

February 2017

# Television



Who's watching?

**Fact and fiction  
in streaming TV**

Plus

Mark Thompson's encounter with the President



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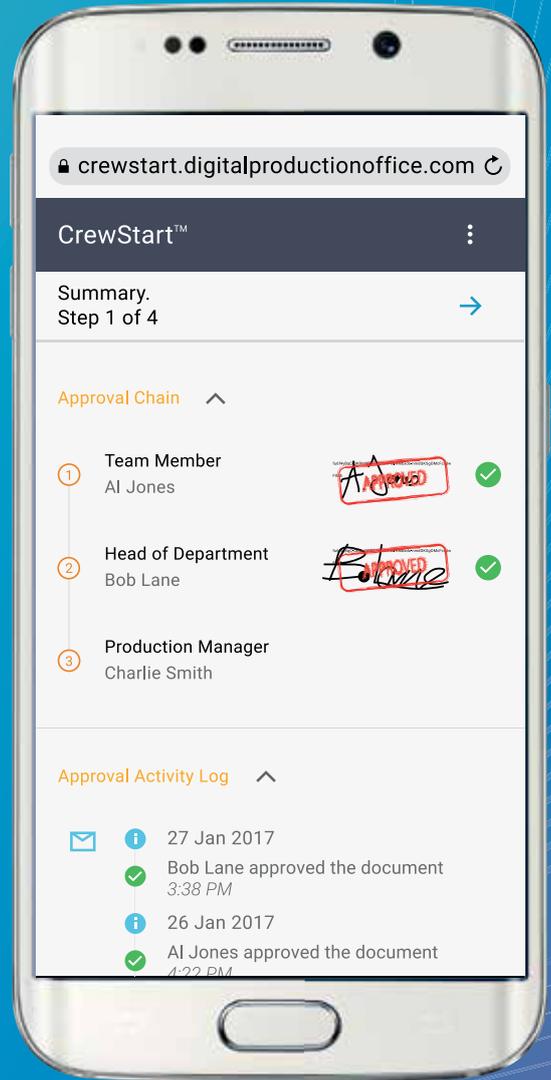
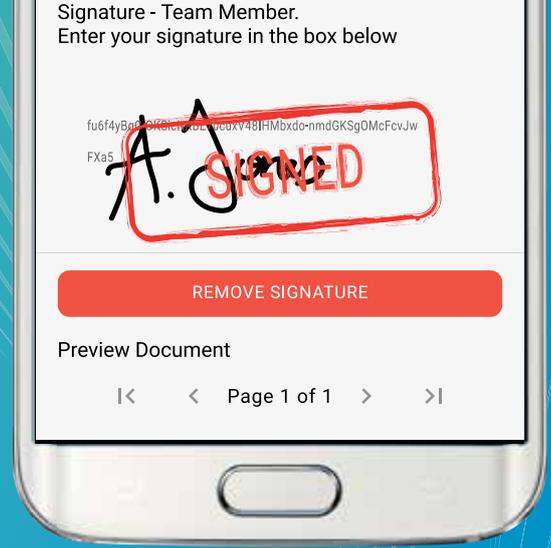
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## National events

### RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Thursday 23 February

#### False news, unverified claims and alternative facts

What is the future for honest journalism in a post-truth world? Panellists include: Nick Robinson, BBC journalist and *Today* presenter; Allegra Stratton, national editor, *ITV News*, ITN; Patrick Walker, director of media partnerships, Facebook; and Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP, former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Chair: Stewart Purvis CBE. More speakers TBA. 6:30pm for a 7:00pm start.

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

■ Book online at [www.rts.org.uk](http://www.rts.org.uk)

### RTS AWARDS

Wednesday 1 March

#### RTS Television Journalism Awards 2017

Venue: *London Hilton on Park Lane, London W1K 1BE*

■ Jamie O'Neill 020 7822 2821

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

### RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Tuesday 7 March

#### John Petter, in conversation

John Petter, CEO of BT Consumer. 6:30pm for 6:45pm start

Venue: *BT Tower, Maple Street, London W1T 4JZ*

■ Book online at [www.rts.org.uk](http://www.rts.org.uk)

Tuesday 21 March

#### RTS Programme Awards 2017

In partnership with Audio Network

Venue: *Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane, London W1K 7TN*

■ Alice Turner 020 7822 2822

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

### RTS CONFERENCE

13-15 September

#### RTS Cambridge Convention 2017

Venue: *West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge CB3 9DP and King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST*

■ Booking opens soon

## Local events

### BRISTOL

Sunday 19 March

#### RTS West of England Awards 2017

Venue: *Bristol Old Vic, King Street, Bristol BS1 4ED*

■ Belinda Biggam

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

### DEVON & CORNWALL

■ Kingsley Marshall

■ [Kingsley.Marshall@falmouth.ac.uk](mailto:Kingsley.Marshall@falmouth.ac.uk)

### EAST

■ Nikki O'Donnell

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

### LONDON

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

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

### MIDLANDS

Thursday 23 March

#### Networking seminar

Find out what's happening in your region from guest speakers, and network with other professionals. To book a place, email [RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk](mailto:RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk). 11:45am-2:30pm

Venue: *University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ*

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

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

### NORTH EAST & THE BORDER

Thursday 23 February

#### Networking evenings

The last Thursday of the month, for anyone working in TV, film, computer games or digital production. 6:00pm onwards.

Venue: *Tyneside Bar Café, Tyne-side Cinema, 10 Pilgrim St, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6QG*

■ Jill Graham

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

### NORTH WEST

Wednesday 22 February

#### Student media conference

Followed by the Student Television Awards. The conference is for media students across the North West. Sessions include: How to get into TV; Using digital media in drama; Exploring virtual and augmented reality; and Newsgathering. To reserve your place, email [rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk). 1:30pm to 5:30pm

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

#### Student Television Awards

Presented by Roger Johnson, with special guest Jack P Shepherd. Book via [rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk). 6:30pm

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

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ [rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk)

### NORTHERN IRELAND

■ John Mitchell

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

### REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Wednesday 15 February

#### Student Television Awards

8:00pm

Venue: *RTÉ Television Centre, Studio 1, Stillorgan Road, Montrose, Dublin 4*

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

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

### SCOTLAND

Wednesday 1 March

#### AGM followed by

#### Student Television Awards

AGM at 6:00pm, followed by the awards reception (light buffet) at 7:00pm

Venue: *The Hub Glasgow, Pacific Quay, Pacific Drive, Glasgow G51 1EA*

■ James Wilson 07899 761167

■ [james.wilson@cityofglasgow-college.ac.uk](mailto:james.wilson@cityofglasgow-college.ac.uk)

### SOUTHERN

Wednesday 22 March

#### Meet the professionals

An opportunity for students from production-based courses across the South to meet informally a wide range of media production professionals. 2:00pm-5:30pm

Venue: *Bournemouth University, Talbot Campus BH12 5BB*

■ Gordon Cooper

■ [gordonjcooper@gmail.com](mailto:gordonjcooper@gmail.com)

### THAMES VALLEY

Wednesday 15 February

#### Advances in compression

Speaker: Ian Trow, senior director, emerging technology and strategy at Harmonic. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: *Pincents Manor Hotel, Calcot, Reading RG31 4UQ*

■ Penny Westlake

■ [info@rtstvc.org.uk](mailto:info@rtstvc.org.uk)

### WALES

Thursday 16 February

#### Clive Myrie, in conversation with Tim Hartley

Booking essential: email [hywel@aim.uk.com](mailto:hywel@aim.uk.com) or call 07980 007 841. 6:15pm (light refreshments available) for 7:00pm

Venue: *Television Studio, ATRium Building, USW, 86-88 Adam Street, Cardiff CF24 2FN*

■ Hywel William 07980 007841

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

### YORKSHIRE

Friday 10 March

#### Emmerdale: Anatomy of a hit

Speakers TBA. Panellists will include producers, directors, writers and actors.

There will also be craft workshops for students and young people interested in a career in television. To register your interest, email [rtsyorkshireevents@rts.org.uk](mailto:rtsyorkshireevents@rts.org.uk)

Venue: *Leeds College of Music, 3 Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7PD*

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

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

# TV diary

## Jess Fowle celebrates a historic week for True North, which seems to have grown too big for its pizzas



**A**n auspicious start to the week. The news breaks that Sky has taken a majority stake in True North. Our baby, born 16 years ago, is all grown-up. What started with three people, one desk and one computer regularly employs more than 150 talented programme-makers across bases in Leeds and Manchester and has 11 series in production.

The deal with Sky has been a long time in the making and it's both exciting and a relief to finally tell our team. We're all fiercely proud of our independent Northern roots and massively invigorated by what the future holds.

■ I'm woken slightly befuddled after last night's fizz. Our development WhatsApp group is going crazy. My co-creative director, Andrew Sheldon, is at Realscreen with executive producer Fiona O'Sullivan - creator of our toe-curlingly honest relationship show, *The Lie Detective*. Three US networks are fighting over the format.

Andrew and I have been partners in crime for 23 years and he had felt torn - having to be away from base for our Sky announcement. He seems to have cheered up now.

■ Try to run off the hangover with a headtorch-lit riverside run at home in Hebden Bridge, before setting off

on the four-hour train ride to pitch in London. There are times when I board the East Coast main line from Happy Valley to Medialand slightly resentfully.

But, today, I'm feeling philosophical. The post-Brexit world presents an enormous challenge to all of us media luvvies, and something tells me that those 200 miles that separate us from the metropolis are going to give us a creative edge in years to come.

Rather than seeing the M62 as a long, thin car park, we're now reimagining it as a cultural fault line across modern Britain. And we're perched right on top of it.

■ One of our shows, *Building the Dream*, is exactly half way through a five-year, 100-part order. We want to make sure that we're not missing any tricks. Thankfully, we have some dedicated viewers inside the company.

Today, we're running a programme review. It's like a book group but without the wine. The brilliant series producer is remarkably resilient as his colleagues analyse and question every part of the format.

We come away with lots of tweaks - all within budget - that will give the show even greater production values and creative edge.

■ We're developing a dramatic transformation show with a BBC commissioning editor and I'm taking heart

from tales of *Bake Off's* drawn-out gestation. In the meantime, we're determined to prove the concept works.

■ Our development exec is teaching herself piano and I am training for a particularly masochistic challenge called *Up the Buttrass* (The Buttrass being a ridiculously vertiginous, slimy, cobbled local "snicket", to be conquered on a mountain bike).

The only way I can train is to do it secretly - at 6:00am - while no one is watching. Today I manage 25 metres before coming off. Tomorrow, I am determined it will be 30.

■ The week that started so well has ended even better. True North is named as one of the best places to work in TV. A near crisis is averted after Dominos says our celebratory order is too big to deliver.

Our brilliant office manager heads into town to pick up the pizzas and we finally celebrate with a Skype hook-up between the teams in Leeds and Manchester.

■ Various members of the True North cycling team nobble me - to ask if Sky will provide brand new Pinarellos for our little team or if Chris Froome can be our coach. I say I will investigate. Maybe some jerseys, perhaps?

*Jess Fowle is creative director and co-founder of True North.*

# Streaming facts from fiction



**H**ave Netflix and Amazon Prime Video finally come of age as viewing platforms in the UK, thanks to the uber-hyped *The Crown* and *The Grand Tour*? But how many people have watched these, the first two big British commissions by the streaming companies? And what impact are the video-streaming companies having on our viewing habits more generally?

With their huge budgets and endless press and online coverage, there is a lot riding on the return of Jeremy Clarkson and co, and the drama series about the young Queen Elizabeth.

Since neither company will share its viewing figures or UK subscription numbers, it is not easy to gauge their real impact, but we can try to sift the fact from the fiction.

If you believe the headlines, services such as Netflix are carrying all before them. But, while everyone agrees that viewing habits are changing – particularly among the young – the stalwarts of terrestrial television insist that the

## Audience research

How big are the changes in UK viewing habits that Netflix and Amazon are fostering?

**Torin Douglas**  
investigates

change is far less dramatic than the internet cheerleaders would have us believe.

“We are experiencing profound change, with new ways to watch, and new global providers of content,” says Jonathan Thompson, Chief Executive of Digital UK, which co-ordinates the Freeview DTT platform. “But it is really important that we separate rhetoric from reality and not get carried away with a Silicon Valley view of the future of broadcast TV.”

There has been a fog of hype

surrounding both shows. In December, the *Mail on Sunday* reported that Clarkson’s *The Grand Tour* was the most illegally-downloaded TV show in history. The source was a piracy data firm called Muso.

The story was picked up by the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Fortune* and other media.

But *Variety* checked the details with Muso and squashed the claim. It said *The Grand Tour* may have had piracy problems but it “was not even close to being the most-pirated show over the last three weeks” – let alone ever. Similarly, when Netflix launched *The Crown*, the *Times* proclaimed: “Streaming upstarts seize traditional television’s crown. Britain is turning into a digital couch-potato economy, with four in five of us subscribing to at least one streaming service.”

Thompson publicly challenged this claim at Digital UK’s stakeholder conference: “The survey’s ‘four in five’ figure was for people subscribing to any type of service, not just streaming – gym membership, publications,



Netflix newcomer *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

Netflix

software, music and so on," he said. "It was commissioned by a company called Zuora, which runs a subscription management programme."

The headline on Zuora's press release was dramatic, echoing a theme repeatedly peddled by internet businesses: "Is broadcast dead? Half of Brits now rarely watch 'normal TV' due to Netflix and Amazon Video, finds consumer research."

This assertion was contradicted by the release itself. It stated that a quarter of British consumers subscribed to video streaming services and almost half of these subscribers said they rarely watched "normal" TV.

"That's 12% of the UK adult population," the release declared. But 12% is not "half of Brits". And, as rigorous researchers know, what people say in a survey can be very different to what they actually do.

So how do *The Crown* and *The Grand Tour* compare with the most popular series on "normal" TV, such as *The Great British Bake Off*, *Strictly Come Dancing*, and *Planet Earth II*? Their audiences can't be

compared directly, because Amazon and Netflix don't publish figures or submit themselves to Barb's strict rules, as broadcasters do – though Amazon has made an approach.

"We had an enquiry recently from a representative of Amazon about measuring audiences for *The Grand Tour*, but it came to nothing," wrote Barb CEO Justin Sampson on its website. "I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions."

Barb requires all programmes to be measured on a similar basis so that figures can be shared and compared. But Amazon won't even tell its series producers how their shows are doing.

Clarkson has confirmed that *The Grand Tour* team has not been told – and will not be told – how many people have watched the programme. Amazon has revealed only that the show was its biggest premiere ever, "with millions of members streaming the first episode in the US, UK, Germany, Austria and Japan over the first weekend".

Netflix's recently published results for Q4 2016 reveal a record quarterly rise in subscriptions, up by 7 million to almost 94 million worldwide. At the same time, Netflix confirmed plans to spend \$6bn on content in 2017. But it remains as coy as Amazon about its viewing figures. Chief content officer Ted Sarandos told analysts simply that *The Crown* was "very popular" in the UK, and also did well across the US, Europe, and Asia.

Fortunately, the UK's wealth of research expertise and viewing data means we can get a clearer picture.

Figures released to *Television* by GfK UK from its SVoD Content Tracker (see charts) show that *The Crown* and *The Grand Tour* went straight to the top spots on their platforms in the UK.

Across November and December 2016, 9% of Netflix users watched *The Crown*, putting it well ahead of proven US hits such as *Breaking Bad*, *Narcos*, *Orange Is the New Black* and *Gilmore Girls*. On average, these viewers watched 3.9 of *The Crown*'s 10 episodes.

A massive 37% of the UK's Amazon Prime users watched *The Grand Tour*, four times the figure for the number-two show, *The Man in the High Castle*. But on average they only watched

1.8 episodes, considerably fewer than the top US shows on Amazon.

GfK says that this could be because viewers were disappointed after the first episode or they simply hadn't caught up yet. Amazon releases a new *Grand Tour* show every Friday (in contrast to Netflix, which puts out a whole series straight away); there were eight episodes in November and December.

"*The Grand Tour* is astonishing," says Julia Lamaison, insight director of GfK UK.

"I've never seen a pattern like that for any other original programme launch. It certainly attracted a massive number of Amazon users and it will be interesting to see whether the interest continues through time."

But how many people have actually watched the show? GfK keeps this sort of analysis for the broadcasters and platforms that subscribe to its tracker, but we can make some assumptions.

The latest Barb Establishment survey shows that 6.13 million UK households subscribed to Netflix in the third quarter of 2016, while Amazon Prime membership grew strongly to 2.55 million.

The survey shows that 13.8 million adults had access to Netflix and 5.4 million to Amazon. A third of adults – 16.9 million – had at least one SVoD service, including Now TV.

Assuming, as GfK says, that *The Crown* reached 9% of 13.8 million Netflix adults, it would mean that 1.2 million saw at least part of an episode. If *The Grand Tour* reached 37% of Amazon's 5.4 million adults, the audience would work out at 2 million – at least for part of the first episode.

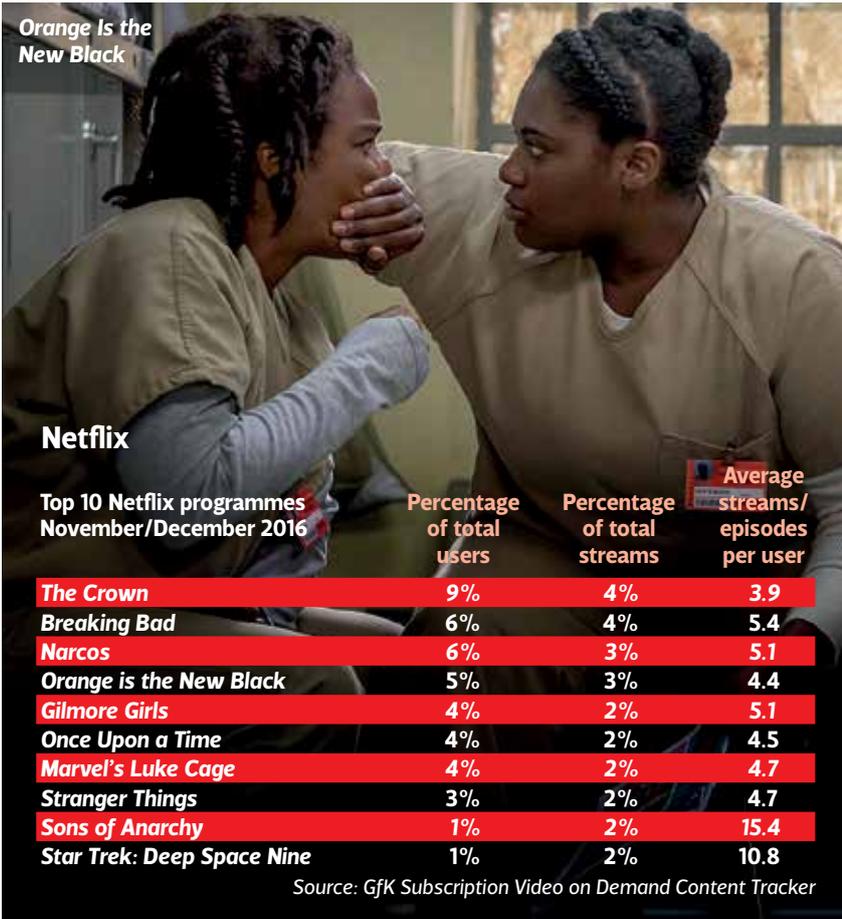
That is good for a show that is not on "normal" TV – the best-watched episode of *Game of Thrones* on Sky Atlantic got an average audience of 2 million. But it's not large in UK audience terms (the *Bake Off* final topped 15 million) and it's a lot less than Clarkson and chums got on *Top Gear*.

So, what impact is internet video having on our viewing habits generally?

UK subscriptions to Netflix and Amazon Prime are undoubtedly growing, boosted by *The Crown* and *The Grand Tour*, but most viewers seem to use them as additions to broadcast TV, not as replacements. >

## A MASSIVE 37% OF THE UK'S AMAZON PRIME USERS WATCHED THE GRAND TOUR

**Orange Is the New Black**



**Netflix**

**Top 10 Netflix programmes November/December 2016**

	Percentage of total users	Percentage of total streams	Average streams/ episodes per user
<b>The Crown</b>	9%	4%	3.9
<b>Breaking Bad</b>	6%	4%	5.4
<b>Narcos</b>	6%	3%	5.1
<b>Orange is the New Black</b>	5%	3%	4.4
<b>Gilmore Girls</b>	4%	2%	5.1
<b>Once Upon a Time</b>	4%	2%	4.5
<b>Marvel's Luke Cage</b>	4%	2%	4.7
<b>Stranger Things</b>	3%	2%	4.7
<b>Sons of Anarchy</b>	1%	2%	15.4
<b>Star Trek: Deep Space Nine</b>	1%	2%	10.8

Source: GfK Subscription Video on Demand Content Tracker

**The Man in the High Castle**



**Amazon Prime**

**Top 10 Amazon programmes November/December 2016**

	Percentage of total users	Percentage of total streams	Average streams/ episodes per user
<b>The Grand Tour</b>	37%	13%	1.8
<b>The Man in the High Castle</b>	9%	6%	3.6
<b>Lucifer</b>	8%	5%	3.1
<b>The Walking Dead</b>	6%	5%	4.2
<b>Mr Robot</b>	5%	5%	4.3
<b>Vikings</b>	5%	4%	4.1
<b>Black Sails</b>	2%	3%	9.3
<b>Arrow</b>	2%	3%	9.2
<b>Outlander</b>	3%	3%	4.7
<b>Prison Break</b>	2%	2%	6.3

Source: GfK Subscription Video on Demand Content Tracker

› And change is happening faster among the young. A much higher proportion of the 16-34 age group have access to an SVoD service and they are watching less live TV than they did two years ago.

According to Barb, this group's average viewing fell to 1 hour 54 minutes a day in 2016, from 2 hours 4 minutes in 2015. Ofcom's Digital Day diary survey agrees, and records a steeper fall over the past two years.

But the young have always watched less TV than all adults and, among viewers as a whole, the drop in viewing to "normal" TV is much lower. Barb and Thinkbox say it is down by just three minutes a day, from 3 hours 26 minutes in 2015 to 3 hours 23 minutes last year. They insist that broadcast TV remains easily the most popular form of video.

"TV – live, playback or on-demand, across all screens – had a 76% share of total video viewing in 2015 in the UK," declared a recent publication, "TV in the video world", published by Thinkbox and the Marketing Society. "SVoD viewing – Netflix, Amazon Prime and other SVoD services – totalled 4%," it said. The YouTube figure was 4.4%.

Yet, many people in TV find it hard to accept this. Nigel Walley, Managing Director of Decipher, the media strategy consultancy, wrote recently: "Speaking at a conference, I quoted an Ofcom figure about the resilience of linear broadcast viewing in UK TV.

"After my talk, I was accused of lying about it by an audience member. It was a strangely shocking moment. They were convinced that the truth they felt in their gut was more true than an exhaustively researched Ofcom number."

The Chair of Thinkbox, Tess Alps, tirelessly challenges all misleading claims about "the death of TV". She says: "We've recently published a study through Ipsos, called "TV nation/ ad nation", which looks at marketers' opinions of what consumers do. It's pretty terrifying. If you ask marketers how much time they think the average person is watching YouTube, they say over an hour a day – the real number is 16 minutes."

It may be apocryphal, but an Amazon executive was recently quoted as saying that no one in north London watches broadcast TV any more. To which the response was "in your dreams".

# Flying high under the radar

## The Billen profile

**Miranda Curtis**, a key player in the expansion of cable TV and BA's all-time top woman passenger, gives a rare interview to **Andrew Billen**



Liberty Global

**W**hen you are talking to a woman as successful as the former president of a key division of Liberty Global, a multi-millionaire who has driven the expansion of cable television and telephony across the world, and who is now firmly in the ranks of Britain's great and good, it is hard to prosecute the case that sexism has held her back.

Miranda Curtis, however, has no compunction in saying she has encountered it, not least in Japan, where she struck one of telephony's deals of the century without – for fear of frightening the locals – ever being named as chair of the company on whose behalf she was negotiating.

Somehow, she turned the curse of being, as she puts it, “female, foreign and fortysomething” (which is

painfully young in Japanese business years, rather than over the hill), to her benefit.

“A Japanese colleague,” she tells me over coffee in a London business centre, “said to me one night after we’d had quite a lot of sake, ‘Miranda-san, you have to understand that, to us, all western men look exactly the same, particularly Americans: square jaw, blue eyes, same shirts. At least we can remember which one you are.’”

Here, however, few people would recognise the neat, blonde, composed yet forthright woman, now a youthful 61, who is talking to me. There are reasons for this. Liberty Global, chaired by the low-key John Malone (go on, tell me you could pick him out in a line-up of American tycoons), does not court publicity.

Its role in British cable has – as Curtis will explain to me in a

bewildering summary of acquisitions and renamings – been huge but was only really noticed by customers when it reacquired Virgin Media in 2013.

Privacy is also part of Curtis's style. When she tells me that *Vanity Fair* has recently brought Malone back from its “hall of fame” into the main body of its annual power list because, at 75, he is still such a “player”, I ask if she is on any list.

“No. Not the power list. Nor the gay power list.”

Would she want to be? “No. Not interested.” She is not in *Who's Who*, I notice. “Not in *Who's Who*, not on Wikipedia, nothing. It suits me fine.”

Why? Why doesn't she want to shout about what she's done, and as a gay woman? “I just fly under the radar. It's the way I always was. It's very effective. I get on with my life and do interesting things and meet

## The Curtis chronicles



**Miranda Curtis, board member of Liberty Global, Marks & Spencer, RSC, Garsington Opera and the Institute for Government**

**Born** 26 November 1955; brought up in London with two brothers and one twin sister

**Father** Michael Curtis, editor of the *News Chronicle* and later executive aide to the Aga Khan

**Mother** Barbara Gough, sub-editor

**Single** But previously in a civil partnership

**Lives** Central London (where she cannot get Virgin cable) and Oxfordshire (ditto)

**Education** Lycée Français, London; Durham University (read Spanish)

**1977** BBC graduate trainee

**1978** Joins BBC Enterprises, followed by a spell at Robert Maxwell-owned tech company Pergamon Compact Solutions

**1988** Joins United Cable, which later becomes TCI

**1992** International development director for Europe and Asia, TCI International

**1996** Executive vice-president, Liberty Media International Holdings

**2005** President, Liberty Global Japan Division

**2010** Completes sale of Liberty Global's Japanese assets

**2010** Takes early retirement, joins Liberty Global board

**2011** Chair of Waterstones after its sale to Alexander Mamut

**2012** Joins board of Marks & Spencer

**Watching** *Unforgotten* on catch-up

**Reading** *Barkskins* by Annie Proulx ('not yet convinced')

**Expertise** 'Cultural management – which is unusual'

**Hobby** Scuba diving

interesting people. I don't feel the need for it." >

> This, it turns out, is only the second full-blown press interview she has ever given in Britain. But we should not mistake reticence for bashfulness. Curtis knows her worth. Early on, she tells me she is "the grandmother of the British cable industry", having written some of the original cable franchise applications that created what is now Virgin Media. Of her work in Japan, she calls it "the most successful investment Liberty Global has ever made".

She joined the Malone empire in 1992 and, although she left the staff six years ago, she remains on Liberty Global's board. Malone has been loyal to her, and she is a loyalist back.

I ask her about the recent acquisition by the sister company, Liberty Media, of Formula One. She says that "John" has always invested in content, as well as distribution, and "it's an increasingly porous industry".

He seems, I suggest, to be looking forward to President Trump loosening the rules for the US cable industry and, by doing so, opening the way for some big mergers.

"I think one of John's great strengths is that he's never got involved in politics, at all, directly," she responds. "Is he, by nature, on the Republican libertarian end of the spectrum? Absolutely. Is he an economic liberal? Absolutely."

And then there is Liberty Global's CEO, Mike Fries, quoted at Davos, worrying that Brexit may lead to less investment in the UK (although not from Liberty).

Liberty Global, she points out, was a major supporter of the Remain campaign, after "a very interesting debate around the board table, where many individuals would probably instinctively have been Brexit supporters".

So the company favours the "consistent European media and telecoms regulation policy" it helped shape. Its \$4bn investment in British cable is safe:

"In the years that we didn't own the company, there was no investment in network con-

struction. So what we're doing now in the UK is bringing Virgin Media back up to the standards of some of our other networks in Europe."

But some Virgin employees feel that, under its new owners, it has lost its old Bransonian spirit, I venture. "It's got a Liberty spirit, instead," she says firmly.

She was raised in a home full of the spirit of inquiry. Her father was editor of the liberal-minded *News Chronicle*, her mother, a sub-editor on *The Sunday Graphic*. Miranda was three when they split up, but she continued to see her father, who, by then, was working for the Aga Khan and was pleased to introduce her to travel in both Europe and Africa.

Her mother reinforced the internationalism by sending her and twin sister Julie (now a Russian literature don at Oxford) to the Lycée Français in London. The result was that, when they had something to conceal from their mother, they'd say it in French.

After studying Spanish at Durham University, Curtis took a graduate traineeship at the BBC. In those days, linguists tended to head there or the Foreign Office.

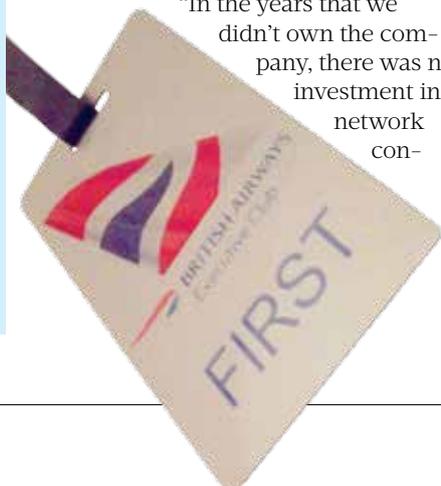
She found a role subtitling and dubbing foreign programmes, but it only lasted a year. Rather than accept a secretarial job, she applied for a position in BBC Enterprises selling BBC programmes abroad.

Aged 25, with no training, she found herself travelling to the US to implement a new North American distribution contract and sell shows such as *Life on Earth*. She became commercial manager for the BBC Micro computer initiative and the BBC Domesday Project.

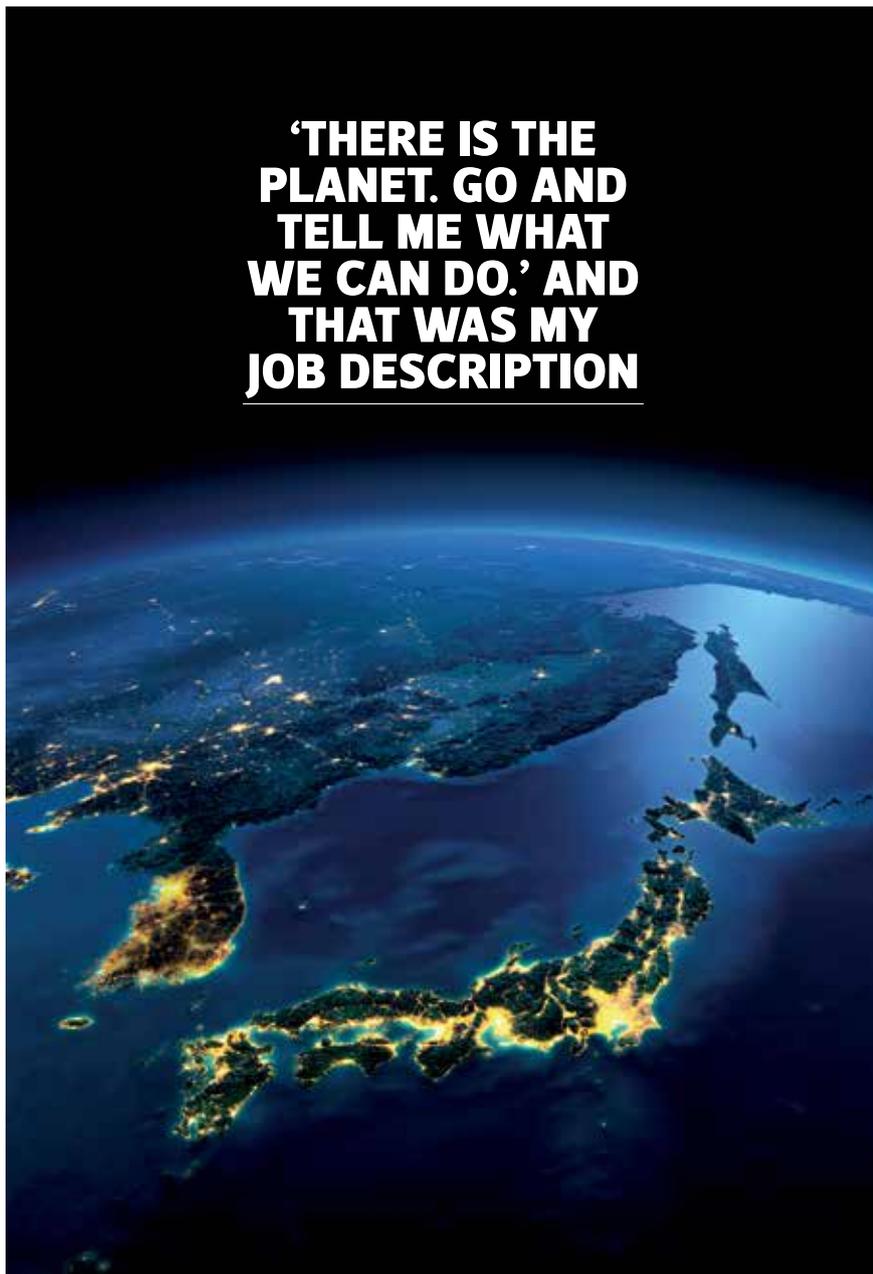
Deciding that she needed a business education, she enrolled at London Business School. To pay off the fees, she joined Robert Maxwell's CD-Rom publishing house and then United Cable, where her great adventure in cable began.

Out in Denver, John Malone was as interested as she was in a country starting a cable industry from scratch, and not just for TV but for telephony. He was interested in Curtis, too, and flew her over in May 1992 to appoint her as the first development director of what was then TCI International.

"He said, 'There is the planet. Go and tell me what we can do.' And that was my job description. We divided the planet into three. I had Asia, Pacific and Continental Europe. That was my patch. And for the next 12 years – a



## **'THERE IS THE PLANET. GO AND TELL ME WHAT WE CAN DO.' AND THAT WAS MY JOB DESCRIPTION**



123RF Photography

bit more than that - I didn't have an employment contract, I didn't have a job description, I never had an appraisal. I worked my way up the ranks and I could bring back anything I wanted in distribution, content and technology, joint ventures, directions, partnerships."

She was flying from her base in Denver to Europe and Singapore. She bought content, but wholesale through companies such as Discovery, never imposing her will on programmes.

Between 1991 and 2002, Malone owned UK cable franchises and then he moved out. There was a setback in Germany. So it was in Japan that glory awaited her, once its government relaxed ownership rules.

To begin with, the male Japanese board she headed in all but title at the cable business J:Com would go behind her back to Malone to ask if she could really have meant what she said. Yes, she did, he always told them.

"In the later years, I simply became a senior, genderless, hierarchical construct. It was a very comfortable place to be."

For a year, she nursed KDDI, the second-largest wireless operator in Japan, as a potential buyer for Global's 37.8% stake in J:Com, unsure if it would finally bid. In December 2009, KDDI asked for a meeting with Mike Fries. With unheard-of directness, they said they wanted to buy.

On 24 January, the sale was announced, the fastest deal in Japanese

corporate history. Liberty got a premium of 60% on the share price. With a few concurrent exits, Liberty was handed \$14bn, on a total investment over the years of less than \$1bn.

Wasn't the trouble with this that she had negotiated herself, aged 54, out of a job that paid her over £1m a year?

"Well, I did, exactly. So, at that point, I thought, 'Crikey', but I also definitely needed to get off a plane. At that stage, I was in BA's all-time top flyers. I'm still BA all-time top female passenger. I've just had my 16th black card."

Had all that flying, all that work, contributed to the end of her civil partnership, I ask. "I think that's a personal question I'm not prepared to discuss. I think the point is that, actually, I was spending at least two weeks of the month on a farm [her second home near Woodstock]. There was quite a lot of time where, actually, I could live a completely normal existence."

In Denver, Malone asked her to take early retirement - which she could afford to do having made her own money from the J:Com sale - but remain in the "family", as a non-executive board member.

Now began a different sort of life; on the board of Marks & Spencer; chairing, until last July, Waterstones; directorships at the RSC and Garsington Opera. She is also on the board of the Institute for Government, an influential think tank that examines the machinery of government (she was "stunned" to find that each department had a separate way of measuring its performance). In addition, she chairs the African girls' education charity Camfed, which, she says, in five years has educated more than 2 million children.

What I cannot tell, because I don't understand the business mind, is whether she would have been as brilliant in any other business. She says she has always been interested in communication technologies and communicating between different cultures. There is a synergy there.

I ask if Liberty's old slogan, "Connect, discover, be free" - recently replaced by "Investing, innovating and empowering" - spoke to her, especially. "They are," she says, "useful slogans around which to rally executive teams."

Well, I say, in any case, congratulations. She never expected to go into business, and she made an absolute fortune. "I hope," she responds, "that I've created an absolute fortune."

No doubt about that, either.



# Trust us, not them

**T**rolls, bots, Russian hackers, fake news, disinformation and lies – 2016 was the year that news seemed to collapse into Hunter S Thompson’s dystopian vision of television as a “cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs”.

Which leaves those of us who still, quaintly, believe in the civic value of good journalism in a quandary: where can we find the truth in a world of “alternative facts”?

There’s good news and bad news. The bad news has been much discussed in the aftermath of Donald Trump’s election and the Brexit result. Undoubtedly, the media has problems. Faced with successful political campaigns based on lies, many have lambasted the news for false equivalence and balance.

In a climate where politicians increasingly see media as either “with us or against us”, and where expertise is actively undermined, the space for neutral, open debate is shrinking.

## Television news

Objective facts are scarcer than ever in an era defined by Trump and Brexit. **Richard Sambrook** asks if UK broadcasters can rise to the challenge

There is a crisis in print journalism. Newspaper advertising is still falling, newsrooms are being hollowed out, and, in a race for impact, many newspapers are becoming more partisan, fixing facts around political policy.

Social media – which many hoped would be a saviour with its open access, extensive reach, targeted advertising and user convenience – turns out to have problems, too.

Over the past two years, news organisations piled into distributed content strategies only to discover that

the technology companies had interposed themselves between media and audience to cream off both revenue and valuable user data.

And there are editorial problems for news online. Social media rewards speed and sensation over accuracy. While it is true that “if you’re first and wrong, you’re not first”, Macedonian teenagers making money from fake news don’t care.

BuzzFeed co-founder Jonah Peretti tells us that sharing is the key indicator of user value for media on the internet. He’s not a man to bet against. But, although sharing may reveal what interests the public, it is no indicator of what is in the public interest.

Traditional media still carries an inherited sense of the civic importance of news and information. A series of algorithmic misjudgements last year illustrated how tech companies are struggling with that public expectation and responsibility.

Social media held such promise for democratic engagement and collaboration, but too much of it has become a noxious echo-chamber undermining the public interest by treating political

journalism as a commodity no different to the latest cat video.

It is not just the media that has problems: society remains deeply divided and rancorous in spite of repeated urgings from all sides of every debate to “get over it”. This seems unlikely to heal in the short term. Polarised politics and “post-truth” campaigning have proved highly successful in the past year – so we should expect more, along with more shouts of “fake news” directed at anything anyone disagrees with.

If nothing else, 2016 showed that, in spite of all that audience research, news organisations did not understand their public in key respects. Public disenchantment with “elites” ran far deeper than they recognised.

In return, the public doesn’t understand the media. Levels of media literacy remain low; and trust, even in broadcasters, continues to fall. The sins of toxic media have cross-contaminated even the best – much of the public lumps “the media” into one odorous bucket.

So where, in all of this, is the good news? Well, there is a real opportunity here – particularly for broadcasters.

As the new wave of populism seeks to rearrange the political landscape and dismiss old assumptions, it provides plenty of meat for journalists to dig into. Weak political leadership and poor accountability should feed a renaissance in investigative journalism. And broadcasters still have the resources to do it.

Those of us who have been judging this year’s RTS Television Journalism Awards cannot fail to be impressed by the quality of Britain’s broadcast journalism. Fresh, original investigation on topics outside the main agenda, such as Michael Crick’s pursuit of Tory election expenses for Channel 4 or the BBC’s long-term commitment to investigating mental-health provision. We don’t celebrate it enough.

Perhaps unfashionably, I believe that this strength is rooted in broadcast regulation. We will shortly face, I am sure, another round of argument to loosen the impartiality rules that apply to broadcasters – it would be a mistake to do so.

From the BBC to ITV, Channel 4 to Sky, we keep each other honest and raise the bar. Far from inhibiting a broad range of views, properly applied impartiality regulation should encourage such views.

## 2016 SHOWED THAT, IN SPITE OF ALL THAT AUDIENCE RESEARCH, NEWS ORGANISATIONS DID NOT UNDERSTAND THEIR PUBLIC IN KEY RESPECTS

A glance across the Atlantic at what has happened to US broadcasting since the end of the Fairness Doctrine in the 1980s, which required broadcasters to provide balance, should be sufficient warning not to follow suit.

Furthermore, at a time when audiences are questioning who they can trust, regulation should be a differentiating mark of quality from the press and online-only services – offering clear, independent accountability.

There are more signs for optimism in the early response of major news organisations to the current moral panic over false news.

The BBC’s announcement of a permanent “Reality Check” team to hunt down and flag fake news, as well as fact-check the politicians, is welcome.

Fact-checking is clearly going to become a more central part of the news offer – building on Channel 4’s success with *FactCheck*, and sites such as *Full Fact*. It is one clear way of increasing the cost of political lying, which currently appears to be too cheap.

## FAR FROM INHIBITING A BROAD RANGE OF VIEWS, PROPERLY APPLIED IMPARTIALITY REGULATION SHOULD ENCOURAGE SUCH VIEWS

In turn, news organisations should open up their own methods to rebuild trust. Media, more than is generally acknowledged, has to work to repair its relationship with much of the public. Regional broadcasting’s proximity to the audience ought to help – along with a greater dose of humility.

Reuters has moved fast to introduce greater transparency into its news operations. Editor-in-chief Steve Adler says that it is time to “double down” on being good, dispassionate journalists and “open the door” a little bit more on how Reuters obtains and handles information.

Other organisations should follow its lead. In broadcasting, many people still judge a devil’s advocate question to be tantamount to betraying the interviewer’s personal view. Or fail to see a distinction between a political editor’s professional judgement and their personal opinion.

Journalists have developed a professional shorthand in how they report – understood by those inside their bubble but, I suspect, not by many outside. On Google trends, two of the most searched-for terms in the past year were “austerity” and “populism”. Yet, day in, day out, report after report assumes these and other once-obscure terms are widely understood.

Broadcasters could do more to support greater media literacy among the public by explaining the complex world we are now in, as well as better explaining how they report it and arrive at their own news judgements.

Greater transparency and accountability are much needed in the current climate of misinformation, political lies and widespread distrust.

But, above all, the strength of broadcasting’s case to “trust us, not them” will lie in sharp, confident, fair reporting. That means journalism that is differentiated and breaks from the pack, that is clearly in touch with public concerns and attitudes, and which is confident in holding the powerful to account and calling out lies or spin.

These are the qualities that will keep news out of Hunter S Thompson’s media sewer. They are the traditional strengths of British TV journalism – and are needed now more than ever.

*Richard Sambrook is professor of journalism, Cardiff University, and a former director of BBC News.*



# The insider's insider

## BBC governance

**Roger Bolton** profiles the BBC's new Chairman, **David Clementi**, who arrives at the corporation in testing times

**D**avid Clementi is the first Chairman of a single, unitary BBC Board, his appointment confirmed by Parliament and the Sovereign. He is now Mr BBC and the Director-General works directly to him.

From now on, there is no debate about who runs the corporation, no discussion about whether the governors or the Trust are more powerful than the Executive. There is only one Board and he runs it. Indeed, he designed it. So he can hardly blame anyone else if it goes wrong. And, of course, things often go wrong.

In many ways, Sir David is well qualified for the job of which he is the architect. He is rich and, according to a friend, "has never had to worry about money".

That will help, as his £100,000 salary,

for what is intended to be a full-time job, might put off potential candidates less financially fortunate than himself. Presumably, he will give up his current roles as chairman of both World First, a currency exchange firm, and King's Cross Central, the company overseeing development of the land around the London station.

He is relatively old: he is 68 this month. He is, therefore, unlikely to be looking for another job following this one. This could make him more independent (although a peerage would be a nice reward for being a successful BBC chairman).

Clementi certainly knows about money. He has been, among other things, Chairman of Virgin Money, Chairman of the Prudential, a Deputy Governor of the Bank of England and Vice-Chairman of Kleinwort Benson. He advised Margaret Thatcher on the



## THE BBC SHOULD, ON OCCASIONS, EMBARRASS AND ANGER GOVERNMENTS. IS SIR DAVID UP FOR THAT?

BBC

privatisation of another great British organisation, BT.

He is, in other words, the epitome of the City grandee.

Clementi knows about regulation as well, having undertaken a wide-ranging independent review of the regulation of legal services in England and Wales in 2003.

City colleagues, such as Lord Myners, have called him “an inspired choice” and “very wise and sensible”, “a man of high integrity”. He certainly feels at home in the establishment.

Clementi’s grandfather was Governor of Hong Kong, and his father was an air vice-marshal. He was educated at Winchester and Oxford and then qualified as a chartered accountant.

He has been Warden of Winchester College and Master of the Mercers’ Company.

The panel that appointed him was

chaired by an ex-head of defence procurement and included a former private secretary to the Queen and a permanent secretary of the DCMS. One might be tempted to say that the Establishment has got its man.

Clearly, if you think the most important thing about the person running one of the greatest broadcasting organisations in the world should not be tainted by any experience of broadcasting, David Clementi is the ideal choice.

However the job of the BBC is not to make a profit, but to produce brilliant public service programmes. Its job is to reflect the complex and varied cultures of the UK.

Its job, more necessary than ever in these divided times, is to speak truth to power. The BBC should, on occasions, embarrass and anger governments. Is Sir David up for that?

Does the new Chairman know how to create the best conditions for creative talent? Will he encourage those who have an appetite for making trouble?

Is he ready for the full fury of the Brexit debate as we move towards withdrawal, or the Trumpian blasts that blowing across the Atlantic?

Who wants a well-run, efficient organisation that makes dull programmes and safe journalism? Perhaps certain members of the Establishment do, but not the licence-fee payers who are the BBC’s shareholders.

By the way, does the new Chairman have any ideas about how to make the corporation properly accountable to those who pay for it, as well as to those who regulate it?

Clementi’s in-tray is full of overflowing. He has to form an effective relationship with the BBC’s new regulator, Ofcom. He has to select the other new members of the unitary Board.

There are, at present, four seats set aside for members of the executive. The DG, Tony Hall, and his deputy, Anne Bulford, get two of them. Presumably, James Harding, director of news, gets the third.

That seems to leave a choice between director of content Charlotte Moore and director of radio and education James Purnell for the fourth.

And Clementi has to make this decision with a view to developing potential successors to Tony Hall as DG. In that case, Purnell’s political past as a Labour culture secretary will, presumably, count against him.

Another pressing problem is how the

BBC can cut around 25% – according to some estimates – off its spending over the next few years. It seems certain that more services will have to go; salami slicing will not be enough.

Clementi arrives just as BBC Studios prepares to begin operating as a commercial division. In one of its final acts, the Trust recently gave the go-ahead to the revamped BBC Studios, but the trade unions are going to ballot their members about strike action.

Some independent producers think that the only way Studios can cut its cost base is by making more staff redundant, changing employment practices for the worse and issuing far more short-term contracts.

In other words, greater casualisation and a widening of the gap between pay levels at the BBC. This is unlikely to enhance staff morale.

If Studios is to make a profit, surely it will have to concentrate on popular formats, returning series and shows that have foreign sales potential. The purely public service programmes that only the BBC can provide will have to be subsidised in some way.

So much now depends on brilliant commissioners with a passion for their subject matter and the confidence to fight their corner. Does the new Board know what is needed to find, enthuse and empower them?

Clementi, like most politicians in Westminster, knows about *The Great British Bake Off* and the *Today* programme – but how much else? The lifestyles of such public figures leave them little time for watching or listening. But he appears to be an exception, having recently told the Commons that he is an avid TV watcher, and that his “specialist subject is BBC One and BBC Two between 8:00pm and 11:00pm”.

Clementi does have interests beyond his professional world. For example, he is a keen yachtsman and seems passionate about sport.

The new Chairman will be on a steep learning curve and will have to take some crucial decisions very early in his tenure. We must all wish him luck and hope that he goes a little, but not too, native.

At the very least, he should be prepared to lose some friends in the Government and the Establishment. He ought to find that being Chairman of the BBC is a lonely job.

**Roger Bolton is a former BBC and ITV executive, and independent producer.**

Is TV's coverage of female sport finally heading into the mainstream? **Ross Biddiscombe** canvasses opinion

# Promotion year for women's sports?

**I**n a year when women's sports events will be at the forefront of many broadcasters' schedules, it's a legitimate time to ask if these sports are poised for a breakthrough.

More women are taking part in sport than ever before and there are more hours of women's sport on TV, including significant numbers of live fixtures. But is the coverage better and is change happening fast enough?

Some observers would argue that, judged by audiences, commercial return on investment and scheduling, women's sports on TV still lag woefully behind men's.

A level playing field for coverage with men's events is rare. The obvious exceptions are grand slam tennis tournaments, major track and field events and both winter and summer Olympics.

Everywhere else, the inequality remains a sensitive topic for participants, administrators, fans and viewers, as well as broadcasters.

There, it seems, is no shortage of goodwill for events such as the UEFA women's European football tournament, the women's cricket World Cup and Ashes series and golf's Solheim Cup to succeed on screen, but question marks remain. This month, Sky announced that it would show live domestic cricket for the first time on UK television, this summer, with eight matches from the Kia Super League.

Inevitably, the BBC has the longest history of broadcasting women's sports. These days, however, the rights are spread around – Channel 4, for example, has outbid the Beeb for UK rights to the women's Euros.

BBC head of sport Barbara Slater says the corporation remains as

committed as ever to women's sports. She argues that it is not necessary to operate any kind of quota system because audiences are increasing.

"We have provided live TV coverage of women's football since the mid-1990s and audience interest has grown considerably," says Slater. "More people watched the 2015 Women's World Cup on BBC TV than our live coverage of the men's Open golf championship."

For new women's football broadcaster Channel 4 and Eurosport (the pan-European channel covering the women's Euros), the national game is seen as one of the breakthrough sports for women. Strong performances by either England or Scotland in the tournament would develop that trend.

Although Channel 4 is very selective in broadcasting any sporting event – male or female – its commissioning editor for sport, Stephen Lyle, wants to build on his channel's reputation for innovation: "Our remit is always to go for programming that has an underdog quality, and this falls into that category.

"We'll try and bring something new to the coverage, but the women also have to step up, entertain and show the audience what they can do."

Eurosport CEO Peter Hutton argues that producers and broadcasters must not skimp on production quality, if they are to stop women's competitions

being regarded as secondary to the male equivalents.

"We judge all sports the same," he says. "It's about the potential audience, the brand that we have developed and the commercial reality. We welcome great women's sport because what we really want is the best sporting stories, wherever they come from."

Both the UK's pay-TV sports channels, Sky Sports and BT Sports, are big supporters of women's cricket. Sky Sports has been broadcasting the game for two decades and is showing this year's women's World Cup. BT Sport, meanwhile, has just announced its coverage of the women's Ashes series and the Big Bash league from Australia.

In addition, Sky Sports News launched the *SportsWomen* magazine show in 2012. It was one of the many initiatives that grew out of the success of the London Olympics.

*SportsWomen* producer Anna Edwards believes women's sports need to have their own identities. "We want to get to a point where we don't have the term 'women's sport,'" she insists. "We actually have debates about this and, just to make the point that it's all just sport, we dropped the word 'women' from the caption when referring to Mark Sampson, the England women's manager.

"Those are small points, but changes like that make a difference. If we sat here in five years' time and the situation was the same, then I'd be concerned."

When BT Sport launched in 2013, one of its justifications for claiming to be a game changer in British TV sport was the signing of high-profile presenter Clare Balding.

She was given her own chat show, with a brief to focus on women guests. The channel has also heavily backed

**WE WANT TO  
GET TO A POINT  
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'WOMEN'S SPORT'**

live women's sport: BT Sport has a particularly high profile for tennis and hockey.

"There are nearly 1,000 hours of live WTA tennis on our channel and, in terms of hours, that's more than the English Premier League or Champions League or MotoGP," says Simon Green, head of BT Sport.

He adds: "We're doing much of it with our own commentary teams and our own personalities on screen. It's the same with the Women's Super League in this country. We treat those OBs the same as we do men's football."

But Green also understands that there is plenty of catching up to do. He knows that high production values do not necessarily guarantee big audiences or enough commercial interest.

"Of course, we want to fold women's sports into whatever else we do and have it be seen as part of the normal agenda of what we put to air, but it's a sensitive subject," he concedes. "Where we can, we give marginal sports – and that means many women's events – due exposure, while always maintaining a nod towards the main subscription drivers – which are men's sports."

One sport that is very much about women is netball, and this is receiving special treatment from Sky Sports. A four-year deal to broadcast the Netball Superleague was signed last November. For once, there is no men's game to compare it with. Head of multisport Georgina Faulkner says that a strong relationship with England Netball is what makes this kind of deal attractive to the channel.

"We've worked hard with the governing body to make the coverage more creative and we've even sold game tickets," she says. "There are now 9,000 or 10,000 people coming to some of the games. They're certainly not all women and nor are the viewers. A full

stadium means more exciting TV." One strategy that both the federations and the broadcasters want to avoid is "ghettoisation" – in other words, gathering women's sports in a separate part of the schedule.

Every broadcaster thinks this is inappropriate, especially given the efforts of female athletes to appeal to male viewers as well as female.

Instead, many sports are moving towards Olympic-style formats that allow men and women to perform at the same time and location, as with a grand slam tennis event.

The Boat Race on the BBC adopted this approach in 2015, with male and female crews racing on live TV on the same day over the same course.

It took three years of logistical discussions and the support of the event sponsors for

this to happen. "The viewing figures have been excellent," says the BBC's Slater, "and the programme is a far better proposition for having two high-quality races rather than just one."

The British Darts Organisation world championships, covered by Channel 4 last month, adopted the same plan. Meanwhile, the Rugby

Football Union's policy of staging England women's test matches ahead of the men's Six Nations games will benefit from live Sky Sports coverage this season.

"It is naive to think that only women watch women's

sports," says Sky's Edwards.

"More awareness will breed more viewers, both men and women."

None of the channels, it seems, are holding back on raising awareness. Sky Sports has held both a netball month and a women's sport week (estimated to have reached almost 3 million viewers).

BT Sport has developed annual Action Woman Awards. And the BBC put six women on to the Sports Personality of the Year shortlist last December. They were almost 40% of the finalists, a far higher proportion than if the list had been based on hours of coverage or size of audience.

Advocates of women's sport believe that, over time, the equality issue will fade and women's sport will not be discussed as a separate issue.

BT's Green says the traditional macho culture of sports media is breaking down. He wants women's sports organisations to work more coherently to help the broadcasters: "Women's sports need to stop acting unilaterally and co-ordinate more across a calendar that has a narrative that the press can follow in a constructive way.

"That would make it easier for women's sports to get attention and allow the involvement of broadcasters to be constructive and realistic."



West Indies Women captain Stafanie Taylor at practice in Bangladesh during the 2016 Women's Twenty20 championships

Christopher Lee—ID/Getty

# The star man's biggest test



**I**f Mark Linsey is intimidated by the thought of launching one of the most far-reaching and challenging reforms in the BBC's 90-year history he is not letting on.

He must be used to dealing with fragile egos and temperamental types from the showbiz end of TV – for seven years, he ran BBC Entertainment. But, compared with getting BBC Studios up and running as a successful commercial entity, keeping high-profile, high-earning stars happy must be a breeze.

Not that you'd know it from Linsey's body language or demeanour as he looks up from his open-plan desk at White City's Broadcast Centre on a wintry Monday morning. "Would you like a hot drink?" he asks, ever the PR man.

Cheerful and casually attired, he might have recently returned from a Sunday post-lunchtime family stroll. He seems that relaxed.

As we are escorted into an adjacent meeting room the quietly-spoken and unobtrusive Linsey makes small talk about being back at work after

## Profile

### Steve Clarke talks to Mark Linsey as he prepares to launch BBC Studios as a commercial organisation

Christmas and having his teenaged children all at home over the festive holiday; he has three boys – two 19-year-old twins and a 15-year-old. His wife is now a yoga teacher, after giving up her job in TV to have a more flexible life to accommodate bringing up a family.

Linsey is the consummate professional, a TV veteran who's worked not only at the BBC, but also at ITV (for Central and LWT) and the independent sector (at entertainment specialists Tiger Aspect and Hat Trick).

Does he consider himself to be a

creative or a business leader? "Interesting question," he muses. "I would say I am a creative leader who has a good sense of business... and a good sense of what works commercially."

He will, undoubtedly, need to demonstrate this commercial acumen if BBC Studios is to become the force envisioned by Director-General Tony Hall. Some cynics regard the coming of a market-facing BBC Studios as the beginning of the end for in-house production at the BBC.

But let's hope the initiative is, instead, the start of a brave new venture that will help insulate the corporation against the biting winds of competition and even give impoverished Auntie a much-needed new revenue source.

Linsey was appointed director of BBC Studios following his predecessor Peter Salmon's abrupt and unexpected departure early last year. He gives every impression of relishing the opportunity to make broadcasting history.

"To lead a production entity is one of the most exciting jobs in television," he says. "When you look at the range of programmes we've got here... we

ended last year on a high, with things such as *Strictly* and *Planet Earth II*...

"It's the sheer range of programmes that means I've got one of the most exciting and rewarding jobs in TV."

Few could deny that, creatively, BBC Studios continues to score. Last year, it won an unprecedented 29 prizes, including nine RTS awards and six Baftas.

But, with the end of any guarantees that BBC shows will be made in-house, Linsey is charged with overseeing nothing less than a cultural revolution.

He looks certain to end up firing quite a few of his colleagues. Already, around 300 jobs are going and more losses are likely in the coming months.

There is nothing, in theory, to stop all of the BBC's flagship productions – apart from those in sport, news and current affairs and children's – moving to the independent sector by the end of the current, eight-year Charter period.

In return, BBC Studios is free to pitch and bid for commissions from third-party broadcasters and content platforms, as well as, of course, for the BBC's own outlets.

In this sink or swim world, what keeps the apparently unflappable Mark Linsey awake at night? "The most worrying aspect is competitive tendering. I think that having a 100% of your titles up for competition is extremely challenging for us.

"We want to win all of those titles but, in order to do that, we have to put in a lot of creative energy... and we are competing with indies who are also expending a lot of creative energy.

"Is it the best thing that, as an industry, we will be putting a lot of creative energy into competing over something like *Antiques Roadshow*, *Countryfile* or *EastEnders*?"

It must be stressed that none of these shows is out for tender yet: ones that include *Songs of Praise* and *Holby City*, plus programme ideas for *Horizon*. Who knows, perhaps Linsey's empire will retain the lion's share of BBC commissions – earlier this month it secured *A Question of Sport*.

It's one thing, he argues, for shows that are past their peak – he's not naming names – to be put on to the market, but when a programme is in rude health, it makes no sense at all. "If you take *Strictly Come Dancing*, it's getting its highest

audience figures ever. It's highest AIs ever. Is it a good use of all of our creativity to be competing over *Strictly Come Dancing* when the audience loves it?" he asks of what, for now, is a hypothetical situation. "That is a challenge. It does take a lot of time because, obviously, we want to win these tenders. That does concern me."

Even sceptics acknowledge that, while Linsey's experience gives him

what it takes to run a successful producer (the kind of fleetness of foot necessary to compete head-to-head with a thriving and well-resourced indie), they think that the BBC's "instinctively top-down" culture could hamper the project.

"There is a nervousness about the BBC 'brand' that is attached to Studios and I think that will hobble them when it comes to competing with genuinely commercial entities," suggests an independent producer who is a regular BBC supplier.

He adds: "Anyone who has run a production company knows that the successful ones have been those with creative entrepreneurs at their head. And yet the BBC seems to have deliberately gone the other way

and put business managers in the key positions.

"I know some of these people and they are clever but they are not creative leaders.

That seems to me to put these divisions at a massive disadvantage compared with the creatively led competition."

Linsey denies this and is proud of the team he has assembled: "I think we've got the right commercial and management leaders."

Under him sit three genre directors: Lisa Opie (factual, including natural history), Roger Leatham (entertainment, music and events) and Nick Betts (scripted). "The three of them have commercial and business skills," he insists.

Most appointments are now filled, says Linsey, adding: "You can't be complacent. You are always in the market for an outstanding creative or an outstanding business winner.

"Our business plan is to support all genres. Yes, we want to >



*Strictly Come Dancing*

All pictures: BBC

› be commercially successful in our drama, our fact ent and our entertainment formats, but we also want to be reputationally successful in our specialisms, particularly in factual but also in drama.”

He continues: “We are moving from a public service world into a more commercial world. That means we need to be more nimble, more flexible and make sure that we give our teams the tools they need to be efficient and commercial.

“That’s how I’ve approached it. I’ve brought in a team who have the commercial nous to lead and to give us the expertise that we need to be commercially efficient and have a foundation that is commercially sound.”

Linsey stresses that he is “trying to make the business as flat as possible so that... there is real accountability within the business. There’s real autonomy, so people are taking responsibility for what they do. I’m after fewer management layers.

“Inevitably, if we’re to operate in a world where there is no 50% guarantee, where we have the uncertainty of competitive tendering – which means revenue is uncertain – we have to be as efficient as possible. That has led to role closures.”

Ultimately, staffing levels will depend on how many commissions BBC Studios secures. Currently, there are around 1,900 people employed full-time by Studios. If enough of Studio’s pitches succeed, he could eventually be in the happy position of hiring, rather than firing.

“We don’t want there to be more jobs going, but we do have the uncertainty of competitive tendering. All our planning is based on the revenue we have at the moment,” Linsey says. “And, until we get through competitive tendering there is going to be uncertainty around our revenue and, therefore, around our staffing level.”

While most indies specialise in certain genres, BBC Studios is making a virtue of the fact that it can create and produce shows across most genres. Might this be a weakness? “There’s always a market for good ideas... particularly hits,” he

## WE ARE MOVING FROM A PUBLIC SERVICE WORLD INTO A MORE COMMERCIAL WORLD

responds. “The conversations I’ve had with domestic broadcasters at a top level is that the door is open for us to start pitching. They appreciate the quality of our execution and our delivery...”

“We already do a lot for other broadcasters, such as PBS and Discovery. Domestic broadcasters are

extremely curious as to what we’ll bring to them.

“We’ve now got to prove our creativity and pitch good ideas to them.”

On rights retention, the BBC will retain the IP to all existing BBC Studios shows. Even if BBC Studios loses an in-house show to the independent sector, the BBC will keep the rights.

Some broadcasters among the potential customers are more determined to retain rights than are others – notably Discovery. “It could be that we are hired to produce a show. Obviously, depending on the show, we’d be interested in that.

“We will be flexible in our deal-making, as indies are. The terms of trade are going to vary according to the broadcaster.”

Linsey says that he is working to a “long-term business plan” and that he expects some genres to do better than others. Which ones?

“It depends on the market. It depends on the creativity, the commissioners commissioning the ideas... As a business, you’d be extremely lucky if all genres were on fire at the same time. I used to sit on the board at Tiger Aspect [as head of entertainment] and the holy grail was for all [the genre chiefs] to do extremely well at the same time, but I can honestly say it never happened.” He hopes that Studios’ successful genres will financially support those doing less well.

Looking five years ahead, what does he hope to have achieved? “I’d love us to continue with our award-winning natural history and for our science output to have grown and be as globally appreciated as our natural history.

“Also, that we grown our reputation in history. We won a Bafta last year for *Britain’s Forgotten Slave Owners*. I’d like to build on that.

“I want to have commercial success with our factual entertainment and our entertainment formats. I’d like us to have some commercial success with our drama. I’d like to have a new popular drama that is as big as *Doctor Who*.

“And, at the same time, retaining our much-loved titles such as *Countryfile*, *Holby*, *Casualty*, *Antiques Roadshow*...”

Linsey is nothing if not ambitious.



On the tender list: *Holly City*

BBC

# OUR FRIEND IN NEW YORK

For the first time in the history of the American republic, one of our own is in the Oval Office. His day job may have been running a property empire but, as a successful reality star who still retains an executive producer credit, the 45th President of the United States is unquestionably a TV guy.

That experience gives Donald Trump an “attack is the best form of defence” confidence in his handling of the media. He banned from his campaign those publications that he claimed were reporting on him unfairly.

Since his inauguration, he’s attempted to set up a classic showbiz system of incentives to influence press coverage, rewarding “good behaviour” with preferential access, while sending those journalists he deems to be hostile to Coventry.

An assiduous spreader of false and fantastical claims himself, he has taken to using the term “fake news” to delegitimise any media reports that don’t suit him.

He is bolder and more adept than any previous Western politician in using Twitter and other digital platforms to get his message out directly to the public and over the heads of the media. Even this seems to be built on lessons in viral marketing learned in modern reality TV.

So how should the media respond? First, by not falling into the trap of becoming a political opposition: our responsibility is to report his presidency rigorously, but also objectively and fairly.

Second, by confronting the new President’s unprecedented willingness to bend or break the truth by

Mark Thompson identifies the truth concerning Donald Trump



Kathy Ryan/New York Times

rethinking some of our own traditional editorial boundaries.

The *New York Times* has now twice used the word “lie” to describe public statements by Trump, because that’s what they were.

Fact-checking used to be an activity consigned to paragraph nine, or put in a box at the bottom of the story. Now we routinely add words “falsely” or “with no evidence” to headlines about new remarks by Trump, as in “Trump claims, with no evidence, that ‘millions of people’ voted illegally”.

We need to stand up for our independence corporately, as well. Soon after the election, Trump summoned the leadership of American TV journalism to Trump Tower for an off-the-record dressing-down – one

unnamed executive described it as a “fucking firing squad”.

The President-elect was due to pay a visit to the *New York Times* the very next day, but a critical difference was that our Chairman and Publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, had insisted that the main meeting at the *Times* should be an on-the-record meeting with our editors and journalists.

Mr Trump began the day by tweeting that he wouldn’t be coming after all – falsely claiming that we had changed the terms of the visit. In the end, he did turn up and spent an hour and a quarter answering our questions.

A day that began with him describing us as the “failing @nytimes” ended with him telling the rest of the world’s media, gathered in our lobby downstairs, that the *Times* was a “jewel” for America and the world. Go figure.

He has subsequently reversed or contradicted many of the answers he gave us that day – about torture, immigration and much else.

I asked him, given his pledge during the campaign to tighten America’s libel laws, whether he supported the First Amendment, which guarantees the freedom of the press. He replied: “I don’t think you’ll have anything to worry about.”

Is that a commitment he will keep? One of the reasons that audiences around the world took to reality formats such as *The Apprentice* was their unpredictability – you never knew just what was going to happen next. Now, one of the most idiosyncratic and protean stars of reality TV is installed in the White House. It’s going to be a white-knuckle ride.

**Mark Thompson is President and CEO of the New York Times.**

It looks easy to compose an elegy for television advertising in the UK. Its market share has been static for years. Viewers are drifting to video-on-demand and gorging on box sets partly to avoid watching advertising.

Brexit could cause an economic slowdown directly hitting television advertising budgets. You can even hear voices predicting the eventual death of linear television.

More pressing, viewers are increasingly watching video on mobile phones and other portable devices, or away from the main TV set.

This is all viewing that, for the time being, traditional audience measuring systems find difficult to record.

Stewart Easterbrook, former digital director at Starcom MediaVest, the large media communications group, argues that traditional commercial television has simply become a less effective medium. Viewers may not be leaving in droves, he acknowledges, but the fact that they are consuming it on different platforms at different times has implications.

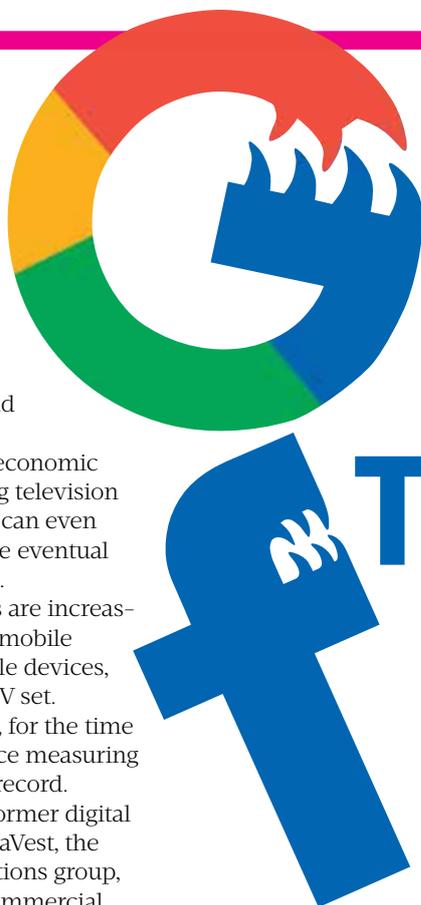
“The great thing about TV in the past was that it reached an awful lot of people at your chosen time in one hit,” says Easterbrook, who now chairs digital start-up companies. “If you are a retailer who has a promotion starting tomorrow or your company is launching a new product tomorrow, if 30% of your audience is shifted across subsequent weeks it’s not as powerful a medium as it was. It’s a matter of degree, but it is a problem.”

Moreover, the disruptive viewing patterns of the young, in terms of when they watch, are starting to become more mainstream.

However, it is much easier to sing a happy tune about the future of television advertising, even with a few flat notes, than it is to write an elegy.

“What we see is opportunity. TV is robust from a revenue point of view. We use econometrics to plan into channels that really work, and TV works. It’s good and it’s strong,” insists Sue Unerman, chief strategy officer of MediaCom, the largest media-buying agency.

She highlights new research conducted with the client base of another



# Are they eating TV's lunch?

## Advertising

Raymond Snoddy asks the experts whether TV can hold on to its advertising revenue

WPP company, Group M, which suggests that only one in 20 Facebook ads are watched for 10 seconds or more and just one in three for three seconds or more.

Unerman believes one big issue is that younger people are not necessarily watching less television – they are just watching TV on other devices and platforms. The MediaCom executive describes as “unfathomable” what she sees as the slowness in integrating conventional and online data into products such as Barb’s Project Dove-tail – a weakness that is costing media owners dear.

Unerman’s ultimate boss, Sir Martin Sorrell, chief executive of WPP, believes that TV remains “a strong and effective medium”. His web of marketing and advertising companies is responsible for placing advertising across the globe worth around \$76bn a year. When all screens are included, he reckons that viewing hours are increasing.

**THERE IS NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY. PARANOIA RULES**

He suggests – like Unerman – that some advertisers have started to question TV as a platform only because current viewing data is not reliable enough. “Our systems of audience measurement have not advanced with the changes in audience behaviour,” he says.

Sorrell recalls how he watched BBC coverage of Mo Farah winning Olympic gold medals on his mobile phone in a restaurant in New York. Could any existing measurement system have picked that up?

Despite the challenges, over the next three or four years he expects commercial television to hold up well: “Newspapers have been under pressure but talk of the death of newspapers is overstated. Talk of linear TV’s death is also overstated, but there is pressure in the system.

“Trying to get advertising and subscription revenues from online content is not easy,” he concedes. “Commercial television will remain one of the, if not the most, significant factors [in marketing], but there are alternatives and linear channels should be aware of those alternatives and try to deal with them. There is no room for complacency. Paranoia rules.”

What do the latest numbers look like? Guy Bisson, research director of Ampere Analysis, believes that total UK

TV advert for  
online commerce  
company Quidco

## IT'S THE PROGRAMMES THAT MAKE TV ADVERTISING TOLERABLE TO VIEWERS

Quidco/ITV

television advertising revenue will decline slightly this year to £3.9bn, compared with around £4.3bn for 2016.

He predicts it will reach £4.5bn by 2021, with the slow recovery caused partly by Brexit.

Bisson is adamant that commercial television advertising is not facing terminal decline despite a challenging market that is shifting generally towards online.

ITV gets high marks from the analyst for what it is doing in the catch-up and over-the-top (OTT) space via the ITV Hub and the forthcoming BritBox streaming service, but it is still too UK-focused, compared with European peers, to protect future revenues.

Alex Wisch, media specialist at Bloomberg's research arm, Bloomberg Intelligence, estimates that television advertising will "moderate" this year because of a decelerating economy, but forecasts that it will not fall of a cliff.

"I think that Facebook and Google are eating more into print advertising than TV – television is always in another league and has another purpose," Wisch explains.

ITV declined to comment on advertising trends before its upcoming financial results, but suggested that the cost of television advertising is now similar to 2004 levels – and therefore

good value. In the first half of 2016, ITV delivered 98% of all commercial audiences over 5 million, the company said.

Mark Howe, a senior Google advertising executive who worked in commercial television for more than 20 years, believes that, in the UK, commercial television is "in rude health" – as opposed to the US, where it is declining.

"Also, when I look at the UK, compared with markets in Italy and Spain, British broadcasters are in a very strong position to continue to drive the emotional engagement that advertisers are looking for," says Howe. "Video remains one of the most evocative methods of reaching consumers with programmes and advertising."

For Tess Alps, who chairs Thinkbox, the commercial TV marketing body, video in all its forms is growing. What is losing out, generally, is what she described as "static" forms of advertising – from newspapers and magazines to posters.

"The mistake is to think that one form of video is replacing another – that YouTube advertising must hit TV advertising. It's not like that at all. They work better together. You need both," says Alps.

The big difference between TV and fleeting online clips is that you are advertising around shows, she argues:

"It's the programmes that make TV advertising tolerable to viewers."

Jenny Biggam, co-founder of the independent media agency The7stars, is at the sharp end of the issue. She decides where to spend her clients' marketing money (including that of Iceland Food, Warner Music, Nintendo and Suzuki cars).

"The likes of Facebook come in and they are compelling and they work very hard to prise advertising money away from television, but what we find is that television continues to work really, really well for our clients," says Biggam.

The marketing executive adds that, apart from mainstream advertising, the ITV, Sky and Channel 4 commercial teams also do very well at creating additional revenue opportunities through leveraging content, licensing deals and product placement.

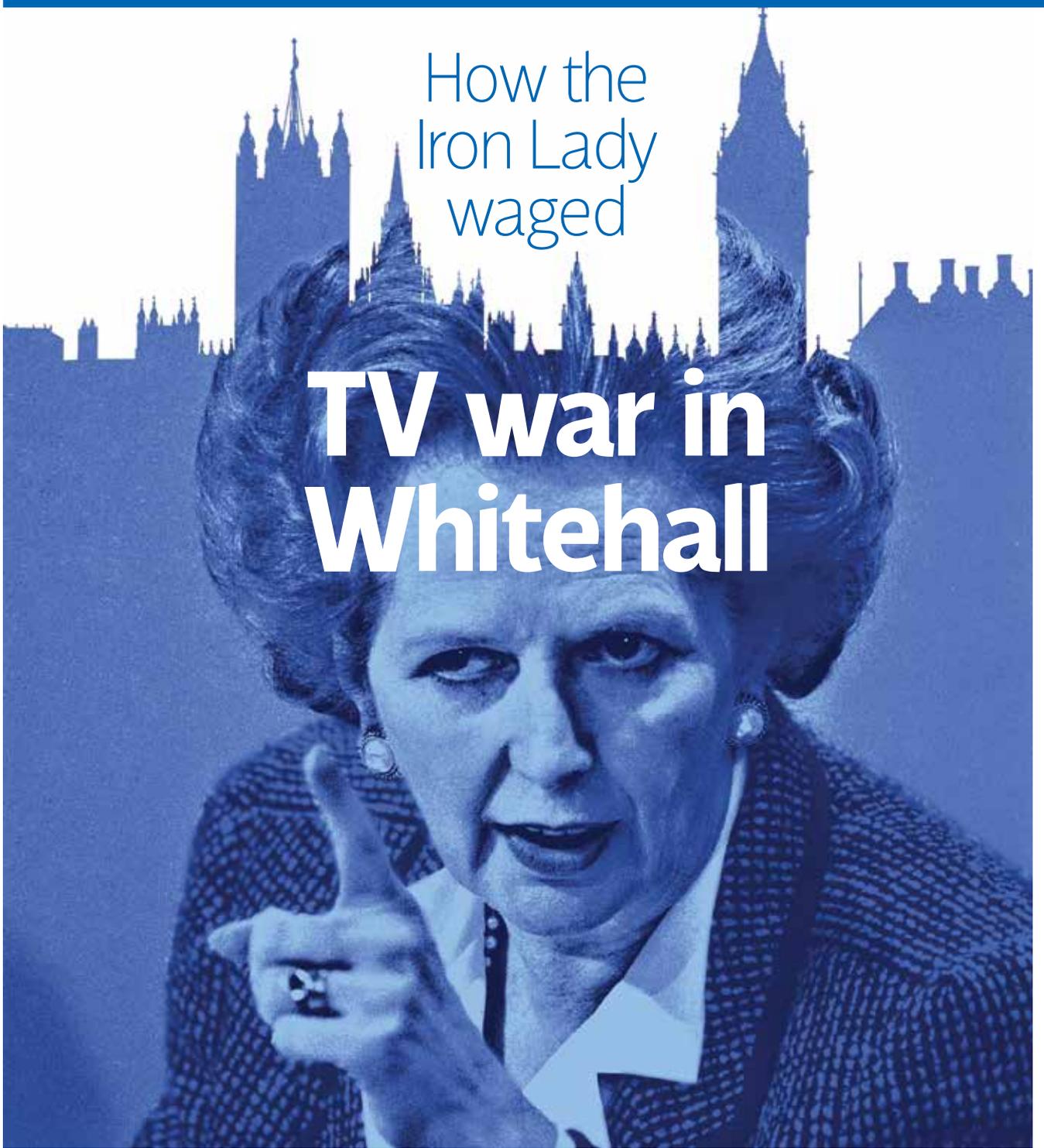
"For the past two or three years, we have spent almost 50% of our total budget on TV. Every year, I think it will decline and every year it ends up at 50%. TV is very effective," Biggam argues.

But will it still be 50% of The7stars budget in five years?

"Probably, yes, if you include the entirety of television such as video on demand," concludes Biggam on a happy note for the future of commercial television.

How the  
Iron Lady  
waged

# TV war in Whitehall



**I**n a classic sketch in the ITV satire *Spitting Image*, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was seen dining in a restaurant with her male Cabinet colleagues. Waitress: “Would you like to order, sir?” Thatcher: “Yes. I will have the steak.” Waitress: “How would you like it?” Thatcher: “Oh, raw, please.” Waitress: “And what about the vegetables?” Thatcher, gesturing at the Cabinet: “Oh, they’ll have the same as me.”

The Thatcher Cabinet papers for 1989-90, just released into the National

## Broadcasting policy

**Stewart Purvis** sifts newly released Cabinet papers that reveal Margaret Thatcher’s mounting frustration with TV bosses and ministers

Archives, show that, when it came to broadcasting policy, the Prime Minister became increasingly frustrated with the vegetables when they showed an appetite for wanting something different to her.

The papers recording the internal debates about what became the 1990 Broadcasting Act include Prime Ministerial hand-written comments such as “this is ridiculous” – and that’s just what she said about her own side.

The 1988 white paper, published in November, had set out the Thatcherite

stall with a package of radical change for British broadcasting. The regulator, the IBA, was to be replaced and ITV licences were to be awarded by competitive tender.

In the months of lobbying and debate before the white paper became a bill and, ultimately, an act, the Prime Minister achieved her ambitions and more: an independent production quota of 25%; the creation of an extra “taste and decency” regulator; the abolition of the duopoly enjoyed by *Radio Times* and *TV Times*; the removal of ITN from ITV control; and the sell-off of BBC transmission.

But despite full-blooded support from Nigel Lawson, her Chancellor, before he resigned in October 1989, she was unable to force the BBC down the road to subscription and Channel 4 towards privatisation – two issues that haven’t exactly gone away today.

The papers reveal that ministers pushed back on a range of issues. Northern Ireland secretary Peter Brooke and Scottish minister Ian Lang opposed her reluctance to require regional news on Channel 3 (that, is ITV) to be “high quality”. Scottish secretary Malcolm Rifkind (who was succeeded by Lang) strongly supported the funding of Gaelic broadcasting.

None of them prevailed against the Thatcher view, but Douglas Hurd and then David Waddington, the home secretaries in charge of broadcasting policy, were more successful – to the frustration of No 10.

Asked, “are you content with the Home Secretary’s comments” on the powers of the proposed extra regulator, the Broadcasting Standards Council, Thatcher clearly was not. She wrote: “If the broadcasting authorities are only to have regard to the BSC there was no point in setting up the BSC! ‘Having regard’ means able to ignore for flimsy reasons. The broadcasters don’t like the BSC.”

Her adviser on broadcasting, Professor Brian Griffiths, regularly wrote comments such as “the BBC management has clearly been getting at Home Office ministers. The BBC has plenty of fat and we should help them get rid of it.”

It was “nothing less than astonishing” to Griffiths when Hurd’s team wanted to back down in a dispute with Channel 4 over governance structures. “The powerful Channel 4 lobby (Sir Richard

Attenborough, Michael Grade, etc) has clearly been getting at the Home Secretary.”

Channel 4’s counter-proposals were “absolutely outrageous.... They simply confirm Rupert Murdoch’s definition of public service broadcasting as ‘something run for the benefit of the people who provide it rather than the viewer’”.

Thatcher accepted a compromise but, later on, Channel 4 held firm on

## THE POWERFUL CHANNEL 4 LOBBY HAS CLEARLY BEEN GETTING AT THE HOME SECRETARY

another area of governance. This time Hurd’s successor, Waddington, compromised. She responded with: “This is ridiculous.”

When told of the threat that, if the Government did not back down, “Attenborough and maybe others will resign,” she replied: “Then so be it. Parliament decides, not Channel 4.” In the end, Parliament decided in Channel 4’s favour on that one.

Thatcher’s political secretary, John Whittingdale (two and a half decades later the DCMS Secretary of State), wrote that Waddington’s response on impartiality was “extremely disappointing”. The BBC and Channel 4 were public broadcasters in a privileged position and “they have consistently abused this”. The last three words were double-underlined by the PM.

The main meat and drink of the policy debate were the details of the new licensing regime for ITV. The No 10 gatekeepers were kept busy with the ITV companies’ lobbying attempts.

Did the Prime Minister still wish to meet the Chairman of LWT, Christopher Bland, who is “often mentioned for bigger jobs in broadcasting” [he subsequently became Chairman of the BBC] to discuss his proposals for broadcasting? “No.” (See obituary, page 26.)

But, yes, she would see Sir Alastair Burnet, who wanted ITV to be forced to give up control of ITN. He had sent

the Prime Minister his proposals for ITN to become the holder of a commercial night-time franchise starting at 10:00pm.

The Prime Minister had commented: “Has the Home Secretary seen this paper? It is most impressive.”

Eventually, the 1990 Act kept the franchise auction but stipulated a quality threshold that applicants must pass before their bids would be considered. That was partly the work of IBA Chairman George Russell, who had been introduced to Thatcher by Burnet.

What the 1989 documents reveal are two previously secret papers that may have helped pave the way for this compromise. The crown jewel is a simple, two-page, hand-written “private and confidential” note to the Prime Minister from her “Willie”. William Whitelaw had resigned as Deputy Prime Minister following a stroke at the end of 1987. A Cumbrian by adoption, Lord Whitelaw, as he had become, was a strong supporter of the ITV service for the Borders.

On 9 June 1989, he wrote on House of Lords notepaper: “If the leaks about the Cabinet Committee are correct – they are certainly widespread – I must stress that I would be horrified and deeply antagonistic if franchises were automatically to go to the highest bidder without clear safeguards....”

“I am convinced that any such course inevitably leads to a major loss of quality in TV programmes. I cannot believe it would be right to sacrifice quality in the hope of greater financial gain. It would certainly be very unpopular in many quarters. Sorry to bother you. Yours ever, Willie.”

Another interesting intervention had come earlier that year from another loyal Thatcher ally. He was also unconvinced that free-market competition would necessarily mean better television.

Press secretary Bernard Ingham advised: “Politically, you are most vulnerable in the area of quality. You, of all people, must not go down in history as the person who ruined British television.”

**Stewart Purvis was editor of ITN during the progress of the 1990 Broadcasting Act. He is currently a non-executive director of Channel 4 and writes in a personal capacity.**

**S**ir Christopher Bland, who died on 28 January, aged 78, was one of the most influential broadcasters of the past 40 years. He chaired London Weekend Television, the BBC and British Telecom. In addition, he served as deputy chairman of the IBA.

Bland was a regular speaker at RTS events, an authoritative contributor to the Society's Cambridge Convention, a Fleming lecturer and more than willing to participate in other RTS activities. He was always pithy and wryly humorous, known for speaking his mind and not suffering fools.

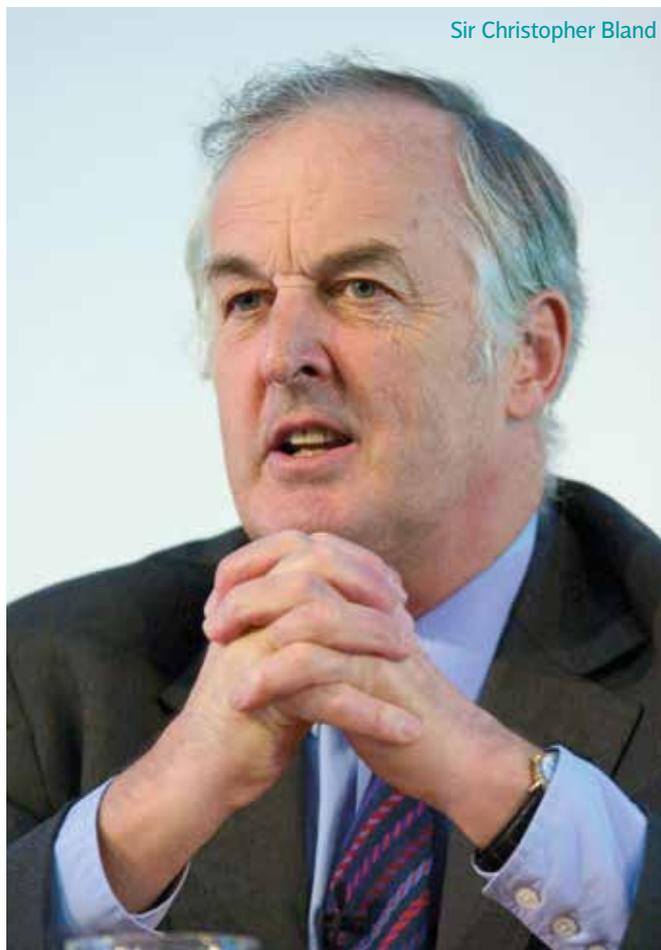
At LWT, he was pivotal in forwarding the career of Greg Dyke and designing the so-called "golden handcuffs" scheme that kept key talent such as Dyke and Melvyn Bragg at LWT during the game of poker that was the 1991 franchise round.

He was hugely loyal to LWT and said the worst day of his life was when the company fell to a hostile takeover by rival Granada.

The aristocratic and patrician Bland looked every inch the imposing, successful, multimillionaire City financier that he was. He was born to Northern Irish gentry and sent to boarding school in Cumbria. Later, he did national service with the Royal Inniskilling Dragoons before reading history at Oxford. He fenced for Ireland at the 1960 Rome Olympics.

Bland wanted to become a journalist but was rejected for three journalistic jobs, including a BBC traineeship. He went into business, but did edit *Crossbow*, the magazine of the moderate Conservative Bow Group, which he chaired from 1969 to 1970.

In 1967, he was elected to the Greater London Council.



Sir Christopher Bland

Paul Hampartourian

## Christopher Bland 1938-2017

It was one of his Conservative contacts, Christopher Chataway, the minister for posts and telecommunications, who invited him to become deputy chairman of the IBA in 1972. He soon discovered, in his early thirties and not owning a TV set, a passion for broadcasting.

John Freeman, then Chairman of LWT, recruited Bland after meeting him at the IBA. The supremely confident London weekend broadcaster was one of ITV's most forward-looking

companies. Bland was appointed Chairman in 1984, and worked with such television luminaries as Brian Tesler and John Birt.

"Christopher was hugely enjoyable to work with – amusing, decisive and quick to learn," wrote Birt in his autobiography, *The Harder Path*. "Like me, he loved his fun, and organised jolly escapades for his friends.... He was passionate, open and honest."

But the new chairman and brilliant businessman was famous for his short fuse. He

hated it when people were late for an appointment. "Even one minute's unpunctuality would draw steam from his ears," said Birt.

"When annoyed, he could suddenly and unexpectedly bite you badly.... Slow or inarticulate people – as well as the successful and powerful – could suffer a terrible, searing mauling."

Bland modernised LWT, cutting costs, reducing staff and focusing on the core business of TV. His "golden handcuffs" scheme, in which key personnel invested in the franchise bid in return for big gains if LWT prevailed, was regarded as a master-stroke by City watchers.

The company's low bid succeeded because the rival consortium, London Independent Broadcasting, failed to pass the quality threshold. LWT had triumphed.

But, three years later, Granada launched a takeover bid and, following much bitterness (Bland considered risking his own money to prevent the Manchester-based predator), secured LWT.

In 1996, Bland was appointed Chairman of the BBC, then being run by his old LWT colleague John Birt. He supported Birt's controversial reforms and ensured that Dyke succeeded Birt in 1999.

He again played the role of moderniser, as Chairman of BT. And from 2004 to 2011 he was an enthusiastic Chairman of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Late in life, he discovered a talent for writing and wrote two novels and had a play staged at the Jermyn Street Theatre.

He is survived by his wife, Jennie, his son, Archie, two stepsons, Jamie and William, and two stepdaughters, Georgia and Tara.

**Steve Clarke**

# BBC chief warns against fake news

**H**elen Boaden highlighted the threat of fake news at a Radio Academy North East event, supported by RTS North East and the Border Centre.

In conversation with former BBC executive Wendy Pilmer, the outgoing director of BBC Radio and former director of BBC News also spoke of the pressure placed upon the BBC (and herself) in the wake of the Jimmy Savile scandal.

In the week in which Donald Trump was inaugurated as US President, Boaden, who is leaving the BBC in March, addressed the impact of fake news. "News is a commodity," she told her audience at the University of Sunderland. "To some, it doesn't matter if it's true – it may be your truth.

But impartiality is something absolutely founded in fact."

Impartial reporting of news is at the heart of her next move as she heads to the US to begin a Harvard fellowship exploring the idea of whether "impartiality in news can survive in an age of anger".

As an ex-director of BBC News – "a role not for the faint-hearted" – Boaden knows the importance of impartiality. She was at the epicentre of *Newsnight's* handling of the Savile scandal and the inquiry that followed.

"My concern was [that], just because someone is dead, it doesn't mean to say you can't do anything about them," said Boaden.

"Although we all think now that we knew about Savile,



Helen Boaden

BBC

the reality is that almost no one did. A brilliant man from the NSPCC said: 'He groomed the nation'.

"It really was the most extraordinary thing to be at the centre of the story... I had to leave my home as it was surrounded by the paparazzi and that happened four times. It was very sobering.

"I was determined to get up every morning and go to

into work.... I may have made mistakes, but I did not suppress the journalism."

In a room full of students at the David Puttnam Media Centre, her advice to emerging talent was: "Be practical and listen a lot.

"Be clear in what you want, but be flexible. Keep your expectations low and outpace them."

**Alex Whelan**

## ONLINE at the RTS

■ The new RTS Futures website launched last month, creating a hub of advice and inspiration for those in the early stages of their TV careers. From handbooks on surviving as a freelancer to lists of training schemes and video tips, there's something for everyone looking to climb the ladder ([www.rtsfutures.org.uk](http://www.rtsfutures.org.uk)).

■ The latest in our *Tea Break Tips* videos sees set decorator Anita Gupta discuss life in the art department. After her first break on *Emmerdale*, Gupta has gone on to work on *The Royle Family* and *DCI Banks*, as well as on the upcoming film *Wonder Woman* ([www.rts.org.uk/AnitaGupta](http://www.rts.org.uk/AnitaGupta)).



Channel 4

■ Explorer Levison Wood talks about his latest expedition for Channel 4, *Walking the Americas*. Accompanied by photographer Alberto Caceras, the former army officer walked from Mexico to Colombia. He tells us

how a career in the army prepared him for life as an explorer, writer and broadcaster ([www.rts.org.uk/LevisonWood](http://www.rts.org.uk/LevisonWood)).

■ We caught up with Walter Iuzzolino, the exuberant Italian behind Channel 4's on-demand foreign drama service, *Walter Presents*, to hear about how the platform has taken British audiences by storm. Since its launch in January last year, the service has racked up more than 17 million hours of streaming as audiences have binged on shows such as *Deutschland 83* and *Locked Up*. Iuzzolino tells us what to look out for in 2017 ([www.rts.org.uk/WalterPresents](http://www.rts.org.uk/WalterPresents)).

**Pippa Shawley**

■ **RTS Midlands** welcomed BBC R&D's Richard Salmon and Manish Pindoria to the IET in Birmingham in January. A bumper crowd heard Salmon discuss Ultra-HDTV and the greater range of colours it brings to TV. Pindoria explained how high-dynamic-range imaging makes programmes look more natural.

■ **RTS Scotland** launched its 2017 Awards before Christmas, with a new category for Young Journalist of the Year in memory of ex-BBC Scotland editor of news and current affairs George MacFarlane Sinclair. The ceremony will take place at Oran Mór, Glasgow, on 17 May.

# Paul Styles

## 1948–2017

**P**aul Styles, who died of pneumonia on 5 January, aged 68, was regarded as the godfather of Britain's independent production sector.

He was the lynchpin of the campaign that persuaded legislators to ensure that a minimum of 25% of all TV airtime in the UK was devoted to programmes made by independents. This was described by the *Financial Times* as "the most successful lobby of the 1980s". Styles's efforts were rewarded with an OBE.

"There's no doubt that those of us involved with [producers' association] Pact in the 1990s owe Paul an enormous debt. He had a ferocious intellect and remarkable political instincts," said Alex Graham, the founder of Wall to Wall Productions.

John Woodward, Chairman of Arts Alliance Media, said: "Paul's legacy is powerful. He helped transition the independent TV production sector from a group of small companies working for Channel 4 into the dominant force in the UK television industry that we can see today."

Styles's professional life in television and media went beyond his duties as director of the Independent Programme Producers Association from 1987 to 1991.

He left the IPPA to join KPMG, where he helped create the company's media consulting practice. There, he built a team of consultants specialising in different aspects of the sector.

He established a domestic and international client base, advising on franchise bids, regulation and strategy, as well as start-ups. On secondment from KPMG, he helped set up one of Britain's first cable channels, UK Living, which began broadcasting on 1 September 1993, as part of BSkyB.

To those of us who knew Styles as an immaculately dressed media consultant – Paul Smith and Armani suits were favoured – it was hard to imagine that he had once worn a kaftan and lived in a commune in Norfolk. But then, he always was someone ahead of the curve who, according to his friend, producer Sophie Balhetchet, "made a point of challenging vested interests".

In 1971, he graduated in economics from Oxford Polytechnic, where he had been president of the union and helped to run the anti-war demonstrations in Grosvenor Square against US involvement in Vietnam.

### HE MADE A POINT OF CHALLENGING VESTED INTERESTS

After his sojourn in the Norfolk commune, he moved to Manchester, where he joined a whole-foods workers' co-operative, On the Eighth Day, which still exists. He also helped found and run Magic (Manchester Alternative General Information Centre), giving free advice and information



Paul Styles

to people in all kinds of difficulties.

Styles lived with like-minded people, who used their home as a refuge for battered wives and other homeless people.

Between 1978 and 1983 he worked for the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. His aim was to train

charities to think in a more businesslike way.

In 1985, he was invited by a team of film-industry professional associations to create the Joint Board for Film Industry Training. At the time, access to technical jobs was effectively controlled by nepotism, but Styles persuaded vested interests, including the ACCT union, that a fairer, more meritocratic system should be adopted.

When he joined the IPPA and started the campaign to open up the TV industry

further to independent producers, the broadcasters were, at first, resistant. But Styles was a persuasive lobbyist. He was adept at handling the media and, crucially, the zeitgeist was on his side.

"Paul came to be seen as something of a sage, a wise *consigliere* to media leaders," said Balhetchet. "For Paul, it wasn't power that energised him, but change and friendship – change for an individual or a system stacked against the interests of the many."

He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease when he was 50 but, typically, endured the illness with stoicism.

Styles was a Fellow of the RTS, an executive committee member of the British Screen Advisory Council and of the Arts Council panel.

He is survived by his wife, Paula Hornby, a former director of HR at BBC Worldwide.

**Steve Clarke**

London Centre's first event of the year attracted a capacity crowd to ITV Studios – and not one of them was computer generated.

A panel of experts discussed the use of visual effects in TV – both real and CGI – and argued that, used responsibly, they aid creativity.

Visual effects have moved on apace over the past two decades. Graeme Harper first directed *Doctor Who* in 1984, although, as a floor assistant at the BBC in the 1960s, he worked on the series when Patrick Troughton was the Time Lord.

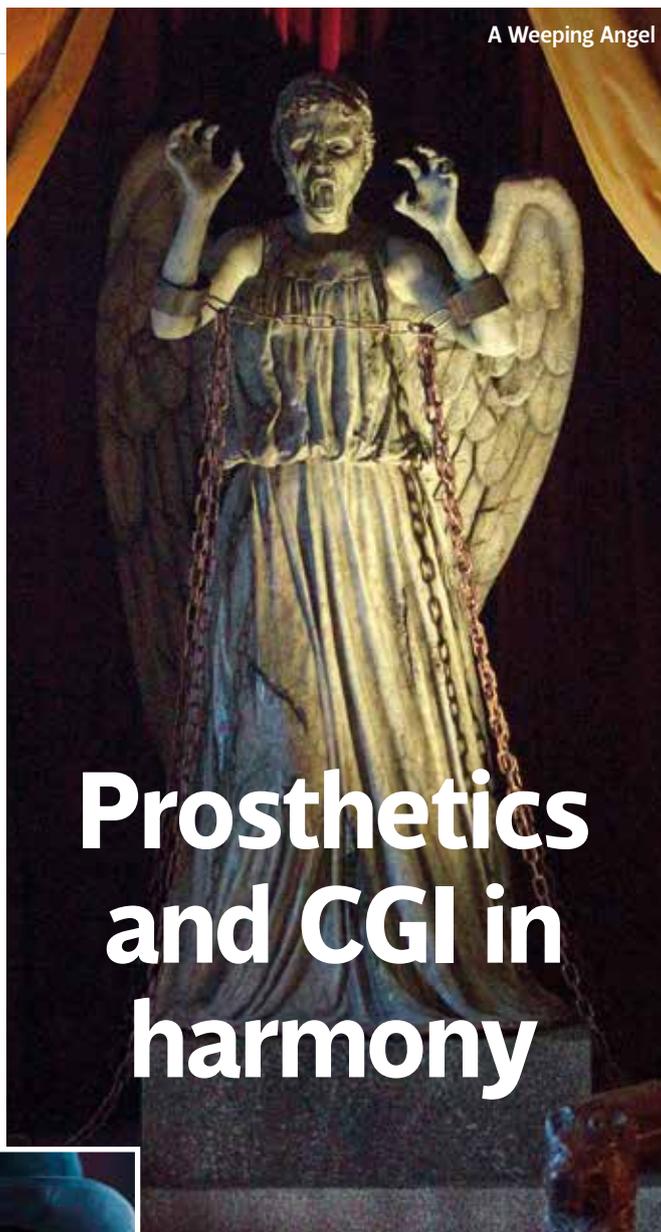
“The *Doctor Who* [series] of the 1980s were great because the stories were great – we all forgave them that the sets creaked,” said Harper.

He returned to the sci-fi show following its successful relaunch by Russell T Davies in 2005 and directed a number of episodes, including the 2006 two-parter *Army of Ghosts/Doomsday*, which saw Daleks and Cybermen at war.

“In the 1980s, we couldn't make the Daleks fly.

I found it extraordinary to have thousands of them in the sky – I was gobsmacked,” said Harper, who showed the audience a clip from *Army of Ghosts/Doomsday*, in which Daleks mount an aerial attack on London.

Will Cohen, who was then at visual-effects facility The Mill, worked on the revived *Doctor Who*. “We were doing [effects that] no one had ever tried to do before in a [UK] TV drama,” he said. “We were trying to copy what you see in the movies – with no time or money.”



# Prosthetics and CGI in harmony

All pictures: BBC



Almost a decade later and Cohen's new outfit, Milk VFX, where he is CEO, was working with fellow panellist Neill Gorton from Millennium

FX to produce the complex effects required for the sinister Half-Face Man from the 2014 episode *Deep Breath*.

Milk created a hollow, computer-generated structure, complete with cogs and machinery, to replace the missing half of the villain's face. The visual

effects work on *Deep Breath* was recognised with the award of a TV Craft Bafta.

Millennium FX specialises in prosthetics, animatronics and make-up. It's famous *Doctor Who* creations include the Cybermen and the Weeping Angels.

The panel at the RTS London event was completed by Gary Negus, VP Sales at Sohonet, which provides fast broadband connections for effects houses. He said: “We do the less glamorous back-end work of providing the IT, the network and the infrastructure to enable the creative process to flourish.

“We enable people to share content. There's a big

movement towards real-time collaboration across borders, to allow, say, people in LA, New York and London to share products in real time.

“There are really clever people who are using complex pieces of software to create an image that's believable – in many cases, you can't tell the difference between what's been created in CGI and what's actually been shot. It requires huge processing power to do that.”

One recent development that found little favour with the panel was using CGI to bring dead actors to life. In the latest *Star Wars* movie, *Rogue One*, Peter Cushing, who died in 1994, appears again as Grand Moff Tarkin.

“We've already had three phone calls this year from television productions inquiring about doing it, [but it would] be very expensive and time-consuming. [The technology] is not quite there yet,” said Cohen.

Looking to the future, Harper said that he saw CGI as an “enhancement and an aid that makes things look brilliant. I want to be able to direct actors”.

Gorton – who is the director of both Millennium FX and Gorton Studio, which provides industry training – also saw a limit to visual effects technology: “We don't want all digital actors, and an actor doesn't want to be stood in front of a green screen all the time – they want to play a character. Just because you can do something, it doesn't mean you should.”

In 10 years, he continued, “we'll have more technology and toys to play with, but we're going to be just as busy. No one's going to take the actors away and, if you still have actors, you are still going to need prosthetics and make-up.”

**Report by Matthew Bell. The event was produced by Rosemary Smith.**

# OFF MESSAGE

**O**ff Message was delighted to visit the White City Broadcast Centre last month. Like any modern-day media workplace,

it's all very open-plan and not dissimilar to a certain, much-loved BBC Two comedy starring Jessica Hynes.

The building is not without its quirks. In the meeting room, the overhead lights kept switching themselves off and so needed constant attention.

Another odd note was the show that was playing on a TV screen in the foyer. A perfect opportunity, you'd think, to promote one of the BBC's own brilliant hits such as *Planet Earth II* or *Strictly Come Dancing*.

Think again. The programme being shown to BBC visitors in the entrance was none other than Netflix's genre-defining period beauty *The Crown*. Yes, the one the BBC couldn't afford to make.

■ **Over in radio, the corporation needs to be congratulated for going outside the BBC to hire a new editor of the agenda-setting, Radio 4 news flagship, *Today*.**

Sarah Sands, who, against the odds, turned the *London Evening Standard* into a successful freesheet, should be a welcome addition to the BBC programme hierarchy.

Auntie is not exactly bursting at the seams with senior staff adept at putting the BBC's case. The

ever-charming and dulcet-toned Sands is certain to be an excellent ambassador for the Beeb.

Her sheer likeability and apparent unwillingness to upset the *Today* appellation was much in evidence during a recent *Media Show* interview. She made light of her lack of broadcasting experience and dealt adroitly with several difficult questions.

We wait with eager ears to hear what impact Sands makes on a BBC programme that remains essential listening for the chattering class.

■ All's well that ends well. Discovery and Sky managed to agree a carriage deal at the very last minute. Brinkmanship or what?

Good to see the two TV giants "celebrating" with a series of newspaper ads. Next time round, it might be best not to leave things until the very last moment.

All that suspense is just too stressful. And all on exactly the same day as the deadline for the January football transfer window.

■ It's that man again. John Mair recently held a very entertaining evening at the Groucho Club to launch his latest book, *Last Words? How Can Journalism Survive the Decline of Print?*

A stellar cast of contributors to the book co-authored by Mair includes Raymond Snoddy, Roy Greenslade and Richard Tait, whose essay on the way in which Channel 4 modernised its advertising model, "Digital alchemy", is especially fascinating.

So where will Mair turn his attention to next? How Brexit is likely to affect the media, of course.

■ The lengths some people will go to in order to produce a must-see reality show. For the latest of Channel 4's signature series *The Island with Bear Grylls*, cast and crew had to endure testing conditions, to say the least. It rained torrentially for all five days and the camp flooded.

Beat that, *Big Brother*.

■ Talking of apocalyptic scenarios, a recent *FT Magazine* cover story was devoted to the gripping subject of the Murdoch succession.

How interesting to learn that, following Roger Ailes's fall from grace, Rupert, 86 this year, has been running Fox News as interim CEO. He took personal charge of the news channel's US election coverage.

James, meanwhile, in addition to his leadership roles at Fox and Sky, is overseeing the building of a new property, according to the piece.

A luxury home in Manhattan, or a beachside bolthole in Santa Monica? Not exactly. The media leader is putting his money where his mouth is by building an eco-retreat. This "end of times" house comes complete with its own water and solar power supply at a remote spot in Canada.

If James Murdoch thinks the apocalypse is nigh, then maybe we should all start worrying.

Now, where is that *Book of Revelation* when you need it most?



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