropriate means. In the case of literature, projects must have a real prospect of publication. Applicants must demonstrate that their work will have a clear expectation of making a significant contribution to the objectives of the Trust.

Applicants will be required to satisfy the Trustees of the soundness of their projects, and identify any grants from other sources. The Trustees will not make commitments to support recurring funding, nor make grants to cover fees or maintenance of students undertaking courses.

### George Shiers

George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. Before his death in 1983, he and his wife, May, provided for a bequest in their wills. The Shiers Trust grant, now in its 18th year, is normally worth £2,000. This year, to mark the 90th anniversary of the RTS, it has been raised to £4,000. Grants will be considered and approved by the Trustees who may, at their discretion, consult appropriate experts to assist their decisions. In assessing priorities, the Trustees will take into account the sums of money available.

### Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by Friday **30 March 2018** on an official application form (available from the RTS, address below). Applications should set out the nature of the project in not more than 500 words. Supporting documentation may also be included. Details of your experience or qualifications should be provided. Applicants should ensure that their project conforms to all the criteria. Applications should be accompanied by a budget that clearly identifies the sum being requested for a grant and the purposes for which it will be used. **Application forms are available either from the RTS website:**

[www.rts.org.uk](http://www.rts.org.uk)

or **Clare Colvin, to whom they should be returned:**  
**Clare Colvin, Archivist, Royal Television Society,**  
**3 Dorset Rise, London EC4Y 8EN.**  
[clare@rts.org.uk](mailto:clare@rts.org.uk)

# Do you need £4,000 for a history of television project?

#### Previous recipients



**1 2017:** Birmingham City University recorded interviews with programme-makers to expand its online oral history of BBC Pebble Mill, 1971 to 2004.



**2 2016:** The Scottish Broadcasting Heritage Group recorded interviews with people who worked at and watched STV from 1957 to 2017.



**3 2015:** Oral history project by former Granada staffers Stephen Kelly and Judith Jones, with interviews published at: [www.granadaland.org](http://www.granadaland.org)



**4 2014:** Shared between Dr Sheldon Hall, whose *Armchair Cinema* is a study of feature films on British television, and Marc Scott, who has researched the unofficial development of TV in Australia



**5 2013:** Barry Fox has built a website ([www.tekkiepix.com](http://www.tekkiepix.com)) to present his collection of historical consumer electronics imagery and documents.



**6 2012:** Paul Marshall researched a biography of Alan Archibald Campbell Swinton, the early visionary of all-electronic television



**7 2012:** Simon Vaughan digitised the 300-page 'Black Book', the first manual of the Marconi-EMI electronic television system, installed in 1936



**8 2011:** David Rose presented an illustrated retrospective of his exceptional career as a groundbreaking television and film producer to a large number of live audiences



**9 2008/2010:** Steve Arnold digitised back issues of *Radio Times* to make a searchable online archive of articles and schedules



**10 2010:** John Wyver conducted interviews on the presentation of theatre plays on British television



**11 2009:** Ronald Sandell, a key planner of the analogue terrestrial transmitter network, conducted research for a book, *Seventy Years Before the Masts*



**12 2005:** John Grist wrote a biography of Grace Wyndham Goldie, the first Head of BBC Television News and Current Affairs



**13 2004:** Don McLean compiled an authentically accurate audio two-CD presentation of the beginnings of TV in Britain



**14 2001:** Simon Vaughan, archivist of the Alexandra Palace Television Society, printed a collection of 1,200 photos by the father of television lighting, Desmond Robert Campbell



## From the CEO



I can't begin to express my gratitude to Their Royal Highnesses, The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall and to all of our Patrons who attended

last month's celebration of the RTS's 90th birthday. A huge thank you to ITV for hosting the event and also to all the RTS bursary students who attended. Thanks also to Tom Mockridge and Peter Bazalgette for hosting this very special occasion.

Speaking at the event, Prince Charles praised the high quality of British television and the teamwork that makes this possible.

I was reminded of this when I attended the RTS's annual TV Careers Fair, held earlier this month. It was

wonderful to have such a wide range of exhibitors at the fair. They included the BBC Academy, Channel 4, Creative Access, Creative Skillset, Endemol Shine UK, FremantleMedia UK, IMG Studios, ITN, ITV, ITV Studios, Lime Pictures, the National Film and Television School, RDF Television Group, Sky, Sony, Studio Lambert, Turner International, UKTV, Viacom and Warner Bros Television Production UK.

They were all mobbed by over 1,200 eager youngsters. I hope we repeat the success of last year when a number of attendees secured internships that led to permanent positions in the industry.

We have just announced our latest undergraduate bursary scheme to support students from low-income families. The RTS is offering 22 bursaries to students studying accredited

TV production and broadcast journalism degree courses. A further five RTS Technology Bursaries, aimed at encouraging some of the most talented students to consider a career in television, are available to students studying computing and engineering. Full details are on our website.

This month's cover story examines how the *Beano*, Britain's longest running children's comic, is being rebooted for the digital era. With luck, Dennis, Gnasher and Minnie will be as much a source of delight to today's swipe-fixated youngsters as they were to previous generations.

Theresa Wise

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Cover: Beano Studios

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## National events

### RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Thursday 22 February

#### Sale or scale

Speakers include: Mike Darcey; Tim Hincks, Co-CEO, Expectation Entertainment; Mathew Horsman, Joint Managing Director, Mediatique; others TBC. Chair: Matthew Garrahan, global media editor, FT. Panel discussion on the implications of the proposed sale of 21st Century Fox to Disney. 6:30pm for 6:45pm

Venue: *The Hospital Club, 24 Endell Street, London WC2H 9HQ*

### RTS AWARDS

Wednesday 28 February

#### RTS Television Journalism Awards 2018

Sponsored by GuestBooker  
Venue: *London Hilton on Park Lane, 22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE*

### RTS AWARDS

Tuesday 20 March

#### RTS Programme Awards 2018

In Partnership with Audio Network  
Venue: *Grosvenor House Hotel, 86-90 Park Lane, London W1K 7TN*

### RTS AWARDS

Friday 22 June

#### RTS Student Television Awards 2018

Venue: *BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT*

### RTS CONFERENCE

Tuesday 18 September

#### RTS London Conference 2018

Sponsored by Viacom  
Venue: *Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG*

## Local events

### BRISTOL

Sunday 11 March

#### RTS West of England Awards

Venue: TBC

■ Belinda Biggam

■ [belindabiggam@hotmail.com](mailto:belindabiggam@hotmail.com)

### DEVON & CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson

■ [RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk)

### EAST

Thursday 15 March

#### Annual Awards

Venue: *Norwich University of the Arts, Francis House, 3-7 Redwell Street, Norwich NR2 4SN*

■ Nikki O'Donnell

■ [nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk](mailto:nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk)

### LONDON

Wednesday 21 February

#### Future past: Will archives survive digitisation?

Joint RTS and Focal International event. Panellists: Steve Daly, head of technology, information and archives, BBC; Dale Grayson, director of content management, ITV; Charles Fairall, head of conservation, BFI National Archive; Tom Blake, commercial director, Imagen. Chair: Sue Malden, Chair of Focal International. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *ITV London Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT*

Wednesday 7 March

#### Building a buzz: What makes a good PR campaign?

Panellists: James Herring, managing partner, Taylor Herring; Alice Bruce, head of television, Premier Comms; Paul Gayfer, planning partner, Good Stuff. Chair: Trevor Morris, author and PR consultant. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *ITV London Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT*

Wednesday 2 May

#### Gaming and TV: What's the score?

Panellists: Steve McNeil, writer, comedian and streamer; Sam Pamphilon, actor, writer and comedian; Julia Hardy, presenter, journalist, YouTuber and broadcaster. Chair: Ellie Gibson, journalist, presenter, comedian and author. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *ITV London Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT*

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

■ [daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk](mailto:daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk)

### MIDLANDS

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ [jayne@ijmmedia.co.uk](mailto:jayne@ijmmedia.co.uk)

### NORTH EAST & THE BORDER

Saturday 24 February

#### Annual Awards

6:00pm onwards

Venue: *Hilton Newcastle Gateshead Hotel, Bottle Bank, Gateshead NE8 2AR*

■ Jill Graham

■ [jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk)

### NORTH WEST

Thursday 8 March

#### Great Big Telly Quiz

Entry fee: £10 per team of four to six people. 6:30pm for 7:00pm.

Venue: *The Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ*

Monday 12 March

#### RTS NW Student Awards Media Conference 2018

Seminars include:

■ An inside look at the making of Monkey Kingdom's *The Real Housewives of Cheshire*

■ Terror attacks: newsgathering in a crisis

■ How to be a good researcher

■ Networking event with broadcasters, production companies and post-production houses.

The conference is free but you need to book in advance. Please note that you will need a separate ticket for the Student Television Awards. Registration: 1:30pm; sessions start at 2:00pm

Venue: *The Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ*

Monday 12 March

#### Student Television Awards

Venue: *The Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ*

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ [RPinkney@rts.org.uk](mailto:RPinkney@rts.org.uk)

### NORTHERN IRELAND

Tuesday 20 March

#### Student Television Awards

Venue: *The Black Box, 18-22 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA*

■ John Mitchell

■ [mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com](mailto:mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com)

### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Tuesday 20 February

#### Student Television Awards

Venue: *Studio 4, RTÉ Television Centre, Stillorgan Road, Dublin 4*

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ [byrnecc@iol.ie](mailto:byrnecc@iol.ie)

### SCOTLAND

Wednesday 21 February

#### TV fight club

Practical masterclass with stunt and fight director David Goodall. Chair: Screen Academy Scotland director Alistair Scott. 6:00pm for 6:30pm

Venue: *TV studio, City of Glasgow College, 190 Cathedral Street, Glasgow G4 0RF*

Wednesday 9 May

#### RTS Scotland Awards

Venue: TBC

■ Jane Muirhead

■ [scotlandchair@rts.org.uk](mailto:scotlandchair@rts.org.uk)

### SOUTHERN

Friday 23 February

#### Student Television Awards

Venue: TBC

■ Stephanie Farmer

■ [SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk)

### THAMES VALLEY

■ Tony Orme

■ [RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk)

### WALES

■ Hywel William 07980 007841

■ [hywel@aim.uk.com](mailto:hywel@aim.uk.com)

### YORKSHIRE

Wednesday 28 February

#### Student Television Awards

Venue: *The Platinum Suite, Sheffield United FC, Bramall Lane, Sheffield S2 4SU*

Friday 6 July

#### Annual Awards

Venue: TBC

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

■ [lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk](mailto:lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk)

# TV diary

## Peter Bazalgette mixes with royalty at the RTS's 90th birthday party, and encounters a world beyond parody on Radio 4



**U**p early to listen to radio news in the shower before I turn on for my daily dose of *Good Morning Britain*. Pay debates rumble

on in the media kasbah.

The day after Carrie Gracie resigned as the BBC's China editor, here she is presenting Radio 4's *Today*, but barred from curating the news story about herself. A magnificent confusion worthy of Evelyn Waugh or David Lodge at their best.

The item itself is less than helpful, since the programme's guest doesn't seem to know the difference between equal pay and the gender pay gap.

■ Equal pay refers to the legal obligation since the early 1970s to pay men and women the same for doing the same job. The gender pay gap, which we're all legally obliged to publish from this year, is when you compare all the pay that women get in your organisation and all that men receive, with a series of complex calculations.

You can have a gender pay gap favouring men while observing equal pay. Because what it reveals, of course, is that there are fewer senior women in your organisation than men.

■ We could all do better at ensuring women rise higher in our hierarchies. But here's a thing: the BBC's

gender pay gap is just under 10%, while the national average is 18%. So, contrary to what you might read, or hear at emotionally charged select committees, Auntie is probably making progress.

■ I'm invited to contribute to a forthcoming WPP book, revealing one of my favourite brands and why. For me, this all comes down to my relationship with TV advertising, still by far the best way to build and maintain a brand (see Ebiquity's recent research showing that TV delivers almost twice the value of online, radio or print).

I can still sing 20 or so jingles from the 1960s, as a startled Michael Grade once discovered when interviewing me for a radio programme.

What was my final choice? You'll have to wait for the book, but here's a clue: it was a Christmas 2016 campaign featuring a vicar and an imam.

■ A meeting with a senior politician to discuss my review of the creative industries for the Government's industrial strategy (we're growing at 3.9% a year and will create 1 million new jobs by 2030).

As an aside, I ask how much time they've spent on the 21st Century Fox bid for Sky and how much looking at the duopoly power of Google and Facebook (the first is essentially a last-century issue, the second a pressing

contemporary topic). Indeed, the landscape is changing so rapidly that some of our market definitions are feeling a bit threadbare. ITV is still governed by its share of television advertising – around 47%. But the only meaningful statistic is our share of video advertising, which is much lower.

In order for ITV, Channels 4 and 5, Sky and UKTV to compete effectively with our internet friends, we need to offer much more data-rich, targeted advertising (something that the era of connected TVs is going to allow us to do). But we also need a level playing field.

■ The RTS's 90th birthday brings HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall to a celebration hosted at ITV. In a very genial encounter, they tour our daytime studios, currently delivering some very robust ratings.

In their wake, I get that drowning-man feeling of my past flashing before my eyes. There's Lorraine Kelly, with whom I first worked at GMTV in 1993. And Phil Vickery in the *This Morning* kitchen, to whom we gave his first TV break on *Ready, Steady, Cook* in 1994.

And, in case I'm in any doubt about my "veteran" status, the very next day a letter arrives at home telling me how to apply for my old-age pension.

*Sir Peter Bazalgette is Chairman of ITV.*

## Children's TV

Dennis, Gnasher and Minnie are being digitally reinvented to future-proof the comic for tomorrow's children. Pippa Shawley logs on

# The Beano goes global

**'S**lime is officially dead," declares Emma Scott, CEO of Beano Studios. As the custodian of one of Britain's most beloved brands, she is responsible for bringing the *Beano* brand into the 21st century.

The *Beano* comic is still profitable, she points out, although the 35,000 copies it sells each week are a far cry from the 2 million copies it sold during its heyday in the 1950s.

While the comic remains the flagship of the brand, Beano Studios is diversifying, last year launching Beano.com as an entertainment platform for children.

The decision to create the platform was twofold, she explains. First, it addressed a lack of places to share *Beano* content, which includes animation, sketch shows, quizzes and short-form articles. Second, it allows the company to harness data for commercial and editorial purposes.

While the platform is "powered by the essence of rebellion", the content aggregator offers peace of mind to parents, as Scott and her team are careful to abide by regulations for kids.

While data is collected to help inform editorial and to take to advertisers, it is randomised in accordance with the US Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (Coppa) and the EU General Data Protection Regulation, which comes into force in the UK in May.

*Beano's* target audience of six- to 12-year-olds may be digital natives, but that doesn't mean the internet has managed to keep children away from content designed for adults and teenagers. In the latest report on children's use of media, Ofcom found that almost a quarter of eight- to 11-year-olds have a social-media profile, despite the fact that users must be 13 or older to join most of the sites.

The report also found that 81% of eight-



Dennis from *Dennis and Gnasher Unleashed*

to 11-year-olds use YouTube, mostly to watch prank videos and music videos. One YouTube prankster popular with the *Beano* crowd was Logan Paul, a 22-year-old vlogger based in LA. The *Beano* website had featured Paul in its zeitgeisty content, alongside other popular figures, including singers Ed Sheeran and Dua Lipa. But when the YouTuber recently uploaded a video of the body of a man who had committed suicide in a Japanese forest, *Beano's* social-media team quickly flagged it with the wider team.

"We rapidly put up a post afterwards

that we thought he's a bit of a loser," says Scott, but the event highlighted the need for a child-friendly internet. "It's a difficult world for children to navigate, let alone their parents," she says. *Beano* will soon be announcing a new area to help parents understand their children's internet experiences.

She also believes that *Beano* has a role to play in helping children consume media: "Both as a parent myself and as a responsible person in the media, I think it's absolutely beholden on us that we help children prepare for some of the more difficult issues that emerge when they hit their teens, how they manage media and how they use and don't use media."

If all this sounds as if *Beano* is in danger of becoming a fun sponge, don't despair. While *Beano's* online platform acts as a safe space for children, it's also packed full of the

content they love. Since launching in 2016, over 1 million users have visited the site.

The analytics read like a diary, with visits at their height at 3:45pm, after school has finished. Many users are still online at 9:00pm, but they're also up at 6:30am on Saturdays. "I think we're doing a lot of favours to British society for lie-ins," laughs the CEO.

*Beano's* online content is strongly influenced by its readers and viewers. Beano Studios' head of insight Helenor Gilmour oversees the *Beano* Trendspotters, a group of 20 nine- to 12-year-olds, who keep the grown-ups up to date with what's going on in the playground.

The children, who live all around the country, speak to Gilmour via Skype or Facetime each Wednesday, telling her what they've been watching, playing or hearing about that week.

"It's really important that our content creators understand their audience, so we bring a lot of people into the building," says Scott.

It is fascinating to hear about the chatter of the playground. Slime and fidget spinners are out, while *Grand Theft Auto* is in, despite its 18+ certificate. "You get interesting insights into different parenting styles," she smiles.

One subject that has popped up several times is Michael Wolff's Trump exposé, *Fire and Fury*. "I found it extraordinary that they knew [Wolff's] name," she says, "although we had three different spellings".

The audience research has also covered growing anxiety among children. Already, the children in their final year of primary school are discussing their SATs. "I find that quite concerning that, five months before an exam, 10- and 11-year-olds are worrying about it, and I know teachers worry about that as well," she says.

The solution, argues the *Beano* boss, is light relief: "We have a role to play in making people laugh and popping pomposity, because that's what the comic's always done and I think that's what our place in British life is."

The website, like the comic, addresses children's fears by poking fun at them. From voting for Donald Trump to the scariest fancy dress costume, to surmising that Minnie the Minx leaked 2016's SATs answers, the Trendspotters help shape *Beano* content.

"These children have got years ahead of having serious lives," says Scott. "I think it's important that they know it's OK to be silly sometimes."

Last year, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport found that spending on children's television by PSBs had fallen by £55m in the past decade. To address this, the Government announced plans to launch a £60m fund to stimulate greater variety in a market dominated by the BBC.

The CEO welcomes the plans. "What we need is more diversity of the durations, of genre, of ideas, that really reflect what children do and don't like."

However, she questions how effective the scheme, which will last three years, will be: "What happens at the end of that, unless the commissioners have money to spend?"

Although the finer details of the plan have yet to be announced, Scott is hoping that Beano Studios will benefit: "As a content creator, I fully expect us to be going forward and pitching ideas to that fund. And us as a platform, well, if we're allowed to, we'd absolutely love to have our ideas and other people's."

Beano Studios is already creating much-loved content for CBBC. Its animation *Dennis & Gnasher Unleashed* is the most-watched show on the children's channel. A new series launches this month. For the first time, *Dennis & Gnasher Unleashed* is going global, with the series being sold across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Australasia.

Meanwhile, Beano.com has already launched in Australia. Scott hopes that the British brand will spread to other English-speaking territories, as well as countries where kids are keen to learn English, such as India.

"Clearly, if you haven't watched *The Great British Bake Off*, you might not know who Noel Fielding is if you live in India," she admits, "but I would hope that, when the time

comes and we move into those markets, that we'll have enough English-language content that will entertain children there, as well. We'll find out, we'll have to find our own trendspotters in those cities."

As *Beano* prepares to celebrate its 80th birthday in the summer, plans are under way to mark the occasion, including new charity partnerships and an exhibition with a national institution.

*Beano* will also inspire this year's Summer Reading Challenge, with children being encouraged to read books around the theme of "Mischief-makers".

For Emma Scott, seeing all the projects develop has proved rewarding: "It's quite a privilege to be able to take an iconic British brand and reimagine it in its own right, but also to bring a very different kind of media proposition to children and prove that it is working." ■



Rubi from *Dennis & Gnasher Unleashed* and *Beano* regular Minnie the Minx (left), who is soon to gain a digital avatar

All pictures: Beano Studios



# TV makes more space for older women

## Diversity

A stellar RTS panel poses some tough questions for the men who still dominate TV.

**Steve Clarke** takes notes

Girlfriends

ITV

**T**he debate over women working in television has come a long way since 1986 when *Coronation Street* was an all-male cabal. In those days, all the female characters were written by men. Yet, as recently as 2015, when Red Productions unveiled the latest run of ITV's trail-blazing cop show *Scott and Bailey*, the response of male journalists could be relentlessly sexist, revealed actor Lesley Sharp.

She recalled: "It was really irritating when we started to promote the show and journalists would ask you, 'Two female cops?' Then, you'd get that awful chestnut, 'How does it feel to play a strong woman?' Then, they'd ask about having female directors.

"Gasp! If it were male actors would you be asking about a male director? You've got to start moving through that. The bigger point is that it's not just our industry, unfortunately, it's enmeshed in our society. Fingers crossed, we're digging away at that.... It's crazy, it's 2015 and we're still being asked those questions. That's nuts."

Sharp was one of the panellists at a timely RTS debate, ostensibly about opportunities for older women working in television – as writers, actors and programme-makers – but which inevitably strayed into the still troubling question of how TV treats women generally. BBC gender pay gap, anyone?

Yes, progress has been made – especially in roles for older women – but, as this engaging discussion showed, much more needs to be done. Judged by what was said, one area that needs urgent attention is how female directors can sustain a career in TV (see sidebar on page 10). However, the days of TV drama as an exclusively male preserve have thankfully disappeared, along with white nylon shirts, cassette tapes and Enoch Powell.

Kay Mellor, whose TV hits include *Band of Gold*, *Fat Friends* and *Playing the Field*, recalled that, in 1986, when she first worked on *Coronation Street*, Britain's most famous TV soap was firmly in the grip of men, invariably wearing dark suits.

"Many of the *Street*'s most iconic characters were women but they were all written by men. I went into that environment and I remember going, 'Wow, all these older men, these great female characters are their alter egos [audience laughter]!"

Mellor said that, when Sally

Wainwright joined the soap's writing team, "she was afraid of opening her mouth and pitching a story because she was frightened that someone would shout her down."

She added: "I remember pitching a story about Shirley, a great woman of colour, who was Curly Watts's other half. They went: 'We're not interested in Shirley, we're interested in Curly!'"

More than 30 years later, Wainwright and Mellor are both big players in British TV drama. Mellor's latest series, ITV's *Girlfriends*, commissioned by a female head of drama, Polly Hill, is the story of three women approaching 60.

"I expected ITV to say, 'Can they be

## IT'S ABOUT OUR MEDIUM CATCHING UP WITH WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SOCIETY

fortysomething?' but it didn't happen... At one point, I thought they could be pushing 70. Nobody put up a barrier."

So it would seem that TV is finally embracing – possibly even wholeheartedly – the wisdom of older women, once often described as women of a certain age.

Mellor said that, with people such as Charlotte Moore at the BBC (where she is director of content) and Hill at ITV (head of drama) occupying powerful jobs, British TV had become more female-friendly.

While more stories based on the experiences of women over 40 are being told in TV drama, Manda Levin, an executive producer at UK drama specialist Kudos, wondered if these stories were being commissioned for the right reasons. "I think we have quite reactive and reactionary ways of choosing the stories we tell," she said. "There's been an awareness for a long time that there's an older female audience for British drama."

The problem was that this became a self-fulfilling prophecy in the way that Hollywood made more films aimed at young men because it saw more young men in cinema audiences.

However, the Kudos executive added, British TV had clearly changed thanks to its employment of more female writers

beyond the ranks of Mellor, Wainwright, Heidi Thomas, Debbie Horsfield and Paula Milne.

Actor Lesley Sharp, who has sustained a top-end TV career for around 25 years, revealed that achieving this had often been difficult. She said that female actors were at the bottom of the TV food chain. They didn't get to see scripts until these had been commissioned and revised.

"In essence, part and parcel of the job that I do is to sign up for a life of disempowerment," said Sharp, whose TV hits include the previously mentioned *Scott & Bailey*, which ran for five series from 2011 to 2016.

She added: "It's really hard, you have to be clever about what you do. There are certain things that you know tick boxes commercially and TV companies want to do because they will get a lot of viewers in.

"But you also want to do things that are maybe niche and have managed to slide their way through in spite of people not wanting to commission them." It was these more edgy shows, the actor maintained, that often resonated the most with the British public.

Sharp said that she and writer Russell T Davies "have this joke that TV is regarded as the bastard medium. Film or theatre are where it's at. Telly is in the middle and it's this kind of broad church. You can fling any old bone on to it and they'll gobble it up. But the truth is that TV is an extraordinary medium.

"We only scratch the surface of what it's capable of with the kind of stories that we tell, regardless of the fact that we're not serving the 50% of the population that are women.

"We are not creating enough interesting stories about women of a certain age in an intelligent, vital, energised way. A lot of the 50-year-old characters I see on TV I don't recognise as being part of my age group. They are not like women I know. As an industry, we have to start catching up with what's happening in society."

Caroline Hollick, creative director at Red, suggested that the success of BBC One's *Last Tango In Halifax* (produced by Red) had encouraged commissioners and broadcasters to be more open-minded about parts for older women.

Persuading the BBC to take the programme had, nevertheless, proved problematic: "When we first pitched that show we were told that the story was too small and the characters too old." ➤



## How to get more women directing

'It's a massive problem that we haven't solved,' said Kudos's Manda Levin.

She added: 'We've always had a lot of female producers and script editors because they're roles where you can facilitate creativity and that's quite an easy role for women to see themselves in. Writing is harder....'

'Directing is different again – it's standing up in front of a massive group of people, many of whom are men with technical skills. You've got to say: "I'm in charge, help me to realise my vision." That's really difficult for a woman.'

Kay Mellor said that one answer to this problem was to hire a female DoP and to nurture her.

One show that deliberately hired female directors was Red's *Scott & Bailey*, in which seven out of the 10 directors were women.

'People have to put their money where their mouth is and hire more women,' said Red's Caroline Hollick.

The skills required to be a successful director probably play to the strengths of a certain kind of very confident young man more than they do a woman, she added. 'Female directors [are labelled] a bit mad, a bit chippy. Whatever you do as a woman, you can't win – you're too quiet, you're too strong or you're too pushy.'

'The only way it will change is if we hire great female directors that we love working with.'

Levin said: 'We have to encourage them and tell them they can do it. An experienced female screenwriter once

said to me: "When I meet potential directors, a man comes into the room and tells me why I should hire him, whereas a woman is very honest about her strengths and weaknesses."' She said she had seen this again and again.

Mellor recalled the first time she was directing and told the DoP that she wanted 'the actress to reach down in one shot, get the gun, bring it out of her skirt and point it. He told me: "You can't do that, it'll have to be a series of cuts."'

'I thought, right, he definitely knows his stuff. But the script advisor said: "He's male, you're female, do it your way."'

Hollick pointed out that there was 'a very established track for young men coming out of film school. They've made a couple of short movies that people have liked. They then get a couple of episodes of a series. They've often worked as first ADs, so they are very comfortable in that set environment.'

'Before you know it, they're helming an original show. There are lots of really talented male directors who've gone down this route.'

'This is not happening for female directors or for directors of colour because it's not the norm, they are seen as other. To deal with this, we need to take some very special action – instead of shadowing schemes, broadcasters have to free up enough money to allow production companies to schedule in a block where a director can direct one episode.'

'Try somebody out. Broadcasters need to put money in. We would make it work.'



► She added: "Things have shifted. I think broadcasters have started to realise that people have an appetite for seeing themselves reflected on screen."

"A lot of the people that are watching television are older. My kids watch Netflix but I think they will watch TV when they get older. TV is getting better at listening to its audience."

As for the willingness of TV's editorial decision-makers to greenlight more stories featuring older women, Sharp insisted that a further change in attitude was required.

"It's about our medium catching up with what's happening in society. Arguably, women have only had any proper kind of voice since the 1970s."

The actor added: "We have to start to think about women in the same way that we think about men. We're people leading difficult, tricky, complicated lives. The stories that get told about women should reflect that."

"Every script doesn't have to have an older woman at the centre of it. It's about intelligent writing. If you've got a story in which the central character is a man, make the female characters that are orbiting around him interesting and clever, not people who are there to be a facilitator, a mother, a social worker, a teacher."

When Kay Mellor sets out to write,



From left:  
Manda Levin,  
Caroline Hollick,  
Jackie Long,  
Kay Mellor OBE  
and Lesley Sharp

Paul Hampartsoumian

is she consciously trying to rebalance things? Or does she think, “I’ve got a story and I want to tell it”, asked the night’s chair, Jackie Long, social affairs editor at *Channel 4 News*.

“I was born into a household of women, who were always more interesting to me than men. I didn’t have a father figure in my household,” replied the dramatist. “I write about things that I care about. I don’t sit down and think: ‘I am going to write about three strong women.’”

She had always put women stage centre in her plays and dramas: “The character of Rose in *Band of Gold* was an older sex worker. I’ve been doing that for 20 years. We need to find and nurture more female writers.”

Manda Levin said that, from her perspective, the number of female writers working in TV today was “off-the-scale better”.

However, female stereotypes still persist in TV drama. Mellor highlighted one lazy one that irritated her – the woman who trips and falls while escaping: “How many times are you watching something and thinking, ‘She’s going to fall. There she goes now.’”

Yet, overall, when the panellists were asked to sum up, there was optimism about how far TV had travelled in its depiction of women (including older

women) and the work opportunities that now exist in TV.

Caroline Hollick said: “TV is a great place to be a woman. I’ve never felt held back by my gender. But TV does need to reflect not just middle-class women.”

Levin stressed TV’s uniquely powerful asset: “We have in our hands the most potent tool of all – storytelling – which has the power to change hearts and minds. Television is the most egalitarian platform for storytelling. Everybody watches television. It’s not self-selecting like other art forms. It’s for us to write stories to inspire people to make it better.”

Sharp struck a more downbeat note: “The notion of older women being crucibles of power has disappeared from our society. We need to find ways of re-engaging with that.

“One of the great things about *Scott & Bailey* was that it was a depiction of two women of different ages – and that not mattering.

“They weren’t competing with one another in terms of the work structure or sexually. You often find that is a big dynamic in drama.

“We start empowering young girls by showing them what it’s like to be a really fabulous woman. Then, people will want to tell those stories.” ■

## Class is key

**Manda Levin:** ‘We’re not even nearly there on class. You can wrap up nearly every issue to do with diversity if you deal with class. Film and TV are still home to privilege and entitlement. If we tackle class, we could change the atmosphere on set.’

**Lesley Sharp:** ‘We are banjaxed by our class system. It’s everywhere, and I also think we’re banjaxed by the north-south divide. There is a huge amount of misunderstanding and suspicion and snobbery about the way people sound and the doors that this opens for them.

‘It’s everywhere, not just in our industry, it seeps into all the big institutions. It’s in politics, in law, education... People are laughed at because of the way they speak.’

*‘Is older the new younger? A debate on women and age diversity in television’ was held at The Hospital Club in central London on 22 January. The producer was Vicky Fairclough.*

It is one year on from one of the biggest and most controversial shake-ups in BBC history – the £400m formation of BBC Studios. Now, the BBC is ruffling feathers again as it merges this recently created commercial production division with BBC Worldwide to create a single company with revenues of £1.4bn.

This classic US-style studio model, with producer and distributor under one roof, is, of course, nothing new in the UK. ITV Studios, All3Media, FremantleMedia and Endemol Shine all produce content, have wholly owned indies, distribute shows globally and take stakes in other companies.

Indeed, as Director-General Tony Hall has pointed out, the deal merely brings the BBC “in line with the industry” and creates a unified business with a single business plan – a means to maximise IP for the benefit of licence-fee payers, and a way to boost exports of British content and thus support the UK creative economy.

So why not do this at the outset, when BBC Studios was first constituted? The answer, according to Mark Linsey, chief creative officer of BBC Studios, was the “huge cultural change” involved in plunging a 50-year-old PSB production division into a competitive global market.

“We had to establish ourselves in that marketplace before we could entertain any sort of merger,” he says. “Anything before that would have been far too much, organisationally and culturally.”

“Our people come first and it’s important to make sure that they are creatively in a good place, are more mindful of audiences across the board, and can feel that sense of opportunity as part of a broader BBC group.”

Linsey is sitting alongside Studios CEO Tim Davie in BBC Television Centre. The building is the former home of BBC News but now the HQ of more than 1,000 Studios staff, part of a combined BBC Studios/BBC Worldwide workforce of 3,000.

The pair are palpably excited about the increase in scale and opportunity afforded by the merger. Linsey stresses that the timing is right. Business plans are on track, some 90 awards have been won in the past year and BBC Studios recently announced its first third-party commissions, *The Red List*, made by the Natural History Unit for Discovery Channel, and *Fatburg Autopsy*, for Channel 4.



# BBC Studios' bid for scale

BBC

**Tim Davie and Mark Linsey** explain their rationale for merging BBC Studios and BBC Worldwide to **Lisa Campbell**

Crucially, they believe the strategy of focusing on hot, “best of British”, premium content will both reap international revenues and serve licence-fee payers with culturally relevant content in an increasingly global TV landscape.

Davie offers *Blue Planet II* as an illustration of how “increasingly sophisticated global customers are becoming”. More than three-quarters of the series’s funding came from on top of the licence fee. The co-production partners included China’s Tencent, alongside the likes of BBC America and France Télévisions.

The first episode won more than 40 million viewers in China. Streaming services, by using the content in ways that went beyond traditional sales and distribution, took the total number of programme views to some 230 million.

“To maximise that opportunity and to secure IP for the BBC, it is no surprise that a vertically integrated company, with a thriving partnership with the indie sector, is a real asset,” he says.

In the UK, the first episode of *Blue Planet II* attracted 14.1 million viewers, putting it in the top three shows of the past five years (and episodes of the series accounted for the four most-watched programmes in 2017). It has been sold to 233 territories. The US premiere in late January attracted almost 3 million viewers, ranking it in the top five programmes in the 9:00pm time slot across all TV channels.

Creating a raft of new, global hits on the scale of *Blue Planet*, *Doctor Who* or *Strictly...*  means that having the right people is paramount.

However, it is not uncommon for rivals to question whether Studios’ chances of success will be hampered by its perceived lack of a strong commercial culture. “People are not used to the cut and thrust, they’ve been cosseted by the system,” says one distribution head.

And the boss of an independent producer wonders: “Does BBC Studios have enough A-list talent? The big brands will carry it for a while but the challenge is creating new ones. Will it be hiring sharp development teams from the indie sector? Will it start collaborating more with the indies it already has stakes in to get commissions?”

These are questions with which Linsey is familiar. “The structure is still changing,” he says. “We’ve just hired Suzy Lamb in entertainment and Hannah Wyatt in factual and we’re by no

means the finished article. I wouldn’t expect to get the team completely finished until two years after Studios’ formation.”

While Davie refuses to rule out further structural change or redundancies – around 300 roles have been lost to date – he confirms that the plan is to “look for efficiencies but it is not the main thrust of the merger. The key metric is delivering a content pipeline that is second to none in terms of the very best of British creativity.”

## THE KEY... IS DELIVERING A CONTENT PIPELINE... OF THE VERY BEST OF BRITISH CREATIVITY

Meanwhile, Davie’s strategy of investing in indies remains unchanged. Although the company’s 30% stake in Greenbird is being sold to Keshet – apparently unlinked to the merger – its stake in Clerkenwell Films has just been upped from 25% to 48%. Worldwide recently took a stake in Sid Gentle, producer of *The Durrells*. Further deals are in the offing.

However, some doubters point to a lack of transparency and one questions whether these indies really do enjoy a “unique relationship with the BBC”. Critics highlight a recent meeting organised by Worldwide, attended by Hall and BBC content chief Charlotte Moore, to which only invested indies were invited.

Davie insists that BBC commissioners are focused solely on securing the best ideas, wherever they come from. “If they [aren’t], it all falls down, particularly for the audience, who are sacrosanct in all of this,” adds Linsey.

Another issue, raised by Pact CEO John McVay, is that, with programme-makers and sellers under the same umbrella, the indies that Worldwide has invested in or which use Worldwide as their distributor may be concerned that their ideas could be copied by Studios.

A much bigger cause of consternation, not least with Pact, is that the deal may represent a further blurring of the BBC’s public service and commercial activities. Are licence-fee payers essentially subsidising the BBC’s global commercial ambitions – aims that are not part of its primary purpose? “This

latest, further integration is structurally complex and it means that we’re pressing for a full report by the end of year two from the National Audit Office,” says McVay. “We have also stressed the importance of immediate oversight to the BBC Board. Should there be a lack of transparency or hidden subsidies, the remedy might be a fine on the BBC, but that’s no good if small indies have already been squeezed out of the market.”

Davie is adamant that there are very clear processes and that the merger can be managed fairly and successfully: “The dividing line between PSB and commercial entities has always been subject to rigorous fair-trading oversight,” he says. “Nothing will change that.”

The more fundamental argument put forward by the BBC – that major global players such as Netflix and Amazon are investing vast sums in content but not, primarily, in British content reflecting British lives – is also questioned.

British broadcasters continue to invest predominantly in UK talent and stories. Indeed, in a recent speech, new Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon said her priority was to invest in programming that reflected a “gritty, urban” Britain in a post-Brexit world.

However, while they may not be going as granular as the Salford secondary school featured in Channel 4’s *Educating...* strand, the streaming giants are, increasingly, looking for more localised content outside of the US – more and more deals are being struck across Europe.

Pact’s McVay adds: “The BBC’s emphasis on British content sounds anti-Netflix because it is investing in great British talent, too, and creating a healthy mixed global economy. It’s quite jingoistic to focus on ‘pure Britishness’”

Davie counters: “I can live with accusations of jingoism if it’s about building success overseas. It’s not about one company beating another, it’s about supporting the UK industry.

“Best of British’ has never been in more demand and we’re allowed to be proud of that.”

There is also a lot riding on the merger for Davie personally. If the merged entity works, Davie, hailed by his supporters as “a great operator”, could well be a future DG. However, the current climate suggests that there will be some strong female candidates in the mix, too. ■

# OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH EAST

**W**e are in the wintry Northumberland countryside to celebrate Burns Night with friends on the lakeside at Kielder Water – a vast man-made reservoir surrounded by dense forest. Surprisingly, the chatter is not about the imminent delights of haggis, bagpipes and single malt, or the excitement of gathering beneath the darkest skies in Northern Europe – so prized by stargazers.

No, all the talk is of another star, Brenda Blethyn. Or, more precisely, her character in ITV's long-running police drama *Vera*. The locals are thrilled that Brenda came to Kielder to shoot the last episode in the current series. The programme is due for broadcast the following night.

Stories abound of where the actors and crew filmed, ate and drank – and who met who and what they were like. Brenda is universally described as lovely. And they point across to the dam where the body was found in *Vera*'s Kielder murder mystery.

Northumberland has a healthy visitor economy and TV shows such as *Vera*, which attracts a consolidated audience of more than 8 million viewers, are important drivers of tourism.

As every tour guide here will tell you, visitors love to hang out in film and TV locations. In Northumberland, you can see *Harry Potter*'s Hogwarts (Alnwick Castle) and coastal vistas beloved of movie-makers (*Elizabeth*, *Transformers*), plus 1960s-set TV whodunnits such as *Inspector George Gently*.

Between them, the titular stars of *Vera* and *George Gently* (Martin Shaw) deserve the freedom of every holiday park and B&B in the county.

These shows are not just a hit in the

**Graeme Thompson**  
sees how hit TV  
shows filmed in  
Northumberland  
are driving a local  
non-media industry



Paul Hampartsoumian

UK but are broadcast across the world – and attract hordes of tourists to the North East from as far afield as New Zealand, the US and Asia.

Sadly, Inspector Gently no longer feels the collars of 1960s villains amid the North East's heritage landscape. Shaw and writer Peter Flannery ensured a rather permanent exit for the character at the end of 25 episodes and eight seasons on BBC One. Location tour operators are still in mourning.

Disappointment also for *Gently*'s North East-based crew. But at least they know the *Vera* unit will be back filming later this year for season 9. And CBBC's Tyneside-set *The Dumping Ground* continues to provide work for local crew and actors as the UK's most popular children's drama.

These long-established shows illustrate how the North East remains

heavily dependent on the big producers and broadcasters. We haven't yet grown a local production company capable of rattling the networks and producing to scale. So, we have to be more inventive than most when it comes to developing talent and ideas.

Take, for instance, local cinema, which is not only screening films, but making them. The Tyneside Cinema is a delightful art deco independent filmhouse tucked away behind Newcastle's busiest shopping street.

As well as showing mainstream and art-house movies, it also runs a thriving film-making facility that brings young talent to work alongside experienced producers and crew.

Most recently, through its work as the lead organisation for Random Acts, co-financed by Arts Council England, the team at Tyneside Cinema has enabled a new generation of young artists to develop and produce original work for Channel 4.

The results have been outstanding – not just in terms of the quality of the films, but also in showcasing the fresh ideas and narratives of the diverse young talent that made them.

In the past 12 months, Tyneside Cinema has led on the commissioning, development and production of 24 short films. They all feature on Channel 4's Random Acts website.

Five of them were also broadcast on the channel. It's a priceless calling card and foot in the door for the aspiring creatives.

And, who knows? In a few years, the good people of Kielder could be singing the praises of a new generation of performers and storytellers stopping by to capture their glorious location. ■

**Graeme Thompson is Pro Vice Chancellor at the University of Sunderland and Chair of the RTS Education Committee.**



## The Billen profile

**Andrew Billen** meets the boss of entertainment powerhouse Avalon, the 'No 1 true indie'

# Why it pays to be on Jon Thoday's side

Paul Hampartsoumian

**T**he lobby of Avalon's office in west London is dominated by two monsters. One is a huge cast of Lenin in full declamation, the other is a Dalek. A visitor's first thought is that you would not want to get on the wrong side of this entertainment giant – one-third talent agency, one-third live show promoter, one-third TV production company – or its famously effective Managing Director and co-founder, Jon Thoday. You would want Avalon and its boss fighting for you.

The impression is muddled slightly in the conference room, whose long wall is stencilled with a cigar-touting Groucho Marx ensnared, James Bond titles-sequence-style, inside a gun barrel. Who is targeting whom? Is somebody about to get hurt?

Jon Thoday, when he enters, is dressed casually in a lumberjack shirt and speaks, I am glad to report, neither like a croak-voiced alien nor a demagogue. He can be blunt, but also garrulous. His voice is soft and slightly Antipodean, an accent the Cambridge lad hazards was contracted from his New Zealand-born wife, Leanne.

Yet, he has a reputation for raising his voice, doesn't he? "I very rarely shout. I think that if you say no to people, which, if you work with good shows or good talent, you often do, they hear what they want to hear, right? If you're lied to by people, it can be annoying and it can lead me to be angry, just like anyone else would be."

An example? "That there's no gender pay gap."

In contrast, his preference has always been to tell the truth, and that

has not always been popular, either. He now rarely informs a broadcaster that an artist is being pursued by another channel, "because they get so upset about it".

He reflects on 1999, when his client Frank Skinner defected to ITV after the BBC's Alan Yentob refused to match a reported £20m rival offer. Yentob was furious. "Unreasonably so," says Thoday.

Skinner, the comedian with the crush on Dr Johnson, might be thought a typical Avalon client: a clever-clogs graduate able to hold his (mainly it's a "his") own against an agent who boasts a Cambridge science degree. This is not quite accurate. His talent list includes the actors Toby Jones, James Nesbitt, Daniel Radcliffe and Imelda Staunton, and, among the comedians, the university dropout ▶

› Dave Gorman and the former Pontins blue coat Lee Mack. This still leaves plenty of highbrow stand-ups on the list, led by the early clients Skinner and David Baddiel, who became millionaires out of the partnership.

So, does Thoday stand accused of inflating the cost of talent?

“If you look at the total annual cost of content at the BBC, right, it has reduced by £500m over the past 10 years. That’s the most important thing: reducing the spend on content, for me, is very anti-public broadcasting. I believe that there should be more money spent on content, less on technology.”

On the gender pay row, he says that it is impossible for him to negotiate equal salaries for his female clients because, unless they are on BBC staff contracts, he does not know what their male colleagues are being paid.

That does not mean, however, that he wants all salaries to be made public. “It’s a complicated area but, in the end, if you’re a broadcaster or an employer, you decide. You don’t necessarily have to wait to be called to account.”

It is, you see, not about the money, not for him. “We’re still here, when lots of other [agents] have sold their businesses, because we like it. We like doing good TV shows and we really believe in British talent.”

This, he says, is the reason why Avalon frequently makes the programmes its artists star in: broadcasters can no longer be relied upon to nurture talent. He cites John Oliver, whom Avalon represented as soon as he had left university. He had a British radio show and podcast, but only began to make his mark in the US on *The Daily Show*. He is now an HBO star on the Avalon-produced *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*.

“With TV, you often have the fight to keep things on air. So, *TV Burp* was cancelled twice by ITV,” he says. “A lot of things we’ve done that succeeded in the end were cancelled. *Not Going Out* was cancelled after the second season. It’s the longest-running sitcom in the UK now. And that’s why we started producing, because we were able to be in a position to fight those battles.

“Sometimes, the battle’s just getting it on. So, with [his client Rob Delaney’s] *Catastrophe*, the BBC commissioned the script and then passed on it. We thought that it wasn’t going to go anywhere. Then Phil Clarke picked it up at Channel 4. We took five years to get

*Taskmaster* on air. All the broadcasters turned it down. But we just kept going and it was taken up by Dave.”

At one stage, Thoday campaigned with Hat Trick Productions to buy BBC Three and prevent its disappearance from TV. For Avalon, this could have replicated in miniature the Grade family’s hold over ITV in the 1950s: agent, production company and broadcaster.

Predictably, the BBC cried “no sale” but, he insists, the bid was for real. “It wasn’t motivated by any desire to run a channel. I don’t want to do that. It was motivated by the fact that BBC Three was one of the places that could bring on new talent.”

The channel’s reduction in budget and move online has not helped the chances of biting satire returning to the BBC, but the chances were low anyway. Thoday says that the corporation is more hidebound than ever by its obligations to impartiality – and by a caution beyond that.

“We produced *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, which was broadcast on BBC Two with more swearwords than any show ever. You couldn’t possibly do that now. The difficulties lie in satirists taking a [political] point of view and also in whether you can push the boundaries. Broadcasters always say, ‘We want to be dangerous’, but they don’t really, because they’re too nervous.”

Of what? “For the BBC, it’s the attacks by successive governments. Whatever it says, it is fearful of that.”

It is not only satirical and edgy comedy that is in decline. “There’s a massive hunger in the audience for comedy. When you get one that works, people really like it, but there isn’t enough on TV and that, in my view, is a failure of commissioning.”

The thought takes us both back to the golden age of television comedy that shone over both our 1970s childhoods – his in Cambridge, where his father, John, was a professor of genetics. At 11, Jon began helping to put on school plays. He hated performing as much as he loved encouraging performers and so, despite taking a degree in natural sciences, was soon dreaming as much of LE as of DNA.

At university (in his home town), he began producing musicals, with gowns and townies in their casts. When he left with a 2:2 (too many plays, not enough study), he took a further degree in genetics but realised that he would



never be good enough to become a research scientist. He contemplated a career in science management with dismay and jumped head first into show business instead.

He was not even dissuaded when, just before he began managing comedians, he put on a London musical, *Nite Club Confidential*, that lost £402,000.50, happily not of his own money. Next came the signings of Rob Newman and David Baddiel. The novice agent had a strange hunch: that the stars of *The Mary Whitehouse Experience* could fill a stadium as well as any band. Comedy became the new rock ‘n’ roll and Avalon, having seen the future, signed much of it up.

Yet, things do not always work out. *Jerry Springer: The Opera* has just returned to New York but Thoday no longer represents its co-creator, Stewart Lee. “Definitely not,” he says, and will not discuss the matter.

Presenter Christine Bleakley found herself a new agent after her move to ITV, guided by him, ended in disaster. “Sometimes, people say that changing agents is a bit like changing deckchairs on the *Titanic*,” he says pointedly. And Avalon’s relationship with Harry Hill



*Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*

HBO

## Thoday's yesterdays

**Jon Thoday, co-founder and MD of Avalon Promotions, Avalon Motion Pictures and Avalon Television, subsidiaries of Tiverton 2 Ltd**

**Born** 7 May 1961; one sister

**Father** John Thoday, professor of genetics (died 2008)

**Mother** Doris Rich

**Married** To Leanne Newman, whom he met at a Royal Court benefit in 1992; a teenage son and daughter.

**Education** King's College School, Cambridge; The Leys School, Cambridge; Corpus Christie, Cambridge (degree in natural sciences); MSc in biotechnology and genetic engineering

**1986** Stages Robin Glendinning's *Mumbo Jumbo* at Lyric Hammer-smith, directed by Nicholas Hytner

**1988** Produces *Nite Club Confidential* with Ruth Madoc. It flops

**1989** Forms Avalon Promotions

**1993** Clients Rob Newman and David Baddiel play the 12,000-seat Wembley Arena

**1999** Negotiates the transfer of *The Frank Skinner Show* from BBC One to ITV for around £20m

**2010** Negotiates reported £4m deal for Adrian Chiles to leave the BBC's *The One Show* for ITV's *Daybreak* and to be its chief football presenter.

**2017** Avalon named 'No 1 true indie' by *Broadcast* and *Television*

**Clients** Chris Addison, David Baddiel, Greg Davies, Russell Howard, Al Murray, et al

**Hits** *Not Going Out*, *TV Burp*, *Russell Howard's Good News*, *Catastrophe*

**Misses** The transfer of Adrian Chiles and Christine Bleakley to ITV

**Coming next** Gameshow *The Button*

**Watching** *The Crown*, *Narcos*, *Rick and Morty*

**Reading** 'Not much'

**Holidays** Christmas and summer.

'If you're in show business it's one long holiday'

ended in a High Court fight, after which the comedian said he felt "liberated, like a huge weight has been lifted".

Thoday is not sympathetic: in show business, "some people react well to success and others don't".

Hill, I counter, just found the long series of *TV Burp* a huge strain. Thoday says he beat ITV down on the length of the runs, but adds: "*TV Burp* was a really successful show and really successful for him. If he found it hard to do, he should talk to people who work in factories, because I think that being successful in show business is a benefit, right? We all should be that lucky.

"It's not supposed to be easy. It isn't easy to succeed.

"And if a broadcaster requires a certain thing, wait until you don't matter to them any more."

The sad thing to me is that Harry Hill, now mostly seen on Sky, is a performer ideally suited to a genre Thoday wishes to see return to PSB, the pre-watershed, weekday entertainment show.

The broadcasters, he says, play safe with ever-longer runs of ageing soaps, turning a blind eye to their declining ratings, and concentrate on post-9:00pm

drama. Yet, there is a big family audience to be seized: "If a BBC controller was to say, 'I'm cancelling an episode of *EastEnders*, and I'm only going to do new shows there until I get one that succeeds', that will be the one that gets 10 million viewers – because it's on at the time when you can get 10 million viewers.

"I don't know what the show is but, in the end, I just know that if you invest all your money in international co-productions at 9:00pm, you're not going to be getting the next show that 10 million people are going to watch at 8:00pm. And no one in the industry is even thinking about shows for that time."

We agree it would be nice to have something to watch with our children, apart from soap opera murders and long summers of soggy cake bottoms.

Perhaps that is what Avalon's front-of-house memorabilia represent. The Dalek harks back to the great days of family entertainment. Lenin is Thoday advocating for the people's thwarted desires. And poor old Groucho looking down the barrel of a gun? That's just Avalon targeting the talent it will next take to fame and fortune. ■

## Regulation

Do traditional broadcasters risk losing prime billing on viewing menus as the tech giants muscle in? **Torin Douglas** investigates

**L**ate last year, the UK's two biggest commercial broadcasters, Sky and ITV, lambasted the global internet giants, contrasting their lack of regulation with the tightly controlled world of television.

In a speech to European broadcasters in Tallin, Sky Chief Executive Jeremy Darroch deplored the unevenness of the playing field: "At a time when there are serious questions over the veracity, safety and legality of much of the content to be found on the internet, television remains the gold-standard reference point for responsibility. Yet, we are in strange times."

He went on: "We increasingly see our carefully regulated content and our socially responsible services appearing on the same devices and screens side by side with a completely unregulated free-for-all."

"That is not good for our customers or our industry, and it is not good for our society. The TV screen used to be the safe space. No longer."

Two days later, at the Voice of the Listener and Viewer conference in London, ITV Chairman Sir Peter Bazalgette said the internet giants posed a "clear and present threat to civil society" in the UK. He called for Facebook and Google, which owns YouTube, to face stricter regulation and rejected their claim to be platforms rather than publishers as "frankly unsustainable".

Sir Peter warned of "an increasingly visible collision between an international market for TV – driven by technology and global economics – and the UK TV market, where PSB channels are still watched by more than 80% of the population every week".

And he highlighted the dangers for UK television if regulators got things wrong. "Just remember the terrible, ignorant mistake by the Competition Commission in 2009, banning Kangaroo – the proposed PSB VoD service," he

said. "It didn't take long for Netflix and Amazon to dominate a market that we simply weren't allowed to enter in a serious way."

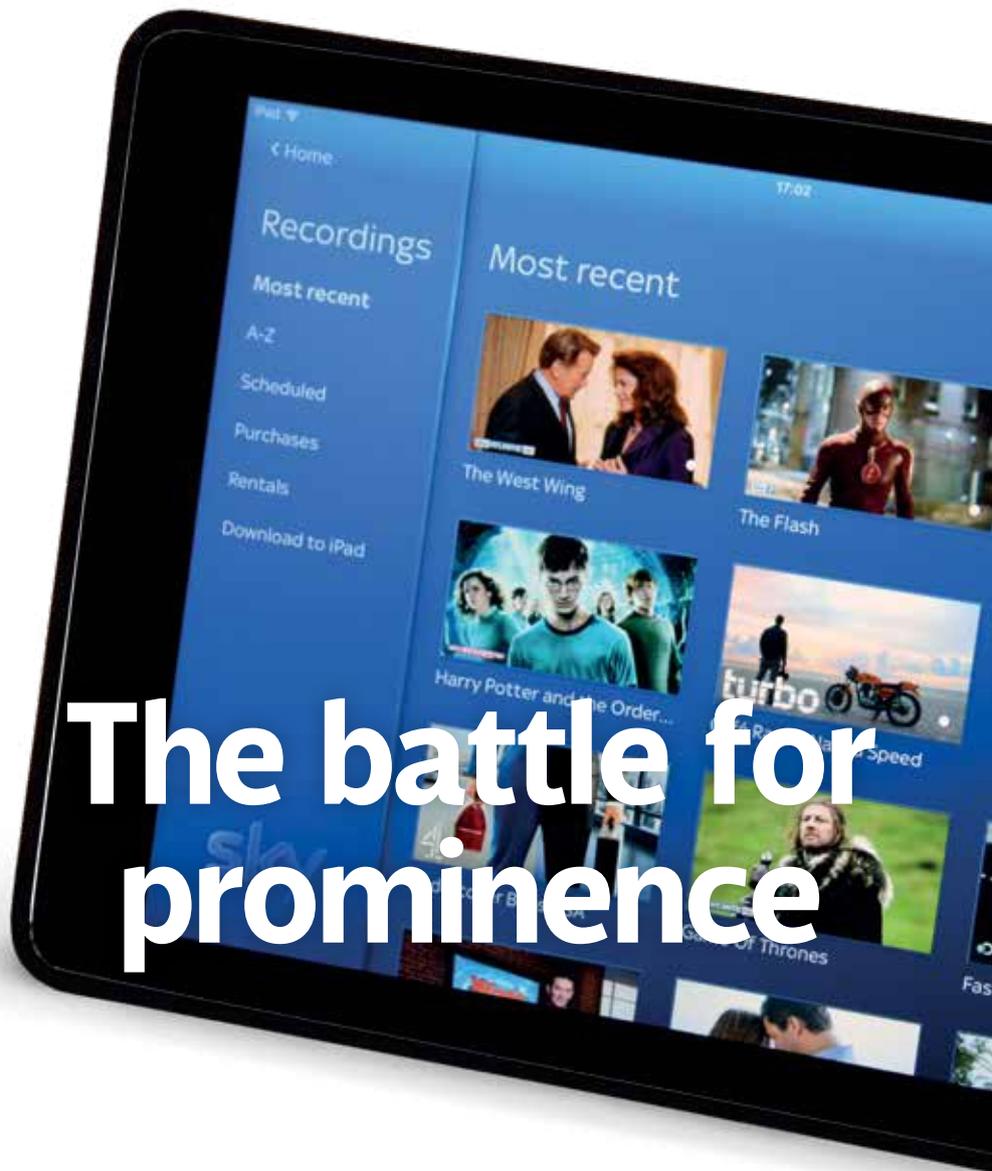
But ITV and Sky don't always see eye to eye on regulation. Broadcasters now find themselves in a complex world of "frenemies" and alliances, sometimes collaborating and sometimes competing. ITV and Sky oppose each other over the requirement to give prominence on electronic programme guides (EPGs) to the PSBs.

Later this year, Ofcom will start a review of the EPG prominence rules and whether they should be updated. The scope of the review has yet to be decided, but Ofcom's content group director, Kevin Bakhurst, explains:

"We'll consider whether the traditional channels are easy to find – on tablets, TVs and smartphones – for people who value their programmes.

"How will viewers find them in a world that's becoming increasingly on-demand and personalised? We must consider this to ensure the PSBs are not drowned out."

The review will reopen arguments played out last year during the House of Lords debate on the Digital Economy Bill, which were cut short by the snap general election. An amendment would have forced Sky, Virgin Media and other pay-TV providers to ensure that BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 programmes got top billing on the new generation of set-top boxes.



## IF WE WANT TO CHERISH PSB THEN VIEWERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO FIND ITS CHANNELS AND ITS VOD SERVICES



“If we want to cherish PSB then viewers need to be able to find its channels and its VoD services,” Sir Peter told the Voice of the Listener and Viewer conference. “Prominence on the home pages of Sky and Virgin is very important for us.

“Since around 50% of viewing on those two platforms is still of PSB channels, you’d think it was a no-brainer. But PSB prominence has been steadily eroded and now needs to be reinforced.”

Sir Peter’s public intervention is significant – recent ITV leaders have kept a low profile. With Dame Carolyn McCall arriving as ITV’s Chief Executive, the company seems ready to take a PSB leadership role.

Until now, the BBC has led the fight

to update the EPG rules, particularly against Sky. James Purnell, the BBC’s director of radio and education, said last year: “On the UK’s leading pay-TV platform, Sky, the BBC’s children’s channels – where parents can rely on their children watching safe, trusted, British programmes without adverts – are listed below 12 US cartoon networks.”

The BBC says the latest Sky box, SkyQ, has made the free-to-air channels even harder to find. Sky sees things very differently and is calling for what it claims is a level playing field in regulation. “We have a real problem with this,” says Mai Fyfield, Sky’s chief strategy and commercial officer. “The only platforms that would get caught by an updating of the EPG rules are Sky, Virgin and BT – not the US tech companies.”

She says that would put the UK platforms at a real disadvantage. “It would also be a real own goal for the PSBs. We are linear-centred platforms that help the PSBs – they get more viewing via us than they do on other on-demand platforms.”

Fyfield says the BBC children’s channels are listed below the US cartoon networks because the EPG numbers were allocated in the order the channels came on the air. And she adds that, in any case, children are quick to find their favourite channels.

“We’d like to promote BBC programmes on Sky Q with a tile on the home page,” she says. “That would lead viewers to its children’s channels, but, at the moment, it won’t allow us to do this, just as it doesn’t let Sky show BBC content on the Sky Go and Sky Q mobile apps.

“If the BBC wants due prominence for its on-demand services, surely it must offer them to us?”

She admits that, when the Sky Q box was launched, viewers complained that the live channels were hard to find: “We listened and changed it – it’s designed to be an evolving platform.

And, if you look at the catch-up page on our boxes, the BBC iPlayer is the first tile you see, followed by ITV Hub, All 4 and Channel 5.”

She goes on: “We’re having proper discussions with the BBC about this and I hope we can resolve this without the need for regulation, but the BBC has been very rigid in what it is asking for.”

Kieran Clifton, the BBC’s director of distribution, says Ofcom is the right body to resolve the prominence issue. But he agrees with Sky that it’s not a level playing field and the growth of the unregulated US platforms will make British programmes harder to find.

He points out that the BBC can’t “buy prominence” as Netflix does through its deals with global TV manufacturers.

“How much did Netflix pay to get its own button on TV remote controls?” he asks. “And it is not alone. Amazon promotes its programmes alongside the items it sells online. And Facebook, Google and YouTube also want to control the relationship with the viewer.”

It is an issue that Damian Collins MP, Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, is keeping a close eye on – and an open mind. “If one or two companies do this (that is, get their own button), it might not distort the market, but if there were a free-for-all and a listings auction, the traditional broadcasters could get lost in the mix, and pushed down the list.”

Collins is keen to see what Ofcom has to say about the EPG. Further ahead, he would like his own committee to take a wider look at all these issues.

“Convergence and the new digital entrants are changing things very fast,” he says. “We’ll soon have generations of people whose main experience of television is not linear viewing but on-demand and uncurated. What is the role of regulation and the public broadcaster in that environment?”

The battle over EPG prominence is just the start. ■



# Royal Patron reception

TRH The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall were the guests of honour at a reception on 31 January, hosted by ITV, to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the RTS





All pictures: Paul Hampartsoumian

# Finecast targets a revolution in TV ads



**L**ondon's Red Lion Square is a place often associated with political revolution. But a few steps away from Conway Hall, home of meetings for radicals and disruptors since the 1920s, is the gleaming modernist UK HQ of global advertising giant GroupM. There, a very different kind of revolution is being conceived.

In September, GroupM officially launched Finecast, an addressable TV service that offers British broadcasters and other UK-based content platforms the ability to provide targeted advertising via a single access point and using a common data currency.

As TV companies continue to assess the threat to their advertising busi-

## Advertising

**Jakob Nielsen**, CEO of GroupM's addressable advertising company, **Finecast**, explains to **Steve Clarke** how TV ads can now be sold at postcode level

nesses from Google and Facebook, advertising aimed at individual households, rather than broad demographics, is looking increasingly attractive.

This point was illustrated when ITV

announced in November that it had agreed a deal with Sorenson Media. This will enable it to sell targeted advertising – or what it described as “dynamically personalised” ads – on smart TVs beginning in the second quarter of this year.

In 2017, for the first time, marketers spent more money online than on TV. Yet, in terms of content, TV has never looked more attractive to advertisers, both in terms of the high quality of programming and the safe environment that TV provides brands with.

Moreover, there are huge doubts about the efficiency of digital advertising, as media buying and selling is increasingly dictated by software designed – but not always certain – to make every pound count.



Shutterstock

“The audiences we are buying for our clients are moving into a world that is going to be so much more complex and difficult,” explains Jakob Nielsen, CEO of Finecast, as he describes the approaching tsunami of on-demand viewing. “This is an opportunity because that world is powered by technology and data. It’s a world where advertisers can reach households at a post-code level. You couldn’t do that before.”

The Finecast boss is a Dane who ran Microsoft’s European ad business until joining GroupM in 2009. Like many ad people, he is relentlessly upbeat as he outlines what Finecast can do for the UK television community. “I can’t pretend that this isn’t complicated and there aren’t a lot of moving parts, but this is a massive, massive opportunity,”

he insists. Technologically speaking, it’s likely that what Finecast can offer advertisers today will be overtaken by further innovations from the company in a couple of years’ time.

“Today, I define Finecast as a company that buys addressable TV audiences. But, in two years’ time, I will probably define that differently because we are on the cutting edge of innovation,” says Nielsen.

Finecast has been in development for two or three years and began its operational roll-out in 2016. To date, it has run more than 200 campaigns with 84 advertisers, including Marks & Spencer, Ford, eBay, Sony, Vodafone, Comparethemarket.com and the *Sunday Times*. It also has data partnerships with Experian, Mastercard, mPLAT-FORM and Kantar.

“Clients are coming back, over and over again. Some of our biggest clients are doing this,” says Nielsen. “To my knowledge, there are no clients who haven’t booked their second campaign. This is a good measurement of them believing that this is a great thing.”

He believes that broadcasters have no choice but to embrace targeted advertising despite the levels of investment required.

“If TV invests in technology and data as Sky has done and like Channel 4 is doing and ITV is starting to, it is starting to compete – because Google has no quality content,” says Nielsen.

“Facebook has no quality content. It has a lot of data and technology and is very digitally savvy, but it doesn’t understand the TV world in the way that broadcasters do. It doesn’t understand TV clients in the way that broadcasters do.”

“Obviously, Amazon and Netflix are quite different. They invest billions in content and they have data and technology. But it will take time for them to get there.”

Intriguingly, he believes that Netflix may one day be forced to carry advertising. This might be wishful thinking, but he is not alone in questioning the long-term viability of the streaming giant’s subscription model.

“Maybe there will be ads on Netflix in the future,” he suggests. “Netflix spent about \$6bn on content last year. It has high costs – technology, people – and its subscription income is not covering that by a long shot.”

“If you said to Netflix that it had to be profitable, then the model would be different. And it will have to be

profitable big time, one day. Otherwise, the stock price will go down to nothing.”

“Its subscriber growth will stop at a certain point, arguably, because the competition from Amazon, Hulu, Disney, etc, will be so big... It is hard to increase prices when there is so much competition. Netflix will have to find new revenue streams.”

“It makes sense that, one day, it will take advertising and I don’t say that just because I am in the industry. Having said that, it is not our focus now.”

At the moment, Finecast’s focus is firmly on persuading broadcasters and brands of the virtues of addressable advertising.

However, not only is it more expensive than conventional TV advertising, there is – as yet – no third-party measurement system.

Taking the latter point first, he says: “It is not a product that is measured by Barb because, unfortunately, Barb is not in this space yet.”

“Barb’s big step is Dovetail, which is measuring online but not set-top boxes and OTT services, which this world is in.”

“We don’t have a Barb to measure 100% of what we are doing. If we did, things would move much, much, much quicker.”

As for the cost of buying targeted ads, Nielsen agrees that “it is more expensive but you get a completely different audience. If you are a BMW dealership in Manchester, the only targeted TV advertising you can do – you have six TV regions, that region is still big, so if, as a dealership, you do TV advertising you waste a lot.”

“Therefore, dealerships don’t do TV advertising. Thanks to addressable advertising, for the first time, they can do TV advertising and serve advertising into defined households around Manchester.”

“They could find people who are interested in buying a BMW X5 – an expensive car. All of a sudden, you open a new market for advertising, which is small budgets, more targeted in the areas they need.”

Ultimately, in the emerging world of addressable advertising, it all comes down to who owns the data and that’s where Finecast is attempting to steal a march.

The good news for Jakob Nielsen and his colleagues is that, in the long term, the likelihood is that all UK broadcasters will have no choice but to do deals with firms such as Finecast. ■



# The buccaneer

If television news had a golden age, it was surely the three decades from around 1980. Driven by videotape news-gathering, growth in satellite capacity and buoyant budgets, news bulletins often drew audiences of 15 million. They were the main way that most people got their news. This was Jeremy Thompson's time, and mine, too.

Thompson came up the old-fashioned way: straight from school into local newspapers and radio before BBC TV, ITN and Sky News. His father, an insurance man, was horrified at his son's career choice, warning that only jazz musicians were a worse actuarial risk.

We joined ITN around the same time. I was in the poor bloody infantry of newsroom producers, he was a sports correspondent en route to a freewheeling career roaming the world's hotspots. He reported and presented on more than 20 wars, coups, terrorist outrages, natural disasters and a genocide.

Along the way, he achieved the iconic status of becoming known simply by his initials. With his honey-and-gravel, high-decibel drawl – Leslie Phillips crossed with a foghorn –

## Book review

Intrepid and fearless, **Jeremy Thompson** epitomised the globe-trotting reporter, says **Simon Bucks**

*Breaking News: An Autobiography*, by Jeremy Thompson, is published by Biteback, priced £20.00. ISBN 978-1785902253



JT epitomised the go-anywhere, buccaneering television reporter. It used to be said that it wasn't a proper war until Kate Adie turned up; JT inherited that mantle. In regulation foreign correspondent fatigues, an Arab *shemagh* knotted stylishly round the neck, he

filled the role suavely and effortlessly.

Thompson is a consummate storyteller, and this autobiography is a catalogue of good stories (and some braggadocio) of the sort reporters tend to swap over a few beers. There were certainly plenty of beers and some low-key hell-raising; CNN's Robert Wiener noted: "I have never seen anyone party harder than Jeremy Thompson."

TV journalism is dominated by logistics, and much of Thompson's narrative describes the challenges of reaching the story, getting it on air and escaping unscathed. Perhaps most terrifying, and bizarre, was a cloak-and-dagger flight from Malawi to Mozambique to interview Afonso Dhlakama, leader of the Renamo resistance movement.

Their ancient, single-engine plane was piloted by a Rhodesian veteran on a Christian mission. His wife explained that they had rescued the old kite from a scrapyard and God had "helped to make it work and taught us to fly".

Thompson has no doubts on the war reporter's classic dilemma: should you embed with a friendly military unit that will protect you but also dictate your journalism? Embedding is favoured by the armed forces because it allows them,



in one general's militarised, to dominate "the information environment".

For Thompson, embedding is anathema: he argues persuasively that the journalist's natural state is to be "independent and unilateral". Nevertheless, when our ITN friend Terry Lloyd – also operating independently – was killed in the Iraq war, a shocked Thompson bunked up alongside the Desert Rats, feeling "safer within sight of British squaddies... not embedded but in touch". In a shooting war, discretion is the better part of valour.

It is a truism that things rarely happen conveniently for TV news cameras; they invariably need "arranging". Set-up shots are in the grammar of the business, but two episodes raise a moot point – how much arranging is OK?

In Alabama, the governor decided to revive chain gangs to demonstrate his toughness on crime, and staged a photocall – an obvious, but "irresistible", publicity stunt. JT added a delicious embellishment, encouraging the hapless inmates to sing spirituals as they broke rocks. It was, he says, "pure TV magic". This, perhaps, was justification enough.

Likewise, in Sierra Leone, Thompson attempted to interview a coup leader,

Captain Valentine Strasser. He was a man of few words – so few that his answers were mainly mumbled monosyllables.

JT – a sympathetic reporter – helped write a script and coached his delivery. Needing more pictures, he persuaded Strasser and his fellow officers to sweep the streets in a symbolic act to show how they would clean up corruption. "You couldn't make it up," observes Thompson, apparently without irony. Small wonder that Strasser invited him to be his information chief, an offer that Thompson swiftly declined.

In truth, the title *Breaking News* is a partial misnomer. Only the arrival of CNN, and then Sky, enabled TV to report in real time. Before that, news rarely broke, but emerged as film, and later tape, which arrived hours, sometimes days, after it was shot, often via circuitous routes.

Reporting a coup in Fiji, Thompson evaded the authorities by ingeniously unspooling his videotape from its cassette, hid it in cigarette cartons and bribing departing passengers at the airport to hand-carry it to Sydney for onward transmission.

The real turning point was Kosovo, in 1999, when the Sky News boss Nick Pollard bet the ranch by sending four satellite trucks by road to the Balkans.

It allowed Thompson and colleagues to report, as it happened, the British contingent of the Nato peacekeeping force rolling across the countryside. For Sky, and JT, it was a major win, netting a well-deserved RTS award.

Things did not always go so well. At ITN, I had a walk-on part in a bad day, which still clearly rankles deeply with JT. The student demonstrations in China in 1989, demanding greater freedom and democracy, grew into a mass movement until the army was sent in to suppress it.

When the protests subsided, Thompson and crew were pulled out and replacements failed to arrive. His version is that, after six weeks in Beijing, it was decided the team needed some "rest and recuperation".

Doubtless that was the message from the foreign desk. The truth, in my memory, was less benevolent. As a programme editor, I had attended a

fateful meeting when it was decided that the escalating costs were unsustainable.

Either way, when the People's Liberation Army rolled into Tiananmen Square, massacring protesters, JT and team were relaxing in the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents Club. It was, he says, a "genuine snafu", one of few regrets in his 50-year career.

Mine, too. I was the duty programme editor, scrambling to rescue something from CNN's crumbs. It was a rare humiliation for us, but worse, as Thompson observes, the might of the entire international media had been powerless to prevent the spark of democracy being snuffed out.

From his rugby-playing days, through international sports reporting, JT clearly felt most comfortable with "good blokes", among them interviewees who became mates, such as Ian "Beefy" Botham and the South African rugby star Francois Pienaar.

He, rightly, devotes an entire chapter in tribute to another very good bloke, the cameraman Mick Deane, his long-time partner on scores of stories. Mick, a gentle giant, was tragically shot dead in Egypt – one of several colleagues and friends felled in the line of duty.

The senseless murder hit us all, but it affected JT particularly badly. He confesses to shedding rare tears when told the news.

Superficially, on camera and in person, Thompson exudes a faintly British colonial air yet, surprisingly, the man who most impressed him was Nelson Mandela. They first met when Thompson was resident correspondent in Johannesburg and went on to become genuine friends.

Thompson admits he was rarely emotional about stories – it was "just business" – but Mandela's death was an exception. It felt, he says, like the end of an era, the "closing of a major chapter in my career".

JT's string of awards (helpfully listed at the back of the book) is testament to his success. *Breaking News* is a hymn to the pre-internet era before "fake news"; a rollicking, roller-coaster account of the glamorous glory days of TV reporting, in which JT had a starring role.

Forgive the cliché, but I doubt we'll see his like again. ■

## I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYONE PARTY HARDER THAN JEREMY THOMPSON



# An intimate epic

RTS APPG

*The Crown* represents a new high-water mark in UK drama production, hear peers and MPs. **Matthew Bell** reports

**P**art royal soap, part British political lesson, *The Crown* is all first-rate drama. To mark the release of its second season on Netflix, a packed RTS pre-Christmas event at the House of Commons heard creator and writer Peter Morgan, executive producer Suzanne Mackie and director Philippa Lowthorpe discuss how they made the award-winning series.

Season 2 of *The Crown*, produced by UK indie Left Bank Pictures, begins with the Suez crisis in 1956 and ends with the Profumo affair in 1963.

It also wrestles with Prince Philip's rumoured infidelities, but Morgan said: "I don't think anything we're saying is controversial. The marriage is clearly a triumph – they've been married for 70 years. If there were complexities along the way that makes it just like any

other marriage that's lasted 70 years."

In total, the writer plans a six-season, 60-part series covering the reign of Elizabeth II. "Some issues are inflamed and sensitive," admitted the writer, "but not to tackle them head on would be irresponsible. I'm wrestling with this [problem] the whole time."

One such story is the disastrous marriage of Charles and Diana, played out in the press, and her tragic death. "The period when Diana enters the story... I think of it as almost, narratively and dramatically, like haemophilia – you just touch it and it bruises. You have to be really careful how you handle it."

The writer admitted that, although he doesn't yet know where the story will end, he is unlikely to bring it fully up to date. "You do not want the drama to feel journalistic. I've always felt that you need at least a decade, because, without a separation of time

and without distance, there's no room for metaphor," he said.

"As soon as you write about [Anthony] Eden [and the Suez crisis], for example, you see Iraq," explained the writer. In another episode of season 2, he added, "women are being groped in a restaurant and it has enormous resonance with where we are today".

The audience at the RTS event was treated to a screening of episode 5 from season 2, "Marionettes", directed by Lowthorpe.

In this episode, the Queen learns to adapt in order to thrive in a less deferential age. The Queen Mother, of course, is appalled that the "divine right of kings" is no longer recognised.

"When you approach a decade, you become conditioned to think in terms of the greatest hits," said Morgan. And, he conceded, there were major events that had to be covered, such as Profumo



The Crown

Netflix

added: “We knew that, somehow, [the story] represented a shift in the prevailing attitudes towards the Queen and the monarchy. It was a brilliant way to say, ‘The times they are a-changin.’”

Nitpickers have obsessively fact-checked *The Crown*, but historical errors seem to be few and far between. “Happily, [with] the people who we’re making these programmes about, where they go and what they do is a matter of public record. I’ve got this big bunch of researchers who are all fabulous,” said Morgan. The research team gives him as full a record of the royals’ lives as possible. When he fills in the gaps, he describes the process as “less an act of fantasy and more an act of imagination”.

He admitted that, on a strict historical basis, “of course, I get it wrong” sometimes. “But my view is that the audience is so sensitive and has such fine instincts that, if they reject [something], then it’s probably wrong. Even if you don’t know the facts, you can smell when something is bogus.

“We do our very, very best to get it right, but sometimes I have to conflate [incidents],” he continued. “You sometimes have to forsake accuracy, but you must never forsake truth.”

Peter Morgan is currently “immersed, planning and plotting” series 3 and 4, which will feature a totally new cast.

“It was all or nothing,” said Suzanne Mackie. But, so far, the only cast announcement sees Olivia Colman replacing Claire Foy as the Queen. The writer argued that trying to age Foy and Matt Smith’s Prince Philip “would be ridiculous – they’d start looking silly with chalk in their hair and prosthetics.

“It so happens that Olivia Colman looks a little bit like Claire, but we would have been quite happy if... the right person didn’t particularly look like Claire. There will be times when the person who takes over from the previous person will not look like them.

“But our attitude is that we’re going to cast the best people available, as if we were doing it from scratch, rather than thinking we need someone to look like the previous incarnation. We’re going to recast and start all over again.” ■

**‘The Crown’ was an RTS event held at the House of Commons on 20 December. It was hosted by Damian Collins MP, Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, and Baroness Bonham-Carter, Lib Dem media spokesperson in the Lords and a former TV producer. It was produced by Sue Robertson and Martin Stott.**

## Freedom to be creative



Peter Morgan

Paul Hampartsoumian

Peter Morgan defended the decision to take *The Crown* to Netflix, rather than a UK broadcaster.

“We went to the BBC and ITV, and we desperately tried to create a partnership between the BBC and Netflix. But it just didn’t work out,” said the drama’s creator and writer. “My conscience is completely clear.”

Netflix commissioned *The Crown*, initially as a 20-hour series, on the spot. “At the end of the meeting, they looked at each other and said, ‘We’ll have that, please’, and pretty much got the chequebook out,” said executive producer Suzanne Mackie. “That conviction gives you a lot of confidence going forward.”

Morgan added that the US streaming giant had shown ‘extraordinary confidence and trust – they really do not interfere whatsoever’ in the making of *The Crown*. “It’s a completely different medium – and the fact that I felt we were on the cutting edge of something made me feel less that I was doing heritage telly. It felt more cutting edge because of who they were. So, actually, I’m thrilled it’s Netflix because it galvanised and energised me.”

Philippa Lowthorpe, who has directed two episodes of season 2, added: “The creativity in shows such as *The Crown* can only add to the general level of creativity in this country. People come [here] to make imaginative drama. It’s an amazingly exciting time for our industry.”

and the death of JFK. But the writer was also determined to cover less well-known stories. In “Marionettes”, the now largely forgotten liberal Tory and journalist Lord Altrincham suggests royal reforms and innovations, including the Queen’s first televised Christmas Day message, that help to modernise the monarchy.

“Whether I’ve heard of it, I take as a barometer of whether people will know a story or not, such as Altrincham. I’ve trawled this stuff long enough now to probably be something of a specialist and I had no [knowledge of] it,” said the show’s creator.

“The lovely thing about this episode is that Peter had taken this microcosmic story and grown this beautiful script from it,” said Philippa Lowthorpe. “It is a tiny corner of history but it says so much.”

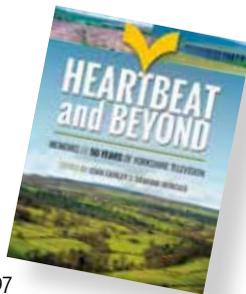
Executive producer Suzanne Mackie

## Yorkshire: regional TV at its best



### David Lowen revels in a book celebrating the glory days of the ITV channel

*Heartbeat and Beyond: Memoirs of 50 Years of Yorkshire Television*, edited by John Fairley and Graham Ironside, is published by Pen and Sword History, priced £25. ISBN: 978-1473896697



The blurb on the back cover, identifying Yorkshire Television (YTV) as “one of the greatest television channels of all times”, might be a touch over the top. But Yorkshire folk don’t applaud modesty.

There is no doubt that YTV punched way above its weight, generating quality and quantity on screen, nationally and regionally, from its launch in 1968 to the Granada takeover in 1997.

These are the personal memories and private photographs of those who made many of the programmes

– stories often told in the bar following the shoot or broadcast of a show. Here is a sense of creative energy, determination and fun. In those days, ITV network slots were often agreed on the nod and on trust.

You will not find the minutes of boardroom battles. Indeed, the men in suits (though not long-time Managing Director Sir Paul Fox) are lined up alongside union restrictions as barriers between creators and viewers.

There are chapters from many who made YTV’s creative reputation: Vernon

Lawrence (who became one of the Network Centre’s first commissioning editors); John Willis (subsequently a brilliant programme director at Channel 4); and Clive Jones (later a force in the TV firmament as MD of Carlton TV).

There were also great directors, such as Peter Kosminsky (who made the brilliant *Shoot to Kill* for YTV long before he was celebrated for *Wolf Hall*), Grant McKee, Robert Charles (later head of sport at Channel 5), Keith Richardson and David Green (now a Hollywood director).

The book contains chapters from those in front of the camera. Included are Miriam Stoppard, Kathryn Apanowicz and the late Marylyn Webb (tellingly, they are the only chapters from women).

The box set of YTV drama delights ranged from *The Darling Buds of May* to *Heartbeat*, from *At Home with the Braithwaites* to *The Beiderbecke Affair*, *Rising Damp* to *A Touch of Frost*.

Writers included Joe Orton, Peter Nichols, Stan Barstow, John Osborne, David Nobbs, Roy Clarke, Alan Bleasdale, Sally Wainwright, Kay Mellor, Alan Plater; true voices of the North.

In factual genres, there were numerous ITV schedule mainstays, from *Whicker’s World* to the *First Tuesday* investigative documentary series, from *Don’t Ask Me* (a popular science show with David Bellamy, Magnus Pyke and Miriam Stoppard) to *Jimmy’s*, a hospital reality show that inspired *ER*.

News show *Calendar* still

flourishes and was recently named Nations and Regions News Programme of the year. *Emmerdale* remains a linchpin of the ITV schedule.

Yorkshire’s *Countdown*, hosted by Richard Whiteley and Carol Vorderman, was the first show to air on Channel 4. The programme became cult viewing for a generation. Sid Waddell, the voice of darts, was another YTV hero.

The book’s co-editors, John Fairley and Graham Ironside, were key players at Yorkshire. Graham oversaw and inspired much excellent regional programming; John fought programming battles at network level with great success.

Richard Whiteley said of John’s newsreading in the early days that he gave the impression of knowing more about a story than he was prepared to tell viewers.

When John was awarded an RTS Fellowship he was congratulated by Greg Dyke, who said the award was well deserved but “to achieve it all from a box at York racecourse was quite remarkable”. This cheeky comment spoke vol-

### YTV PUNCHED WAY ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

umes of the swashbuckling and innovative nature of YTV’s approach to program-

ming. Dull it never was.

I declare a personal interest. I produced and commissioned hundreds (possibly thousands) of programmes for YTV. Like all who contribute to these memories, I also believe it was ITV at its best. As David Green puts it, YTV was “the brightest star in ITV’s tangled firmament”.

## Matthew Bell hears how the BBC is speaking new languages around the globe

**T**he BBC World Service's ambitious plans to increase the corporation's global audience to 500 million by 2020 came under the microscope at an RTS London event in late January.

On the back of a £290m funding boost, the World Service is in the middle of its biggest expansion since the 1940s. Its growth – in “areas of common interest” for the BBC and the Foreign Office, which is footing the bill – will see new TV, radio and digital services in current languages and 12 new ones, including Gujarati, Korean, Pidgin, Serbian and Yoruba.

The BBC's priority areas, such as the Horn of Africa and North Korea, are those where “there isn't access to free information”, said Adrian Van Klaveren, head of the World 2020 investment programme. The BBC is also looking to increase TV and online reach where it already has a strong radio presence, such as in Nigeria.

In other areas, he said, “there is clearly a geo-political interest from the Foreign Office in trying to strengthen free information, and that is true of investment in Russia and in Arabic [countries]”.

Van Klaveren was part of a four-strong panel at the ITV London Studios event, which was chaired and produced by Aradhna Tayal.

He explained that the BBC was looking to attract more young and female viewers and listeners to address the “male skew within the World



India Today

# A truly world service

Service audience”, and argued that “high-quality, original journalism” would increase its weekly reach by 80 million people by 2020.

The World Service will continue to tell the stories that governments don't want told. “We won't make the compromises that some are willing to make,” said Van Klaveren. If the BBC did so, “what we stand for, what we're trusted for counts for nothing. We won't compromise our journalistic principles.”

However, he argued that the type of content offered by the World Service will have to move further beyond hard news, if it is to win larger audiences.

“A diet [of news] that is pure geopolitics and big international crises is not going to do the trick – you've got to do things that draw the world together and connect to people's lives,” he suggested. A new, broader definition of news includes health and technology programming.

In India, said Juliana Iooty, head of the World Service in Asia, “there is a need for news

that is trustworthy”. More than 100 Indian channels offer news, which she characterised as “shrill and loud” in style. A debate is often “two people sitting, side by side, shouting at each other. It's more show business than actual news.”

She added: “Our role at the BBC is to provide news that is high-impact and engaging, but also serious, quality journalism.”

While radio remains important and digital audi-

## OUR BIGGEST GROWTH IS STILL THROUGH TV

ences are increasing rapidly (albeit from a low base), TV is the focus of the investment. “People talk a lot about digital and mobile – and those are important and will become ever more important – but our biggest growth is still through television,” said Adrian Van Klaveren.

The BBC is investing in new

and expanded news bulletins, often in partnership with other broadcasters. “This is a way of getting BBC content into [new] places,” he said. It is also investing in new facilities in major cities such as Delhi and Lagos.

Nicky Goldberg heads the World Service's Television Unit, which works in 15 languages and enables “the best of the BBC's journalism, in whichever language it originates, to travel much further”.

The unit reverts bulletins, although occasionally it is stumped. “Our Uzbek team wanted a bulletin in Cyrillic, Arabic and Latin script, simultaneously, in a 10-minute piece of television, which we just couldn't do,” he said.

Meanwhile, David James, technology manager at World Service Distribution, revealed the technical problems he faces – Soviet-era equipment, bureaucratic red tape and wildlife: “We lost a satellite feed in West Africa after a monkey [attacked] one of our satellite dishes.”

## RTS events IN BRIEF

### North West runs huge new quiz

RTS North West hosted its first 'Great big Xmas telly quiz' late last year.

Some 180 people from the region's television industry competed at the Lowry Theatre, Salford. Dock 10 sponsored the quiz, which was won by the 'More of less' team.

### Channel 4 gives Midlands tutorial

Channel 4 Nations and Regions manager Deborah Dunnett gave 50 students from higher and further education colleges a masterclass in developing factual formats at the end of November.

She joined Channel 4 in 2016 from Scottish indie Raise the Roof, where her credits included BBC One's *Holiday of My Lifetime with Len Goodman*.

The RTS Midlands event was held at the National Motorcycle Museum in Solihull on the same day as the centre's Programme Awards.

### Newcastle hosts annual RTS quiz

'You're joking. Oh, no, not another one... I can't stand it!'

This wasn't the reaction to the annual North East and the Border quiz, which was held before Christmas in Newcastle, but the reaction of 'Brenda from Bristol' on BBC News to the calling of last year's general election. The clip became a YouTube sensation and featured in the centre's annual quiz.

Carole and Tony Edwards and Graeme Aldous set the questions. The winners were the 'Snow problem' team.

**Thames Valley** Ericsson's Steve Plunkett and EE's Matt Stagg outlined the current state and potential of 5G, which is due to launch officially in 2020, to the Thames Valley Centre late last year.

The two experts covered both the consumer and professional applications of 5th-generation mobile networks at the Reading event.

Plunkett, chief technology officer at Ericsson, discussed the expected improvements, which include significantly higher data rates, the capability to manage larger volumes and better battery life.

He said that changing data usage and viewing habits have been driven, in part, by mobile usage and an increase in viewing hours. Indeed, 5G could replace fixed-line delivery of the internet in some cases, he argued.

He also explained the concept of network slicing, which allows for networks within networks, and specialist applications such as mobile production and virtual networks (which seamlessly link local and remote servers).

EE head of mobile video and content Matt Stagg said his company's experience at the Glastonbury music festival demonstrated the potential of network slicing.

Plunkett explained that



EE's wi-fi service at Glastonbury

Nathan Gallagher

## Thames Valley sees 5G future

several organisations are working together to bring 5G to market and that the University of Surrey, with which he is involved, is a leading research force. He added that

5G has great potential, but that a spirit of collaboration is needed to avoid fragmentation and incompatibility between competing services.  
**John Ive**

## Helicopters offer drone lesson

■ Drones are taking the TV industry by storm and RTS Thames Valley's Christmas lecture offered a perfect introduction to the science behind how they fly.

Addressing a packed audience, aviation industry guru John Watkinson demystified helicopter flight. Using his signature approach – no-nonsense, plain speaking

– he jumped straight into basic aerodynamic theory.

He went on to describe some of the critical helicopter components that keep the aircraft in the sky and allow it to be manoeuvred wherever the pilot wants.

Speaking for two hours-plus, Watkinson spoke of his own experiences as a pilot and put to rest some myths

surrounding helicopters. Although a deep knowledge of helicopter aerodynamics is not necessary to fly a drone, understanding the basics will help camera operators achieve better, safer shots with their drone rigs. This could be important with the Civil Aviation Authority taking a keen interest in their use.

**Tony Orme**

# Storyville looks to East

ONLINE  
at the RTS

East  
Centre

A packed hall welcomed Mandy Chang – the new commissioning editor of the BBC’s premier international documentary strand, *Storyville* – to Cambridge in December.

It was the first event the relaunched RTS East Centre has held in Cambridge and was aimed at the many filmmakers, professional and student, based in the city.

Chang, who left the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to join the BBC last year, explained what she believed made a good *Storyville* feature-length documentary. She illustrated this with clips from *Last Men in Aleppo*, *My Mother’s Lost Children* and *Weiner – Sex, Scandals and Politics*.

She pointed out that, unlike most other documentary strands in the UK, *Storyville* was open to pitches from first-time filmmakers, provided they had a unique story, access and approach. This was of particular



BBC

Storyville: Last Men in Aleppo

interest to the audience, many of whom were student filmmakers or freelancers.

Mandy Chang won an Emmy and Grierson for Channel 4’s 2008 documentary, *The Mona Lisa Curse*.

The School of Art at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) hosted the event, with the support of StoryLab, a

research institute based at the university that experiments with different approaches to storytelling.

The event was chaired by Dr Catherine Elliott, a distinguished filmmaker as well as course leader of the MA Film and TV Production course at ARU.

**Fiona Chesterton**

## Potemkin: an Irish connection

Republic  
of Ireland

Former RTÉ producer Peter McEvoy revealed an Irish connection to Sergei Eisenstein’s classic film *Battleship Potemkin* at the latest RTS Republic of Ireland event.

The silent Russian film tells the story of the revolutionary mutineers who took control of their ship, the *Potemkin*, in 1905.

McEvoy explained that one of the mutineers, Ivan Beshov, escaped to London, where he met Lenin. It is believed that the future leader of the Russian Revolution introduced Beshov to



Battleship Potemkin

the Irish trade union leader, Jim Larkin, who advised him to go to Dublin.

Beshov arrived in the city in 1913, and the revolutionary-turned-capitalist set up a chain of fish ‘n’ chip shops

that are in existence to this day, managed by his grandsons. He died in 1989, aged between 104 and 106 years.

Among the excerpts from *Battleship Potemkin* screened by McEvoy, who is a member of the RTS Republic of Ireland Committee and has an MA in film studies, was the famous “Odessa Steps” sequence (pictured).

McEvoy revealed another Irish connection to Eisenstein – the director met James Joyce in Paris in 1925 to discuss adapting *Ulysses*, but the film was never made.

**Charles Byrne**

■ This month, the digital team swapped web for print to write the new TV jobs guide, *How to Get into Television*, for February’s RTS Futures Careers Fair. The magazine offers everything from tips on how to work as a runner and survive as a freelancer, to interviews with leading experts from the fields of journalism, screenwriting, camera-work and sound. Last year’s magazine was so well received, both at the Careers Fair and at RTS events around the country, that we had to double the original print run. If you can’t lay your hands on a copy, it can be viewed online in its entirety ([www.rts.org.uk/JobsGuide2018](http://www.rts.org.uk/JobsGuide2018)), or visit the links below for some of the highlights.

■ Louis Theroux has made his name making documentaries about some of the world’s strangest individuals. We caught up with him on the phone from Los Angeles, from where he explained that anyone wanting to follow in his footsteps should focus on making good TV, rather than setting out to be a presenter ([www.rts.org.uk/LouisTheroux](http://www.rts.org.uk/LouisTheroux)).

■ Adrian Lester, currently starring in ITV drama *Trauma*, shared his experiences of working as an actor and director. Switching between the two roles, as he has done on *Hustle* and *Riviera*, is a ‘very complicated dance’, he says. See his top tips for thriving on set at [www.rts.org.uk/AdrianLester](http://www.rts.org.uk/AdrianLester).

■ For those interested in writing drama, scriptwriters – including Daisy Goodwin, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Marnie Dickens – reveal how they got their ideas from page to screen ([www.rts.org.uk/ScreenwritingTips18](http://www.rts.org.uk/ScreenwritingTips18)).

**Pippa Shawley**

# Leeds plaque marks 90th year

**Yorkshire Centre** In early January, the Yorkshire Centre joined forces with Leeds University and the Yorkshire Society to commemorate the RTS's inaugural meeting more than 90 years ago.

On 7 September 1927, John Logie Baird demonstrated his "noctovision" to a room full of enthusiasts at Leeds University. Baird referred to the technology as "seeing by electricity".

At the close of the meeting, the formation of the society was proposed. Then known as the British Association, many of the founder

members were from Leeds and Yorkshire.

A plaque was unveiled at the university, on the wall of the School of Media and Communication in the Clothworkers' North Building.

It was donated by the Yorkshire Society, which celebrates Yorkshire men and women who have given exceptional service or contributed significantly to the county during their lifetime.

RTS Yorkshire has a long-standing relationship with both the Yorkshire Society and Leeds University.



Following the unveiling, attendees were treated to a tour of the university's media production facilities.

There were warm words from Leeds University Vice-Chancellor Sir Alan Langlands, RTS Yorkshire Chair

Fiona Thompson, RTS Honorary Treasurer (and former Yorkshire Centre Chair) David Lowen, Yorkshire Society Chair Keith Madeley and Leeds Beckett University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Slee.

David Lowen said: "It's an honour to have the chance to unveil the plaque to commemorate the creation of the Television Society – since 1966, the Royal Television Society. As one who worked for 30 years in television in Leeds, I am proud that it all started here."

**Lisa Holdsworth**

Samantha Gill

# Rees outlines S4C plans for Wales

**Wales Centre** Speaking at an RTS Wales event in Cardiff last December, S4C creative content director Amanda Rees described how the broadcaster "aims to create the conversation, touch the heart and fire the imagination".

S4C's output is prolific: it screens 6,300 hours of Welsh-language programming a year across genres that include drama, factual, news and current affairs, children's, the arts and sport. But Rees acknowledged that the channel's core audience was changing and emphasised that her ambition for 2018 was to reach new viewers.

She argued that "we need to press the reset button and adapt the schedule". She announced that S4C's two popular soaps, *Pobol y Cwm* and *Rownd a Rownd*, would be moved to create a new one-hour 8:00pm weekday family viewing slot in the new year, aimed at audiences that might



Bang S4C

not currently be familiar with the channel.

Before joining S4C, Rees was already an experienced director and producer. She has filmed in more than 35 countries for Channel 4, the BBC, ITV, National Geographic, UKTV and Foxtel.

Her own production

company, TiFiNi, was nominated for a clutch of awards for the Channel 4 documentary *Finding Mum and Dad*.

The creative content director has aimed to extend S4C's demographic with new programmes such as the recent crime drama series, *Bang*, which was set in Port Talbot

and mixed English- and Welsh-language dialogue to offer a more realistic reflection of the local area.

Other content that has extended the channel's reach includes *Hansh*, the youth-orientated online content portal, and sports, including live international football.

Replying to a question from RTS Wales Chair Judith Winnan on the challenges faced by S4C, Rees said: "Budgets are tight and we have to be inventive, but it's hard to grow without additional resources.

"Our drama tariff is normally less than £250,000 per hour, but we can add value through co-productions."

This could prove a challenging year for S4C. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which conducted a review of the service last autumn, is expected to publish its findings this spring.

**Hywel Wiliam**



Creating the Kelpies

BBC

## Sound advice

**Scotland Centre** Kahl Henderson and Diane Jardine offered a masterclass in sound to a sold-out RTS Scotland event at Glasgow's Film City in mid-December.

Henderson – who won the

RTS Scotland Sound Award 2017 for his work on BBC One drama *The Secret Agent* – co-founded Savalas in 1998.

It has grown to become Scotland's largest audio post-production centre.

Jardine is a dubbing mixer, who also lectures in sound production at Forth Valley College. Her company, That's Sound, supports women in the audio industry across Scotland. She argued that technical subjects should be adapted and expanded in schools to encourage young women to make a career in industries such as sound.

Henderson described hearing as “a muscle” that can be trained and used as a tool. He talked about how he worked closely with the director on the set of *The Secret Agent* to recreate the sounds of 19th-century London. The Savalas boss also worked on Channel 4 documentary strand *Dispatches* and BBC One drama *Shetland*.

Jardine revealed that she is protective of her sound-effects library because of the amount of research and travel that can go into achieving a single sound. It is a hugely personal subject for her and her library represents her own journey behind each sound, from dogs barking to the juddering trains of Mongolia.

She has worked on a broad range of programmes, including BBC Two's *Creating the Kelpies*, about the construction of Falkirk's famous giant horse-head sculptures.

Journalist Stephen Ferguson chaired the event.

**Alice Aries**

## Plimsoll sneak a quiz win

**Bristol Centre** The Big Fat Bumper Quizmas on all things telly returned for its fourth, triumphant year in Bristol in early December.

TV presenters Ben Garrod and Christy Harrison were on hand to oversee proceedings and adjudicate.



John Craven

BBC

Rounds included old favourites such as “TV theme tunes”, alongside “John Craven's fake news” and “iconic Bristol”, during which teams had to build a well-known Bristol landmark.

Twelve teams competed, including Tigress Productions, Offspring Films, Wall to Wall and a couple of BBC Bristol teams, but it was Plimsoll Productions that emerged victorious at the end of a keenly contested quiz.

**Suzy Lambert**

## Students learn from the professionals

**Southern Centre** Southern Centre held its third annual “Working in journalism” event at Southampton Solent University late last year. It was attended by 180 students and staff from Solent, Bournemouth, Winchester and Portsmouth universities, as well as Highbury

College, Portsmouth. On hand to offer advice, were 15 journalism professionals at varying stages of their careers, from the just-qualified to experienced editors and producers.

The professionals stressed the importance of multi-tasking in the online world

and of producing effective material for mobile media.

They also pointed out the value to would-be journalists of improving their understanding of current affairs in order to interpret the world to others. Only a few hands went up when the students were asked how many had checked

out the day's news stories. It is such touches of realism that make the event popular with the students, who appreciate how the experts' practical advice adds to their classroom learning – that and the chance to talk informally with professionals.

**Gordon Cooper**

# OFF MESSAGE

**R**arely have so many British broadcasting luminaries gathered under one roof. The occasion, of course, was the RTS's very special 90th birthday celebration, held at ITV's South Bank HQ.

The guests of honour were HRH The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. Pictures from the splendid event can be seen in this edition of *Television*. The RTS-branded cupcakes would not have looked out of place on *Bake Off*.

The occasion was covered, at some length, by ITV's *News at Ten*, a welcome positive story in a news agenda full of Brexit muddle and splenetic US Presidential tweets.

Also, it was good to see the *Yorkshire Post* reporting the unveiling of a plaque at the University of Leeds in recognition of the Society's 90th anniversary.

■ In television, it is not just David Attenborough and *Blue Planet II* that are drawing attention to the global plastic plague.

Writing recently in the *Evening Standard*, Sky CEO Jeremy Darroch outlined how his company is cutting down on the use of plastic. He stressed that Sky News had covered the issue and pointed out that Sky had eliminated plastic containers for food and drink across its sites.

Sky aims to be "single-use

plastic-free" by 2020, the first FTSE100 company to make such a commitment, he said.

This involves "everything from how we build studios and sets to the way our products are manufactured and delivered to our millions of customers," noted Darroch.

Let's all hope that other broadcasters are following Sky's lead.

■ Belated congratulations to the new culture secretary, Matt Hancock. We all know that the West Suffolk MP is something of a digital wunderkind, having become the first Member of Parliament to launch his own app.

What is less well known is that, unlike some of his predecessors, he watches a lot of television.

This is something that every broadcaster and content provider must surely welcome.

■ There was a time when media editors, particularly those employed by the *Guardian*, stuck around for several years. Not any more, it seems.

Graham Ruddick, who became the *Guardian's* media editor only last May, is already in transit – to join the *Times* as assistant business editor.

At least no one can accuse the great Gillian Reynolds – the doyenne of radio writers – of being flighty. After what seems like for ever (in fact, it's a mere 42 years), she is forsaking the radio perch at the *Daily Telegraph* in order to join the *Sunday Times*, where

she will occupy a similar role. "Being offered a new job at age 82 is rather cheering," she told *The Oldie*.

Three cheers for Gillian. There isn't a single senior radio person in New Broadcasting House who doesn't tremble when Reynolds raises her pen.

■ For readers who are devotees of classy, subtitled TV drama, look no further than a new 10-part Swedish series, *The Restaurant*.

Already hailed as a Scandinavian *Downton Abbey*, the upstairs-downstairs saga, set in post-1945 Stockholm, was a breakout hit in Sweden when the first series premiered there last autumn. Two more series are in the pipeline, bringing the show forward in time to the 1970s.

One for Channel 4's Walter Presents... or BBC Four, perhaps?

■ And finally, attendees of the launch of BBC Two's *Civilisations* got an unexpected treat when Sir David Attenborough made an appearance.

Attenborough, who, as BBC Two controller, commissioned Kenneth Clark's series *Civilisation* in 1966, explained the idea behind the commission. He needed to sell the idea of colour TV.

"I thought the simple idea would be to get all the loveliest things in colour, put them in a chronological order and to contemporary music and then you would have a series," he explained.



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