

November 2016

Television



Hackers stalk TV

Greg Dyke: Essential reading for the under-40s



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When you combine URSA Mini with the URSA Studio Viewfinder, you get a complete solution that delivers amazing Ultra HD images and has all of the professional broadcast studio camera features you'll need! You get talkback, tally, remote color correction and camera control from an ATEM switcher and more. It's a true high end live production solution that delivers commercial quality results for both HD and Ultra HD productions, all for less than the cost of a traditional HD studio camera!

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The URSA Studio Viewfinder has a bright 7" screen with handles and a large tally light with camera numbers. You also get high quality dedicated buttons and dials, along with customizable function buttons that are perfectly positioned so you can quickly adjust brightness, zebra displays, focus peaking, change settings and more! There's even an articulated arm so you can move the camera and never take your eyes off the action!

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Blackmagic URSA Mini
From £2,475*

Blackmagic URSA Studio Viewfinder
£1,425*



From the CEO



It's so great to see Sir David Attenborough back on BBC One presenting *Planet Earth II*, all filmed in glorious Ultra-HDTV.

The RTS had the privilege of hosting our own encounter with the world's most renowned natural history broadcaster in October.

Sir David was in conversation with Andrew Marr at the House of Commons. For connoisseurs of the UK broadcasting scene, this was an event to savour. Both broadcasters were on top form. The talk was scintillating and often very funny.

I'd like to thank both Sir David and Andrew for giving up their time. And thanks to Damian Collins MP, the new Chair of the RTS All-Party

Parliamentary Group, for hosting what was a very memorable afternoon.

Sir David's interest and enthusiasm for cutting-edge technology is well known. Perhaps, some day soon, he will be able to take advantage of the kind of kit available at the RTS's early-evening event "Virtual reality and 360° storytelling", held at The Hospital Club in London earlier this month.

Some of the latest innovations in VR were there to test in a "playroom" before and after the panel discussion. I, for one, can't wait for VR to become a mainstream consumer experience.

Thanks to our brilliant panellists and to Terry Marsh for producing such a stimulating and informative evening.

Away from London, the RTS has been busy, too. The RTS Midlands Awards were streamed live from the

National Motorcycle Museum. Congratulations to all the winners.

We have a packed calendar for the rest of November. There simply isn't the space to mention everything, but do let me draw your attention to the RTS Craft & Design Awards, which take place at the end of the month.

Also, the RTS is proud to be one of the partners presenting "An evening with Steve Hewlett" at the BBC Radio Theatre on 25 November.

Steve's extraordinary career in TV and radio will be celebrated by his friend and colleague Roger Bolton. It is bound to be an emotional occasion.

Theresa Wise

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Want your next series to make the top 100 TV shows of all time? Just raise the budget to £500m

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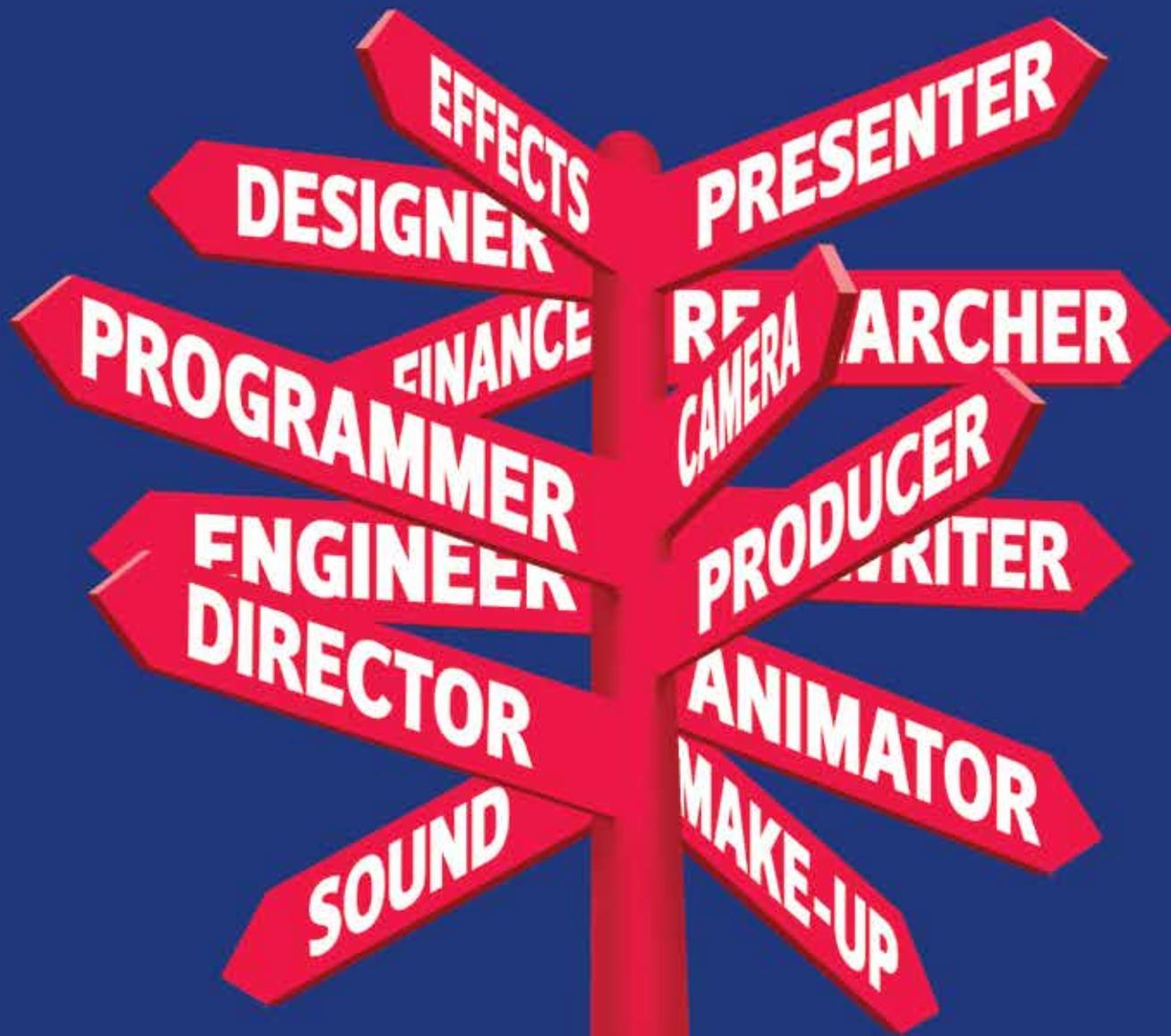
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Television Careers Fair

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Business Design Centre
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Booking: www.rts.org.uk



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National events

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 23 November

First Dates: Uncovered

6:45pm for 7:00pm start

Venue: TBC

JOINT EVENT

Friday 25 November

An evening with Steve Hewlett

In conversation with Roger Bolton. A Media Society event with support from BBC Radio 4, the RTS, London Press Club and Voice of the Listener and Viewer. Tickets: £10 for members of the RTS, Media Society, London Press Club or the Voice of the Listener and Viewer; £15 for guests; £5 for students. 6:00pm for 7:00pm

Venue: The Radio Theatre, Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS AWARDS

Monday 28 November

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2016.

In partnership with Blackmagic Design.

Venue: London Hilton, 22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

■ Alice Turner 020 7822 2822

■ ATurner@rts.org.uk

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Tuesday 29 November

Social media muscles in on TV

Panelists: Dara Nasr, Managing Director, Twitter UK; Stephen Nuttall, Senior Director, EMEA, YouTube; Patrick Walker, Director of Media Partnerships, EMEA, Facebook. Chair: Kate Bulkeley.

6:30pm for 6:45pm start

Venue: IET, 2 Savoy Place,

London WC2R 0BL

■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS FUTURES

Tuesday 6 December

Christmas quiz

Hosted by Mark Wright. 6:45pm for 7:00pm start

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

■ Book online at www.rts.org.uk

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 1 February 2017

RTS Futures Careers Fair 2017

Network at the biggest careers fair in TV, learn about the jobs, schemes and opportunities available and get crucial tips on how to stand out from the crowd. Tickets: early-bird rate £6; full price £10

Venue: Business Design Centre, 52 Upper St, London N1 0QH

For group bookings:

■ Alice Turner 020 7822 2822

■ ATurner@rts.org.uk

RTS CONFERENCE

13-15 September 2017

RTS Cambridge Convention 2017

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

Local events

BRISTOL

Thursday 1 December

The big fat bumper quiz 2016

Hosted by TV presenters Tim Warwood and Adam Gendle. Entry: £66 per team of six. Doors and bar: 7:00pm. Quiz 7:45pm prompt.

Venue: Bristol Folk House, 40A

Park Street, Bristol BS1 5JG

■ Belinda Biggam

■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

DEVON & CORNWALL

■ Kingsley Marshall

■ Kingsley.Marshall@falmouth.ac.uk

EAST

Wednesday 30 November

East Centre launch event

Our launch party includes a special preview of the interactive animation exhibition AniMotion.

Email rtseast@rts.org.uk to book your place. All welcome.

7:00pm-9:00pm

Venue: The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich NR2 1BH

■ Nikki O'Donnell

■ nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

LONDON

Wednesday 23 November

Women in comedy

Panelists: Saskia Schuster, Commissioning Editor, Comedy, ITV; Tracey Gillham, Casting Director; Lynne Parker, Founder and CEO of Funny Women; and Harriet Braine, Stage Award winner at the 2016 Funny Women Awards. Chair: Nadine Dereza.

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: ITV London Studios,

Upper Ground, South Bank,

London SE1 9LT

■ Daniel Cherowbrier

■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ jayne@ijmmedia.co.uk

NORTH EAST & THE BORDER

Thursday 24 November

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, Tyneside Cinema, 10 Pilgrim St, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 6QG

■ Jill Graham

■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ rachelpinkney@yahoo.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thursday 17 November

RTS Northern Ireland

Programme Awards 2016

In association with Performance Film and Media Insurance

Venue: The MAC, 10 Exchange

Street West, Belfast BT1 2NJ

■ John Mitchell

■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Thursday 1 December

Small voice, talks loud.

With actor and writer Joe Taylor, Venue: RTÉ, Donnybrook, Dublin 4

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ byrnecc@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

■ James Wilson 07899 761167

■ james.wilson@cityofglasgow-college.ac.uk

SOUTHERN

■ Gordon Cooper

■ gordonjcooper@gmail.com

THAMES VALLEY

Friday 25 November

Annual Dinner Dance

This year, we are holding a masquerade ball

Venue: Kings Meadow, Napier Road, Reading, Berks RG1 8DF

Wednesday 7 December

Mince pies and VR 360°

6:30pm for 7:00pm

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

■ Penny Westlake

■ info@rtstvc.org.uk

WALES

■ Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841

■ hywel@aim.uk.com

YORKSHIRE

Friday 18 November

Journalism Week@Leeds

Trinity University

Speakers: Alex Thomson, chief correspondent, Channel 4 News; Christine Talbot and Duncan Wood, ITV News Calendar; Phil Hay, football writer, The Yorkshire Evening Post; Richard Conway, sports news correspondent, BBC; and Scott Manson, director of content, OgilvyOne.

RTS Yorkshire supports Leeds Trinity University's annual Journalism Week, 15-18 November

Venue: Leeds Trinity University, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 5HD

Tuesday 6 December

Christmas quiz

7:30pm-9:30pm

Arts Trinity, Holy Trinity Church, Boar Lane, Leeds LS1 6SU

■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280

■ lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk

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TV diary

Alex Graham returns to his roots as he listens to a pitch from a sports journalist and lunches with Steve Hewlett



A quick trip to our cottage in the Sussex Downs. Denis Healey lived in the next-door village until he died last year. The local historical society is selling some of his books to raise funds. I go looking for a gem and am not disappointed.

Between battered indigo covers, a turgid official history of the Russian Revolution dating from 1938, the era of Stalin's purges. On the flyleaf, in faded fountain pen, I come across the signature of the future Chancellor with the inscription, "Balliol 1939". He may have repudiated his early politics but I'm intrigued that he kept the book for more than 70 years.

Of course, when I stepped down from Wall to Wall this is what my future was meant to be like: country walks and poring over second-hand books. I certainly didn't expect to be writing the TV Diary again!

■ **To BBC Worldwide with my new business partner, Michael Jackson. Michael and I have known each other for 30 years, but we've never run a business together until now.**

Worldwide has taken a stake in our company - Two Cities Television. We're here to listen to a fascinating presentation about the latest trends in global TV drama: from Scandi noir to New Zealand slacker comedies. Least Euphemistic Title award easily won by Canada's euthanasia drama *Mary Kills People*.

■ To Glasgow to celebrate the opening of the National Library of Scotland's

new Moving Image Archive. I've given some of my ill-gotten gains from selling Wall to Wall to help fund this amazing new digital facility.

You could not have come up with a cause closer to my heart. Born into a house with no books, the local library made me the person I am. And, of course, without dedicated archivists, a show such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* would never have existed.

■ **After a brief encounter with an old Glasgow friend, I'm back on a train to Sheffield at 7:00am. I don't mind the early start as I have the pleasant duty of reviewing Liz McIntyre's first year as director of Sheffield Doc/Fest. I can't believe it's been a year! Oh, and if you're wondering, she passed – with flying colours.**

■ Cup of coffee with Kevin Mitchell, *The Guardian's* tennis and boxing correspondent, to discuss a drama idea for Two Cities. We quickly get the idea out of the way and then spend two hours talking about the unexpected similarities between these two gladiatorial sports.

■ **To the London Film Festival to see William Oldroyd's remarkable feature debut, *Lady Macbeth*. One of several shocking scenes in the film involves the shooting of a horse. The scene gets its power from the fact that there's no edit. The gun goes off and the horse drops dead.**

Fortunately, the director is on hand at the end of the film to explain how it was done. "We were lucky enough to find the only horse in Britain that is able to fall over on command."

■ Dim sum with Steve Hewlett. I've known Steve even longer than I've known Michael. We worked together in the early buccaneering days of Channel 4, when rules were there to be broken, and for many years on the Board of Sheffield Doc/Fest.

Earlier this year, Steve discovered he had cancer. It's been a very tough time for him but, characteristically, he has brought his forensic intelligence to the experience. His interviews with Eddie Mair on Radio 4's *PM* have had a powerful impact.

He also hasn't lost his pugnacious good humour. We laugh and joke our way through a carafe of wine, discussing everything from Brexit to *Bake Off*.

■ **Lunch with Kath Viner, the first woman editor of *The Guardian* in its 195-year history. I don't yet know Kath well but I suspect we're about to become very close. After serving for four years as a trustee, I have just become Chair of the Scott Trust – the ultimate owner of *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. Its remit is to preserve *Guardian* journalism in perpetuity.**

The great CP Scott, whose legacy we protect, said the editor and business manager of a paper should march hand in hand, with the first always just an inch or two in advance.

I'm not sure how much holding hands Kath and CEO David Pemsel do. But, when it comes to getting to grips with *The Guardian's* future, so far at least, they seem perfectly in step.

Alex Graham is Joint CEO of Two Cities Television.



Hackers stalk TV networks

A large broadcasting symposium will be held in New York at the beginning of next month, but the state of TV drama, the rise of Netflix or the impact of mega-mergers on the media landscape are unlikely to be mentioned.

This symposium, called by the North American Broadcasters Association (NABA), is devoted entirely to the growing threat that broadcasters around the world face from cybercrime and the hacking of their networks.

It is the highest-profile assessment of the current state of risk to be organised by the industry, and a sign of increasing alarm. Alongside speakers from the US networks and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the gathering will be addressed by Phyllis Schneck, deputy under secretary for cybersecurity and communications at the US Department of Homeland Security.

Also speaking will be Shawn Henry, President of CrowdStrike, the company that in June traced the hack – and leak – of sensitive documents from the Democratic National Committee in the US back to Russia.

Cybersecurity

Cybercriminals target broadcasters up to 1,000 times a day. **Raymond Snoddy** investigates the growing threat

Alexis Renard, a senior technologist from TV5Monde, will tell of the devastating 2015 attack on the French broadcasting network.

“The issue has kind of been sitting in the weeds for the past four or five years. It is now a pressing issue, a serious threat,” says Michael McEwen, Director-General of NABA.

Broadcasters are now facing attempted hacks on their systems daily; McEwen claims they come in the thousands. The vast majority are little more than a nuisance, carried out by the curious or by recreational hackers.

A small number are much more professional and deadly serious. These

cyberattacks could severely damage a major media organisation, as with those on Sony Pictures Entertainment two years ago and TV5Monde last year. The latter came close to destroying the station.

In the case of Sony, a hacker group calling itself the Guardians of Peace penetrated the company’s IT system. It gained access to everything from employee records, salaries and information about contracts to unreleased films. Famously, these included *The Interview*, a comedy about a plot to assassinate the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Threats were made to carry out terrorist attacks on any cinemas showing the film. As a result, Sony cancelled the premiere and *The Interview* went straight to digital release, combined with a limited number of theatrical screenings. US security agencies concluded that the cyberattack had been organised by North Korea – which denied any responsibility.

Any large corporation could have suffered the fate of Sony, but what happened to TV5Monde has caused greater alarm among broadcasters. There, the broadcasting system itself

came under a sophisticated attack that may have been planned for months.

New details have emerged recently of how all 12 channels of TV5Monde were taken off air on 8 April 2015 by a group calling itself the Cyber Caliphate. Staff had been celebrating the launch of a new channel when news came through that the station's channels were disappearing.

Yves Bigot, Director-General of TV5Monde, recently told BBC security correspondent Gordon Corera: "It's the worst thing that can happen to you in TV. We were a couple of hours from having the whole station gone for good."

If the entire system had been corrupted there was a danger that satellite channels distributed by TV5Monde might have cancelled their contracts.

Because of the launch, engineers were on the premises that evening. One found the machine where the attack was taking place and disconnected it from the internet.

After the attack, TV5 employees had to return to using faxes for months. Even now, with the station reconnected to the internet, all external emails have to be rigorously authenticated. Bigot fears that the station will never be the same again.

Security investigators believe the "Cyber Caliphate" claim was designed to provide cover for the true perpetrators, a Russian group of hackers. Their motive is not obvious, but British security analysts suggest it may have been a case of testing methods of cyber-warfare. These could be aimed at broadcasting networks anywhere during times of international tension.

Simon Fell, the EBU's director of technology and innovation, says that the TV5 hack "was a wake-up call to those who haven't already woken up to these things". While the cyber threat is real, Fell believes that there is no need to panic. Most broadcasters are very well aware of the danger.

The kind of anti-penetration tests that were usual in IT departments are now being carried out in transmission or broadcasting technology departments.

There is so much at stake that many companies have been appointing chief information security officers (CISOs). These employees often have board-level access. This is something that simply would not have happened in the immediate past. One of the sessions at the New York symposium features a panel made up entirely of CISOs.

"Security is being taken extremely

seriously at board level. Broadcasters have been slow to catch up but they are doing so now," believes Fell.

Peter Collins, a media cybersecurity specialist, agrees that the main broadcasters are very much aware of the threat. He believes that it is best to be proactive, rather than wait for a serious attack to occur before taking action.

"You have to keep assessing potential threats in advance," says Collins, "and keep up to date with what is happening in the world and learning from that. Global awareness is now necessary."

For understandable reasons, broadcasters are reluctant to discuss their anti-cyberattack measures in any detail. All that the BBC will say is that the corporation is well aware of the dangers; full-time staff are devoted to protecting the integrity of its networks.

The embarrassment would be crippling if, for example, one of the BBC's UK TV channels were taken down by hackers. More speculatively, what if a channel were erased and replaced by Islamic State propaganda videos?

Worse still are the business implications of criminals successfully penetrating encrypted pay-TV channels. Sky has an entire department devoted to protecting the integrity of its encryption systems. Ultimately, the satellite broadcaster's multi-billion-pound business rests on these arrangements.

The economic impact of cybercrime is one of the reasons for the high level of concern from the US Department of Homeland Security, and the UK's GCHQ. Increasingly, broadcasting, in all its forms, is seen as a critical utility that must be protected.

Very unusually, two "civil servants" from GCHQ came to speak under Chatham House rules (that is, off the record) at the Society of Editors' recent annual conference in Carlisle.

Although serious crime has been part of GCHQ's remit for some time, most of its surveillance has been directed towards foreign states and terrorist targets.

Now cybercrime is very much on its agenda, including the protection of all significant state and commercial communication networks in the UK. Official concern about the threat of cyber-attacks has grown over the past year. A new National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has just opened in London under the leadership of Ciaran Martin, previously Director-General of Cyber at GCHQ. >

**WE [MUST] RID
OURSELVES OF
HUBRIS. WE MUST
BE PREPARED
TO ADMIT THAT
WE HAVE BEEN
ATTACKED AND
BREACHED, AND
FIND A WAY OF
SHARING THIS
INFORMATION
FOR MUTUAL
BENEFIT – AND
TO DO IT QUICKLY**



**YOU HAVE
TO KEEP
ASSESSING
POTENTIAL
THREATS IN
ADVANCE...
GLOBAL
AWARENESS
IS NOW
NECESSARY**

› According to GCHQ, the UK faces “a growing threat of cyberattacks from states, serious crime gangs and hacking groups, as well as terrorists. The NCSC will help to ensure that the people, public and private sector organisations and the critical national infrastructure of the UK are safer online.”

At the Society of Editors conference, one security specialist was asked about possible attacks on broadcast networks. “If someone was able to take a broadcaster offline, and essentially challenge one of our rights to free speech, that would not be the right outcome,” was the understated reply.

It is clear that GCHQ is interested in helping to protect the security and integrity of networks carrying everything from Olympics results to financial and markets information.

Helen Stevens, director of broadcast operations at ITV, chairs the UK’s Digital Production Partnership (DPP), which links UK broadcasters, distributors and equipment suppliers. She says that, with the growth in web-connected services and IP-driven production, broadcasters needed to focus on protecting their content “from increasingly frequent cyberattacks”.

But what can be done specifically

about the daily threats that broadcasters face?

Last year, the DPP formed a strategic alliance with NABA to tackle cyberattacks. And, in September, the alliance issued recommendations on best practice. The objective is to help manufacturers come up with products in line with the best cybersecurity standards and that are fit to be integrated into broadcasting facilities. The overall aim is to harden both IT and broadcast departments against attack.

Steve Plunkett, Ericsson’s chief technology officer for broadcast and media services, warns that all stages in the broadcast chain, from programme development to the point of transmission, must be designed to be robust and resilient and they must be properly tested.

Mark Harrison, the DPP’s Managing Director, notes that broadcasters have, in the past, complained that manufacturers have been reluctant to build security into their equipment. It might slow performance and put them at a competitive disadvantage. This is no longer the case.

“The other key thing that a lot of people are talking about is how to rid ourselves of hubris,” says Harrison. “We must be prepared to admit that

we have been attacked and breached, and find a way of exchanging this information for mutual benefit – and to do it quickly.”

The DPP chief hopes, following the New York symposium, to see this kind of industry-wide system set up. He adds: “We need to create a neutral space in which people feel they can safely share their experiences and, over time, create an early-warning system.”

Harrison notes that the big players in broadcasting are already monitoring cyber activity in real time for themselves and their clients. But, he asks, “How do we make that more effective internationally and how do we collectively get the benefit of it?”

McEwen at NABA is realistic about the ability of broadcasters to deal with the most determined professional hackers.

“We know we won’t be able to stop the most serious hacks. What we want to do is mitigate the damage,” he says.

McEwen believes that most broadcasters have managed to create defensive trenches in the war against the new cyber enemy.

He hopes that, by staying alert, they will be as safe as they possibly can be in the trenches.

At the cutting edge of the mainstream



Nicola Shindler is not a great one for giving interviews, possibly because, as the founder and Chief Executive of one of Britain's most successful drama producers, she sees her job as telling other people's stories, not her own. As I say to her, her *Who's Who* entry is the least personal I have ever read, absent of parents, partners and children. "Good," she says, "I don't want people to know anything about me."

In those interviews that she does give, however, there is always one theme: that she is the writer's friend. Now that I am in her office at Media-City in Salford – a quarter of Greater Manchester populated by the young, the smart and the personable – I can imagine that these passionate, protective, hermetic writers, happiest when probing their subconscious in their garrets, are not every executive's cup of tea. Perhaps her rivals generally find them a little scary?

"Oh, I find writers scary as well. Of course, I do. They're scary because it's a really weird way of thinking, writing. Without saying they are all tortured,

The Billen profile

Andrew Billen meets the intensely private drama producer **Nicola Shindler** and discovers what makes her tick

I think that there is an element of trickiness to what they're trying to do. So, I'm always scared of upsetting them, having upset them, being about to upset them. All of those things."

A small, dark-haired woman with a proper northern accent, she is slightly scary herself: quick as you like but, always, I fear, about to take offence at one of my questions. I play it safe and ask, yes, about her writers.

We need to start with Russell T Davies, because it is with him that Red's story began in 1998. She set up her indie without a loan, and without backers, from the front room of her home in Manchester. She did have a

development deal from Channel 4's then-head of drama, Gub Neal, with whom she had worked on *Cracker* at Granada.

"He said: 'Bring me three projects over the year.' I think it was for about £10,000," she recalls. She had met Davies the year before at the International Emmys in New York (they both lost). "He had this idea. He had had it for ages."

It did not occur to her that this idea of his – a story of unrequited love on Canal Street, Manchester – might be controversial: "I was too young to think it through properly. Also, I don't have a filter. To me, a good story is a good story and if they're gay, straight or from Mars, it just doesn't matter. It's about a relationship. I suppose I knew there'd be a bit of a fuss but I didn't realise there'd be quite as much fuss."

And so, within four months of setting up on her own, *Queer as Folk* was greenlit and Shindler moved into offices in Granada, from where, under another development agreement with Tessa Ross at the BBC, she produced Paul Abbott's series *Clocking Off*.

Davies, she says, is not as sociable as he appears – "I think he enjoys >

› sitting by himself, but they all do”. Nevertheless, he introduced her to Sally Wainwright, at the time known for toiling at *Corrie* and for her comedy drama *At Home with the Braithwaites*.

Together, they made a contemporary *Wuthering Heights*, *Sparkhouse*. It was, however, with *Unforgiven* in 2009 that Red and Wainwright had their breakthrough. *Scott & Bailey*, *Last Tango in Halifax* and *Happy Valley* followed – three Red series that will help define the 2010s for historians of television.

I remark that, in an industry in which only 10% of lead writers are women, Shindler discovered a writing star who was not only a woman but nearly 40. “It is not like that,” she responds, almost crossly. “I really don’t look at someone’s age. She had a brilliant idea.”

But doesn’t she feel that, in a tough, male industry, she must champion women writers and give them a voice?

“No, because I wouldn’t ever push someone who I didn’t think was really brilliant. So you’re not ‘giving someone a voice’. You’re very lucky to get their work and be able to produce their work. I wouldn’t work with someone just because they were a woman.”

We look out of her glass office. My God, are there any men working here? She points to one and gestures to the office next door of her MD, Andrew Critchley. “We have a man executive producer as well.” That makes three out of, she thinks, 26. The rest are women.

“It just happened that way and now that’s how it is.”

Does she find it harder working with men? “No, not at all. The men who work here are all great and I work very well with male writers.”

This, of course, is true, from Jimmy McGovern on *Cracker* (“he was brilliant because he had no rules”), through *Ordinary Lies*’ Danny Brocklehurst (“he’s just writing better and better every time we work with him”) to, now, Harlan Coben, with whom she has just set up a company to make the successor to Sky’s *The Five* (*The Four*).

“Working with Harlan is astonishing,” she says. “You give him a story problem and he comes up with 10 brilliant solutions right away!”

She really does love writers, I say, and, on a hunch (for her PR would not tell me), I ask if she is married to one.

“I am married to a writer,” she admits. He is Matt Greenhalgh, author of Sam Taylor-Wood’s movie *Nowhere Boy*, about the young John Lennon. They have two girls and a boy, aged



between eight and 13. I immediately regret our conversation about the weirdness of writers.

“We tend not to work together, much,” she explains. “We made BBC Three’s first drama, *Burn It*. He wrote all 21 episodes of that.”

She says she enjoys doing the school run in the mornings and leaves the office early to see her children when they return. She then works all evening. It strikes me, and I think she agrees that, if there is a common thread to Red’s dramas, it may be their grounding in humble, domestic reality.

The consequence of running both a business and a family is that she no longer gets to the theatre, which, growing up in Bury and Rochdale, she did a lot. At the Royal Exchange, she says, they saw everything.

Nor was there parental censorship over what she read – a classic one night, Harold Robbins the next. The family was “obsessed” by television, although Shindler never imagined working in it.

She was good at exams at school and

made it to her father’s old Cambridge college, Gonville and Caius, where she read history and directed plays. “I was a real anomaly and kind of interesting. I was from Rochdale. I had never been exotic before, so I used it to my advantage.”

Leaving with the 2:1 that she wanted, she found a job as a publicist at the Royal Court Theatre, where she was allowed to read scripts and report back on promising work on the fringe. She thought that she might want to be a literary agent and asked advice from a couple of them. She wanted to work with writers. “They said: ‘Oh, that’s script editing. It’s a job, too.’”

The BBC took her on as a trainee doing just that. From London, she moved to Granada in Manchester, which was not only nearer to where she was brought up but somewhere that felt like home. At last, she was working with writers.

She felt lucky, but they must have felt lucky, too. Here was an executive who wanted to give writers their

TO ME, A GOOD STORY IS A GOOD STORY AND IF THEY'RE GAY, STRAIGHT OR FROM MARS, IT JUST DOESN'T MATTER. IT'S ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP



Channel 4

Shindler's story



Nicola Shindler, founder and Chief Executive, Red Production Company

Born 8 October 1968, second of three daughters, brought up in Rochdale and Bury

Parents Mother, Gay Shindler, nurse turned secondary school teacher; father, Geoffrey Shindler OBE, solicitor

Family Married to writer Matt Greenhalgh; they have three children

Education Bury Grammar School, Gonville and Caius, Cambridge (2:1 in history)

1993 Script editor on *Cracker* at Granada

1996 Producer, *Hillsborough*

1998 Sets up Red, aged 29

1999 Executive producer, *Queer as Folk*

2000 *Clocking Off*

2005 *Casanova*

2010 *Single Father*

2011 *Scott & Bailey*

2012 *Last Tango in Halifax*

2013 Sells controlling stake in Red to StudioCanal. The deal values the company at £30m

2014 *Happy Valley*

2015 *Ordinary Lies*

2016 *The Five*

Hits *Queer as Folk*, *Scott & Bailey*, *Last Tango in Halifax*, *Happy Valley*

Misses Comedies *Heading Out* and *Cabbage and Pat*; and *Paranoid*, which lost more than 1.5 million overnight viewers in a week for ITV this autumn

Watching *Stranger Things*, *The Nick*, *The Night Of*

Not watching *Game of Thrones*, *The Fall*

Reading Books about writers, including Peter Biskind's *Difficult Men* and *Sick in the Head* by Judd Apatow

Hobbies Sleeping, children, work

murdered in her series, but producers and writers need to take responsibility for how they actually depict it. She does not approve of Allan Cubitt's *The Fall*. "That man was a serial killer but you didn't need to show a woman getting very scared for so long."

In the 18 years since she founded Red, the business has changed. Production values and costs have risen. Having been brought up by parents who lived within their means, rather than borrow money, she preferred to sell a controlling stake in Red to France's StudioCanal in 2013.

"I considered it really carefully but, because of the way Studio Canal works, I don't feel that I lost my independence. It wants products to sell, and it wants good-quality products, but, other than that, I run my company how I need to run it."

The executives who buy her products have changed, too – perhaps more over the past year than they ever have, with drama commissioners bouncing from the BBC to ITV and from Channel 4 to the BBC.

In Edinburgh this summer, Kevin Lygo, ITV's director of television, said that he wanted the best writers in the country working for ITV and name-checked both Wainwright and Davies. To me, that sounded like good news for Red until he added: "We're not in the experimental game, and our dramas need to get large audiences, and that suggests experience and people who know what writing dramas is all about."

"Yes," says Shindler, "he wants the big-name writers but big-name writers don't always bring success. Everyone has failures. He also says that he wants mainstream, authored drama. That doesn't mean that it has to be the blandest piece of work in the world. That just means that it has to try and appeal to a big audience. Most people don't want to do something that's bland or been done before."

"Most people want to do their best work and they want to push things. So you find something that is mainstream that attracts a big audience, such as *Scott & Bailey*, and, within that, you tackle hundreds of subjects that are really edgy and niche."

Mainstream but edgy, that sounds like Nicola Shindler. It is almost 3:00pm. In the corner of her office, I notice a shopping bag of Halloween outfits. It is time to take them home. She has children back there – and a writer she can call her own, too.

heads, who was pleased, not exasperated, when their scripts came in with scenes worked out to the last detail, who wanted their help in casting their pieces and who would, as in the case of Wainwright on *Happy Valley*, encourage them to direct them.

Does this make Red's writers show-runners? "In my mind, they are, definitely. It's a different process to in America. They're not on set. They're not in the edit all the time, but they're in touch with all those things, all the time."

Yet, at the same time, it is pretty clear that it is Shindler who runs the show and does it by her own set of rules. There will never, she says, be a naked breast in a Red drama. "It has been very one-sided for many years. Men get naked and women don't."

And if a writer said he needed that shot to make the scene real? "We've had that conversation a lot, but you'd be surprised how you can make something feel very real without having blatant nudity." There is, she says, no blanket ban on young women being



The Night Manager: Anatomy of a hit

Few recent TV dramas have brightened up our screens as much as *The Night Manager*. One critic described the six-part adaptation of John le Carré's 1993 novel as "the BBC's glossiest, smartest, most indecently entertaining Sunday-night drama in ages". Who could possibly disagree?

Certainly not the audience for the latest in the RTS's "Anatomy of a hit" strand, which heard from three of the key people involved in making the show: director Susanne Bier, screenwriter David Farr and executive producer Simon Cornwell, co-founder of the Ink Factory, the production company set up, among other things, to take control of TV and film versions of stories by his father, David Cornwell, aka Le Carré.

The lavish and exquisitely filmed reimagining of *The Night Manager* resembled a feature film. There were glamorous and exotic locations, stunning special effects, plus a starry cast.

Production

The creative team share how they transformed John le Carré's complex novel into great television.
Steve Clarke takes notes

Thrills aside, the series had much to say concerning the dark and deeply divided times we live in.

The performances from Hugh Laurie, as the amoral arms dealer Roper, and his nemesis, Pine, the damaged secret agent played by Tom Hiddleston, were mesmerising. The acting of the other leading characters was impressive, too – Tom Hollander as Roper's louche factotum Lance Corkoran, aka Corky,

Olivia Colman as Angela Burr and Elizabeth Debicki as Roper's mistress, Jed.

The capacity crowd at the RTS event learnt how the screen version of Le Carré's novel experienced several false starts. Cornwell told how the rights to the book were seized by Paramount on publication.

Despite throwing money at the project, coming up with a script that matched the novel's complexity proved elusive. Even the distinguished screenwriter Robert Towne (an Oscar winner for his *Chinatown* script) struggled to adapt *The Night Manager* for cinema.

"It went into a big Hollywood development process but ended up with a worthy script that was nothing special," Cornwell recalled. "Perhaps that wasn't surprising, because [the book] is almost 600 pages long and not easy to distil into a 90-minute feature."

The project languished for several years before Paramount gave it another go – this time in cahoots with Brad Pitt's production company, Plan B. Once again, the script failed to



BBC

reflect anything like the depth and subtlety of Le Carré's original.

Enter English writer and director David Farr, who was approached by The Ink Factory. He succeeded by turning *The Night Manager* on its head.

"David came up with a brilliant contemporary take... and we were off to the races," said Cornwell.

There was a measure of surprise that Farr's script excelled on so many fronts. "With the very honourable exception of the original TV adaptations from the 1980s, if you look at the best adaptations – in a lot of ways, my father is a quintessentially British writer – the best ones, without exception, come from people who are not British," Cornwell noted.

By moving the story to the Middle East (much of the original was set in Latin America), Farr gave the story a sharp, contemporary edge that resonated with the Cornwells.

"In contrast to a lot of my dad's work, this was a novel that wasn't hugely grounded in its time," explained the

producer. He added with understatement: "The general notion that governments collude with bad people to do bad things in difficult places has probably become more prevalent since 1993."

Farr, whose early career was as a playwright and theatre director, had read *The Night Manager* in the 1990s but didn't remember it very clearly.

However, as a child, he had experienced a Damascene moment when his father allowed him to sit up and watch Alec Guinness in *Smiley's People*, the BBC's definitive Le Carré reboot, first broadcast in 1982. "I'd never seen anything like it in my life. For me, it was a seminal piece of TV," Farr remembered.

He added: "When I reread *The Night Manager*, I clicked into realising how much more politically incendiary it was. My partner's father is Arab and I saw it as a story that reflected the Arab Spring."

While much of the six-part TV series departs significantly from Le Carré's book, the author has said that, paradoxically, Farr's adaptation echoes the story's essence. "My father's learned that the book has to be the starting point, not the end point for the film-making process," said Cornwell.

"[The novel has been] updated to the present, it takes place in a different part of the world... [Its] moral heart – in a way, the Smiley character – is a woman (Burr is a man in the book).

"Beyond that, I would say, from the end of episode 4 onwards, we've departed quite substantially, even from the plot's basic elements. You can't get much freer than that. At the same time, if my father were here tonight, he would say, in lots of ways, that it's the truest adaptation of his work."

As far as Farr was concerned, the book's second half lacked the ingredients that were crucial to a successful TV adaptation. He told Le Carré and, happily, the author accepted his point: "He wasn't difficult in any way. I explained why it wouldn't work. I said, essentially, it's a dual between two guys. In the book, Pine gets locked up and he becomes passive," said Farr.

"That's not going to work [on screen] because we are going to have two great actors playing these roles. And, like a great western, we're going to have to see the final confrontation..."

"I thought he would want to be completely all over it, but he wasn't. >

Bier on making Burr female

Susanne Bier: 'Stephen Garrett [one of the executive producers on *The Night Manager*] told me when I first came on board that [they were] talking about whether [they could] change one of the characters from a man to a woman.'

'I said, "Yes, absolutely, you have got to do that." Fortunately, the world today is slightly different to how it was in 1930. Burr is the moral heart of the novel, so it seemed right to make the character a woman...'

'Olivia Colman's team is actually – ethnically, age wise and in terms of gender – extremely complex. Roper's world is very Caucasian and pretty male, not in the most clichéd of ways, but it is a male world.'

'Colman's world is very diverse and it was a very conscious choice. It might defy expectations, but it lends itself to reality... It subconsciously sent the message which is the political message of the book.'

Farr on filling out Jed's role

David Farr: 'I was getting lots of notes, "Make Jed more interesting, give her a bigger part, give her more to do."

'As a writer, when you get a note like that you think, "That's never going to work. That means the problem is somewhere else."

Susanne Bier: 'But you did make her more interesting.'

David Farr: 'I did, but that was after I'd already made her interesting.'

Susanne Bier: 'I didn't want to make a show where she's just eye candy, a hot girlfriend.... She is really interesting.'



From left: Simon Cornwell, David Farr and Susanne Bier

Paul Hampartsoumian

What about a sequel?



Olivia Colman as Angela Burr

BBC

Simon Cornwell: ‘The broadcasters would love to have another series. In lots of ways, I think we would love to do another series.’

‘It is new territory. There is no book. There’s never been a Le Carré story that’s been extended beyond the confines of a novel. It would be interesting and exciting to try that.’

‘I think the one thing I can safely say we wouldn’t do is something that we didn’t feel had a fighting chance of being even better than the first one.’

‘We might succeed... if you don’t go in with that ambition, there’s no point in doing it.’

› Obviously, he scrupulously read everything that came in and gave very good notes. He is a really creative, collaborative man, fiercely intelligent.”

Susanne Bier emphasised: “We were adamant not to disappoint John le Carré in a very profound way... We all loved his novels so much... We thought, ‘We’re going to do it the right way.’ He trusted that we wouldn’t disappoint him.”

Much of the credit for the series’ distinctiveness must go to Bier. She is the only living woman to have won an Oscar, a Golden Globe and an Emmy; in September, she was awarded the Emmy for directing *The Night Manager*.

Bier said she had read the book when it was published. For her, three things from the story stuck in her memory – the excitement of the cat-and-mouse game between Roper and Pine, the character of the dissolute Corky, and the sense of being present on an island.

Her initial reaction to reading Farr’s script was one of foreboding: “I got the first episode that David had written and I was terrified. I thought it’s probably not going to do what the novel does. But it did – but in a very different way.”

She added: “Eighty per cent of screenplays based on literature have an element of something being contrived. This one didn’t. It seemed as if David had a very easy time writing it.”

Bier is convinced that, today, most of the very best screenwriting is done for TV, rather than film: “I’ve probably read 100 scripts in the last five or six weeks and there is no doubt that, primarily, the great writing is in television.”

So why, asked the evening’s chair, Boyd Hilton, did the producers ask her to direct *The Night Manager*?

Cornwell replied: “If you look at her body of work, it was very often very intense. At the same time, it has a very delicate understanding of relationships and how narrative develops through relationships and through character.”

“A lot of people think of Le Carré as a very political writer. Yet, at the end of the day, all of his books are love stories. This was something that Susanne instantly understood.”

He continued: “The suspense is essentially between two people... It’s all about betrayal and loss: the things we could have done together had we trusted each other, but we never did.”

Explained Bier: “To avoid any misunderstanding, the love story of this novel is between Roper and Pine. There are other love stories going on, but the primary love story is between Roper and Pine...”

“That is the engine. There’s been so much talk about Jed and Pine, [but] it’s still secondary to the main story.”

Does their relationship have a homoerotic quality, asked Hilton. “To me, that aspect is not that interesting, [but] there is definitely an obsession. They are completely fascinated by one another,” said Bier.

“There’s a father-son thing clearly going on,” stressed Farr. “Pine’s father is dead. Roper’s son is either a disappointment or too young to take the mantle on.”

“Roper is like a malevolent Shakespearean king, seeking an heir because



Tom Hiddleston as Jonathan Pine and Elizabeth Debicki as Jed Marshall

WE CARE BECAUSE ALL THAT'S REALLY GOING ON IS TWO MEN LOVING, HATING AND BETRAYING ONE ANOTHER

Bier on how to rehearse

Susanne Bier: 'I think read-throughs are crucial. I know that, in traditional Hollywood, or even in traditional TV, it is mostly about investors signing off on the text.'

'But I think that it is a hugely important creative element because you do have a sense of what is working.... There are lots of crucial things that you learn from a read-through.'

'Every day, I rehearsed for at least an hour – with a difficult scene, it could be up to two and a half hours. Then the crew comes. Actors have long days, but they like it because they own the set and they own the scenes.'

'Once the crew comes on board, they feel quite confident and excited about what they're going to do each day....'

'Tom [Hiddleston] had the novel on set. Tom is a fantastic actor and a wonderful guy to be around, but he has a slightly different sense of time to everyone else. He would read pages from the novel... All the crew were going crazy because it's shot rather fast.'

'At some point, he sat the DoP down – the crew were waiting for him to give instructions – and he started reading. It was hilarious.'

BBC

he can't be immortal. The great thing about those sorts of characters is the one thing they can't defeat is death. They hate it. They've got all the money in the world but they can't defeat death. How you defeat death is through having an heir."

Some critics have wondered at the suspension of belief required for the narrative to click into place: why was someone as worldly and cynical as Roper not suspicious of Pine?

Didn't he suspect that Pine was an MI6 plant? "Some part of that has to be delusional," countered Farr. "He has just decided that this beautiful boy who arrives at his doorstep – and there is a homoerotic quality in a gentle way – is a little him. He invests in that. That's the humanity in Roper that makes him interesting and flawed...."

"We care because all that's really going on is two men loving, hating and betraying one another, for all sorts of complicated reasons."

Did Bier approach it differently from directing a feature film? "No... the

series is shot like a very long film.... Coming from features has given me a certain enjoyment of seducing audiences. It is fun to seduce an audience and think, "This is fun, this is going to be different."

Did you all sit down and talk about the visual look of *The Night Manager* and the tone, asked Hilton. "It came from Susanne," insisted Cornwell. "Having one single director on board was fundamental to our approach. We wanted a single, authorial stamp."

"My taste normally is a bit more austere," explained Farr. "Susanne was totally responsible for this beautiful, glorious, visual feast."

"Where we connected completely was Simon's point about the love story. This is really about power, love and betrayal."

***The Night Manager: Anatomy of a hit* was an RTS early-evening event held at Kings Place, central London, on 10 October. The producers were Sally Doganis and Barney Hooper.**

The online drive for audiences

Amazon Prime

As Clarkson and co gear up for the launch of *The Grand Tour*, Lisa Campbell looks at Amazon's content strategy

It's rare for Yorkshire town Whitby to make the national press – unless, of course, there's been a flood – but wherever Jeremy Clarkson goes, the world follows.

Amazon's impending launch of *The Grand Tour* is one of the most globally anticipated series of all time.

Jay Marine, vice-president of Amazon Prime Video Europe, says: "It is a huge TV moment, not only for us but for UK TV generally."

Indeed, the new driving show is sending everyone into a spin. Rumours are circulating about celebrities in the line-up and the size of Clarkson's pay packet. There is even speculation that Amazon is looking into bundling broadband alongside its Prime package, which delivers movies and TV shows via the internet.

It's not an inconceivable idea. Amazon has shown it has an amazing ability to move with the times. Its business has shifted from books, CDs and DVDs to digital content. Prime Video is its future.

That future would be more secure if it didn't have to rely on broadband providers, many of whom are also television providers.

Amazon's budget for *The Grand Tour* is a source of much speculation – reports have claimed each episode had a £4.5m budget. This was rubbished by producer Andy Wilman when he spoke at the Edinburgh International Television Festival in August. Whatever the true figure, it's a safe bet that it is an eye-watering amount, given Clarkson and co's famous negotiating skills and the exotic locations filmed in Ultra-HD 4k.

The Grand Tour is the clearest demonstration yet of Amazon's ambitions in the original-content space, where it is

facing off against streaming rival Netflix, as well as traditional broadcasters.

However, Netflix's planned 2017 content spend outstrips Amazon's by \$6bn to \$3.6bn, according to Boston Consulting Group. And Netflix Originals currently offers many more new series – *Stranger Things*, *Narcos* and *Orange is the New Black* are among the most popular and critically acclaimed.

But Amazon is increasingly a force to be reckoned with. Marine points out that it has clocked up 80 awards for Amazon Original Series, spanning drama, comedy and kids' shows. He is looking forward to further noisy and Emmy-winning series such as *Transparent*, *Mr Robot* and *The Man in the High Castle*. To this end, Amazon has pledged to double the amount it spends on licensed material and to triple the amount it invests in original content by the end of 2017.

Moreover, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has begun talking about video becoming the fourth pillar of Amazon's business. At its heart, Amazon remains an e-commerce company while Netflix is a video-streaming giant.

One competitive advantage that Amazon enjoys is its subscribers' ability to download content for offline viewing, something that Netflix has so far failed to address.

AMAZON WANTED SOMETHING A BIT CULT, A BIT TRIBAL, AS OPPOSED TO ANYTHING TOO MAINSTREAM

Marine says that Amazon is continually investing to improve Prime customers' experience: "The team includes hundreds of engineers, designers and technicians working right here in London... introducing innovations such as our download feature.

"This lets customers watch on their devices even when they're not connected to the internet... We're working hard to be the first streaming service to offer HDR [high dynamic range], which brings a richer viewing experience."

In addition, Amazon's e-commerce infrastructure facilitates transactions on the back of TV-show viewing.

A report by eBay in September shows how "dual-screening" is booming for those in need of some retail therapy. Everyone from *Game of Thrones* to *Bake Off* fans, it seems, is watching TV while simultaneously shopping. In the report, one former Amazon executive describes how a major goal is to use TV franchises to drive sales of apparel and accessories. Like Kim Kardashian's shoes? Click here to buy.

Amazon is keen to add high-end brands to its business, but it should be noted that luxury brands are still reluctant to associate themselves with the company. In October, luxury goods group LVMH said that there was "no way" it would do business with the internet retailer.

By contrast, digital producers have reacted positively to the launch of the self-publishing video service, Amazon Video Direct. Many believe that they will be better able to monetise their videos on a platform where vast numbers of customers are already used to paying for content.

The service is also expected to have an impact on YouTube. "The lure of



The Grand Tour

Amazon

making content exclusive to Amazon will be a risk for YouTube, which risks losing viewers,” according to Joseph Evans, writing in an Enders Analysis report. Creators will be able to either charge users to access their content or to offer it on an advertising-funded, YouTube-style basis.

Amazon’s increased willingness to partner with established broadcasters also signals the super-sizing of its content ambitions. And those British producers who’ve worked with Amazon refute the suggestion that the company can be tricky to deal with.

Following its joint venture with the BBC on drama series *Ripper Street*, Amazon recently made the move into comedy. The online giant invested in the well-reviewed BBC Three comedy *Fleabag*.

It’s a win-win, according to BBC head of comedy Shane Allen. He notes that fully funded content is increasingly rare. DVD sales no longer plug the gap in any deficit-finance deal.

“Amazon’s investment created a more lavish product for the BBC and gave Amazon a critically acclaimed show,” says Allen.

He adds: “The concern with any partner is the level of editorial interference, but we had made a pilot that was true to what [writer and performer] Phoebe Waller-Bridge wanted when it came to cast, ambitions and tone. Amazon bought into that. It was really, really hands off.”

The comedy might be darker in tone than some might expect for Amazon, but Allen says the BBC’s distinct output “and our model of shorter runs suited

Amazon. It wanted something a bit cult, a bit tribal, as opposed to anything too mainstream. It was looking for a more distinctive, emotional comedy drama.”

Sky has also partnered with Amazon US for the first time, with the upcoming drama *Britannia*, a 10-part drama set in AD43, as the Romans invade Britain. Significantly, it is written by Jez Butterworth, the celebrated writer of *Jerusalem*.

According to Sky drama commissioning editor Cameron Roach, Amazon and Sky share common ground in seeking noisy, commercial shows.

“We were both looking for big-scale projects and the co-production gives us a big budget on screen and a global reputation and presence,” says Roach.

He also reports a positive working relationship with Amazon: “I get the sense that editorial meetings before a shoot are rare for them, but they were good partners and clear about what they wanted. We agreed to share notes, so that the production company would only ever get one set.”

Amazon gets the US rights and Sky Vision handles the UK and European rights. Roach believes that there will be more projects of this nature.

Whether platforms such as Amazon are a friend or a foe to traditional broadcasters has been debated for some time. The tide now appears to be turning in favour of the company becoming an increasingly valuable partner. “Friend or foe feels reductive,” says Roach. “The delivery mechanism is irrelevant. It’s all about supreme content.”

For analyst Tom Harrington at Enders Analysis, Amazon video is “an intriguing case study. It acts as an alluring element of the Amazon Prime membership, trapping users within the online giant’s ecosystem well past the point when they think they are tired of shopping. And yet it is also a very good streaming service in its own right.”

However, he believes a rapid, Netflix-style worldwide roll-out is unlikely. Amazon’s full video service is currently only available in the US, UK, Germany, Austria and Japan, with a roll-out to India anticipated.

Harrington says: “Having a streaming service without a physical distribution infrastructure to support Amazon Prime would be going against present strategic momentum.

“That said, Amazon has time on its side: wherever it goes, it becomes a site that most people trust. Buying from it becomes a very regular, even enjoyable thing.”



‘The biggest possible bargain in Britain’

It's a rare that two thoroughgoing BBC men are seen smiling, let alone laughing, inside the precincts of the House of Commons. When senior BBC people visit Parliament, they are invariably greeted by sceptical MPs, keen to give them a rough time.

The atmosphere could not have been more different when, last month, the RTS invited Andrew Marr and Sir David Attenborough to hold a conversation at the Commons.

The two broadcasters were introduced by Damian Collins MP, recently elected chair of the Culture Media and Sport Committee. He is also the new Chair of the RTS All Party Parliamentary Group, which hosted the event.

The occasion was full of good humour. This was despite some

David Attenborough at 90

David Attenborough tells **Andrew Marr** why he supports the licence fee but urges BBC television to broaden its range. **Steve Clarke** reports

trenchant criticism from each one about what they perceived to be some of the BBC's present shortcomings.

Marr's deceptively conversational style elicited some moments of surprising candour from the much interviewed broadcasting knight.

An animated Attenborough spoke passionately on the subjects he cares about: conservation, broadcasting and, inevitably, the BBC, for which he first worked a lifetime ago, in 1952.

They began their discussion by visiting the vexed topic of Brexit. What might Brexit mean for those involved in conservation, asked Marr.

Sir David suggested that there were pluses and minuses stemming from the UK's planned departure from the EU.

The loss of EU farming subsidies "will affect our countryside very much".



BBC

While running BBC Two, he green-lit *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, introduced snooker and commissioned the landmark documentary *Civilisation*.

His success was such that he was regarded as a director-general in waiting. But Attenborough, to our benefit, turned his back on corporate ambition and returned to making programmes.

But did we still need the BBC in today's content-rich world, where all tastes are apparently catered for at the click of a mouse? "Oh, yes, there is no doubt about that," insisted Attenborough. "As colleagues say, the BBC keeps us honest.... The BBC can set standards, of veracity, of responsibility.

"Taste is a very difficult thing... but the BBC has to be there and do things that others don't tackle because they don't think it's worth it commercially for them.

"If you look back at popular programmes, you'll see that the BBC pioneered them, again and again and again."

Attenborough regretted that long-running documentaries dealing with serious subjects were absent from contemporary British broadcasting. He said: "Today, there is a tendency to do shorter series, until you get the ultimate absurdity when they announce: 'Today, we present a new, two-part series.'"

Once the audience had stopped laughing, Marr noted that Attenborough had been responsible for several big series, such as *Life on Earth* and the previously mentioned *Civilisation*. Which one was closest to his heart?

"*Civilisation* has a very great place in my heart because it was the first of those 13-parters."

Was it hard to persuade the then-Director-General to spend all that time and money on the series? "He didn't know," replied the erstwhile BBC Two controller to more laughter. "How could he know? In those days, I had a programme allowance. If I chose to spend the funds in that way, it was entirely up to me.

"The 13-parter was something I decided to do because, as a child, I subscribed to something called *The Outline of History* by HG Wells. I used to wait at the letterbox for this thing to come through.... That market was not being dealt with at all by television and colour had recently been introduced.... It was a great relief that *Civilisation* worked."

Marr agreed that the BBC needed to raise the bar and back more programmes of genuine ambition, such as the behemoth that was *Civilisation*. >

However, enabling Britain to act independently on matters such as fishing policy was a positive.

"By and large, I would say there are a substantial number of people in the conservation movement who think, maybe, there is a chance to tailor-make our own legislation to fit our circumstances," suggested Attenborough. He added: "If we are going to go out [of the EU], we must make the best of it."

On the other hand, co-operation on a global scale had led to the ban on CFCs. As a result, the size of the hole in the ozone layer was getting smaller.

Similarly, the impact of global warming on climate change would only be ameliorated by collective action. "If we could harness the sun's energy, we could solve all the problems of CO₂ and global warming,"

maintained Sir David. "We know the basic science to solve it. What is needed is a concerted attempt by all the research scientists of all the developed nations to work out a route map to show where the difficult points are."

Marr asked if Attenborough regarded the UK as being one of the leading voices for radical change in energy policy. "There is no party politics in this," he replied. "There are no favoured nations. We are all in this together. Brexit is beside the point."

Turning to TV, Marr took Attenborough back to 1965 and his appointment as the second controller of the fledgling channel BBC Two. What would he do if had the job in today's digital world?

To audience laughter, the naturalist said: "I would resign immediately."

QUESTION & ANSWER



Paul Hampartsoumian

Q Has the BBC's coverage of climate change failed to reflect the balance of public opinion because it was so concerned about impartiality?

A Whatever it did, there would be somebody who thought it was either too early or too late. Myself, I thought they had it about right.... I had to decide how far I would go in saying climate change was responsible for this, that and the other.

I remember the moment when I could say positively that the world was warming due to humanity. It was when a US climate professor showed a whole series of graphs, demonstrating what there was in the upper atmosphere. He plotted that against population and the industrial revolution....

The BBC has quite a good record on these sorts of things.... When you get these big things, it's very difficult to get it right. I would say, by and large, the BBC gets it right.

Q What was the most mesmerising experience of your professional life?

A It was the first time I put on sub-aqua gear and dived on a coral reef. We all know that diving is itself an extraordinary experience. Simply being able to move in three dimensions is wonderfully liberating.

But to see 150 animals I'd never seen before, of the most amazing shapes and colours, all entirely unafraid of me, was the most transforming experience of my life.

Q Does it bother you that some politicians seem to have it in for the BBC? With your years of wisdom, do you have an explanation for this?

A In my experience, the opposition is always in favour of the BBC because the government has a big majority in the House and a lot of control over the media. The BBC was the one place where the opposition did have a say-so.

I was also there when there was a change in government. Suddenly, the opposition was now in power. Within six months, you could give them the same speeches [as the previous government].

Q Do you think it would ever be possible to return to having more BBC in-house productions? Several councils have discovered recently that it is better to have the services in-house, rather than outsourced.

A The first time I had to work on a BBC programme in a studio that wasn't the BBC's, I was rather childish about it. I thought, 'Well, in my day, we didn't allow this.' But I've grown out of that. It was silly.

There is room in the marketplace for independent operators to provide specialist services that the BBC and other broadcasters can make use of.

Q What advice would you give to someone who wanted to be a natural history presenter?

A My advice would be not to stand between the camera and the animal too frequently (laughter and applause from the audience).... In the programmes I do, the animals tend to be the stars.

Q Can you name a favourite programme?

A *Porridge*. It is absolutely top of almost anything. It seems to me a drama, a comedy, a deep insight into human personalities, causes you to think, magnificently played, perfectly cast. I don't know a better series on television.



From left: Andrew Marr and Sir David Attenborough

► Both broadcasters said that they wanted to see more TV coverage of classical music on the BBC. "I fear that, if I am watching an obscure concert, it'll be on Sky Arts," Marr complained. "Because of the pressure [for the BBC] to outsource, there are no in-house arts or history documentary-making facilities left in England. This seems to me to be a terrible moment."

Attenborough concurred: "Yes, and I would also say that there is nowhere within the BBC where what you might call house style is actually cherished, where house standards are cherished.

"You [gesturing to Marr] are in the BBC more than I am now, but where is somebody in authority who says, 'Did you not realise that, when you did that, you actually cut in a question that was repeated by the person already in shot?'..."

"Production standards are missing. I miss other standards, too."

Marr said there were large numbers of people who thought the BBC licence fee was unsustainable. What did Sir David think?

"A lot of the people I talk to, and I hope I'm not too cliquish, but a lot of the people are delighted to pay for what they get from [the] radio networks and three or four television networks.



[THE BBC IS] DOING TOO MANY ACTUALITY SHOWS [AND,] AS AN EX-BBC TWO CHANNEL CONTROLLER, I THINK WE ARE DOING TOO MUCH [DRAMA]

Paul Hampartsoumian

BBC TV needs a new menu

David Attenborough: 'I think, personally, that we are doing too many actuality shows. And, important though they are, there are other things – such as cooking and so on, and gardening, which are very good and certainly should be on the network – that we are doing rather too much of.'

'We are also doing a lot of drama. Personally, as an ex-BBC Two channel controller, I think we are doing too much. Not because there's anything wrong with them in themselves – they are all absolutely excellent in their own way – but we are nudging out and we are not exploring enough new things and new subjects.'

The art of crisp commentary

David Attenborough: 'I give commentaries in ways that were fashionable 30, 40 or 50 years ago.'

'A lot of people can write but they aren't being allowed or encouraged to write film commentaries in the way that they used to be 40 years ago.'

'There aren't a lot of people who write in the sort of documentary way that I try and do...'

'There are too many words in most commentaries.'

"They recognise that it's the biggest possible bargain in Britain."

So, finally, some good news for Tony Hall and his lieutenants, but Marr had not yet finished playing devil's advocate.

Surely, the great success of BBC iPlayer had almost demolished the case for the BBC? The idea of channels was vanishing. People expected to watch shows on-demand. Channels were an anachronism.

Attenborough disagreed. He said: "That may be so in the long term, but one of the extraordinary things, when you look at the statistics, is that channel loyalty is extraordinarily deeply ingrained. You put a show on BBC Four, nobody watches it, but you put it on BBC Two or BBC One and it gets a big audience."

Coincidentally, later that day more than 14 million viewers would watch the final of *The Great British Bake Off* broadcast by BBC One.

It was unclear if Attenborough was hoping to tune in but, as the dialogue continued between these two BBC heavyweights, he made it clear that he wanted to see fewer lifestyle shows and less drama on BBC TV (see box, left).

Returning to the subject of documentaries, Marr said that, in the more elitist days of the mid-1960s, it was possible

to make solid value judgements in programmes such as *Civilisation*. Today, anyone proffering judgements of this nature was met by hostility.

"Yes, and, in my book, that is to be regretted," said Attenborough. "A member of this House actually said: 'I don't wish experts to tell me what to do.'" This rebuke of Michael Gove was greeted by guffaws from the RTS audience.

Did Attenborough have any advice to offer the new BBC Chair? Reluctantly, he replied: "I don't know a sentence or a paragraph to answer that."

"I am absolutely persuaded that the BBC is a place where sanity and good judgement and civilisation can be protected and exercised."

Finally, out of the current crop of presenters, which of these did he think would eventually emerge as the next David Attenborough? "I am not sure there is a need for one, actually."

Others might disagree.

Sir David Attenborough was in conversation with Andrew Marr at an RTS All-Party Parliamentary Group event held on 26 October at the House of Commons. The producer was Sue Robertson. At the event, Sir David was presented with a trophy in recognition of his role as a Vice-President of the RTS.



Virtual reality gets serious

The latest virtual-reality headsets and gadgets battled for space with a bumper audience at the RTS early-evening event on virtual reality and 360° technology earlier this month.

Kit from some of the leading innovators in virtual reality was available for the audience to test in a “playroom”, before and after a panel of experts discussed the consumer appeal of this new technology.

Introducing the event, journalist Kate Bulkley said: “There’s a lot of money and ambition chasing virtual reality and 360° at the moment, which is very exciting.” Some media commentators had predicted that VR would grow to become an \$80bn industry by 2025, she continued.

It wouldn’t be the first time, however, that the industry had backed the wrong horse. The advent of 3D television was

VR production

Can 360° content defy the sceptics and bring a new, sustainable dimension to storytelling on TV?

Matthew Bell dons a headset

greeted with similar wild enthusiasm but never completed the course (see box, right).

Is virtual reality headed for the knacker’s yard or is TV on to a winner?

Ken Blakeslee, Chair of consultancy WebMobility Ventures, admitted that he had only started to “take virtual reality seriously about a year and a half ago”.

Until that point, “[the motion] made me sick and the content was glib”, he said.

He thanked the games industry for being the “cash cow” that has funded the development of VR technology over the past decade or so.

As a result, he argued, short-form virtual-reality “stuff is now being shot that is [truly] immersive”.

But much of the content, Blakeslee admitted, is poor: “You look at YouTube and most of the videos are rubbish, but there is some good [work] and new [virtual-reality] storytellers are being born.”

Addressing the TV producers in the audience, Blakeslee advised them to “embrace [virtual reality] but don’t think it’s right for everything”.

Both the BBC and Sky News filmed the Calais refugee camp in 360° video, which Blakeslee said was a highly effective use of VR technology.



GAMES ARE GOING TO DRIVE [VIRTUAL REALITY]

Oculus Rift headset and Oculus Touch controllers

Oculus VR

Will VR swim – or sink like 3D?

Television has form for promoting new technologies that do not live up to the hype. Journalist Kate Bulkley, who chaired the event, asked the panel whether virtual reality would fare any better than 3D TV. The latter had been much hyped by set manufacturers and some broadcasters, including Sky, before disappearing.

‘For 50 years, the industry has been trying to do 3D on a 2D screen and it just doesn’t work,’ said Ken Blakeslee from Web-Mobility Ventures. In contrast, he argued, virtual reality ‘has a big chance of taking off’.

Sounding a note of caution, Blakeslee added that the need to wear headsets to enter the VR world – like 3D’s ‘glasses problem’ – could put a brake on growth.

Sky VR executive producer Neil Graham was involved in the broadcaster’s early 3D experiments. He said: ‘I didn’t have the same feeling of excitement, immersion and emotional connection’ that he now got from a VR experience.

He argued that ‘3D was a layer on an existing form of content, whereas virtual reality is a whole new ecosystem that transports you to new places and gives you new experiences – they are completely different’.

Spencer Kelly, from BBC technology magazine show *Click*, said the programme had always been sceptical about the claims made for 3D: ‘We spent years going to tech expos and being told that 3D TVs were going to be the next big thing. We thought, “No, you’re lying – you’re just trying to sell more TVs”.’

Google’s Tamzin Taylor said that, unlike 3D, VR was cheap; Google’s new virtual reality headset, Daydream, was priced at just £69.

She also argued that the interactivity of virtual reality, which put the viewer at the heart of the action, gave it a significant advantage over 3D: ‘VR will give the user control over their experience and [allow] them to do more with the storytelling.’

Sky has been busy creating virtual-reality content, across all the broadcaster’s programme genres, in its Sky VR Studio, which opened earlier this year. In sport, the studio has produced virtual-reality shorts to support its Formula One coverage and a film about British heavyweight boxer Anthony Joshua.

Sport and virtual reality were a natural fit but, suggested Bulkley, using the new technology in drama was a trickier proposition.

‘Drama’s a longer burn than sport,’ admitted Sky VR executive producer Neil Graham, who runs Sky VR Studio. ‘It does have challenges but we have seen some tremendous footage.’

Sky saw its role as both a commissioner and distributor of virtual-reality content. ‘We felt that, if we were to commission and distribute content, we first had to learn how to make it,’ recalled Graham.

He had been picking the brains of experienced virtual-reality creators and directors. Over the next two to three years, Sky was looking to commission ‘around 12 high-end, virtual-reality films’, he revealed.

Spencer Kelly, the main presenter of BBC technology magazine show *Click*, emphasised that he is ‘sold’ on virtual reality: ‘The technology is there and it really does feel immersive.’ But he added a caveat: ‘You have to film content differently.’

Kelly was speaking from experience. Earlier this year, *Click* filmed an episode of the show entirely in 360° video. ‘We wanted to see if we could make our normal 25-minute programme in virtual reality,’ he said.

‘Choose a great location’ he advised, to grab the audience’s attention. ‘It’s an easy win if you can put the camera in an interesting place.’ For *Click*, this involved shooting at the Large ▶



From left: Tamzin Taylor, Neil Graham, Kate Bulkley, Spencer Kelly and Ken Blakeslee

Paul Hampartsoumian

› Hadron Collider near Geneva and in the Alps.

“The nature of virtual reality is that you park your traditional ways of making TV, where you cut between different shots every few seconds, or cut to a reaction shot or a close-up,” said Kelly. “You can’t do any of that because, if you’re wearing a [VR headset] and [the film] has 10 cuts in a minute, it will feel like your head is exploding.”

VR film-makers should imagine that they are filming in a theatre, rather than making telly: “It’s a long scene and you have to direct the audience to which part of the stage you want them to look at – that’s the trick with virtual reality.

“Shooting a scene is actually a lot easier than normal TV, because you choose a great location, put a camera up, hit record and do the scene. And you’ve got to get it right in one take.”

Post-production is another matter. “All the work comes afterwards – when you stitch the image together,” said Kelly.

Google is launching its new virtual-reality headset, Daydream, this month. The lightweight fabric headset, working with a small controller and a compatible smartphone, will offer mobile virtual reality.

It is a higher-tech version of Google Cardboard, the company’s first virtual-reality headset, which is made – as its name suggests – from cardboard.

Control is key, said Tamzin Taylor, who works in new business development for Google’s Android apps and games division: “Having an immersive experience with a comfortable headset is important, but giving the user control over their experience is the exciting part.”

SHOOTING A VR SCENE IS ACTUALLY A LOT EASIER THAN NORMAL TV [THOUGH] YOU HAVE TO GET IT RIGHT IN ONE TAKE

Currently, virtual reality is niche broadcasting – but could it break out into the mainstream?

Taylor thought so, revealing that Google expects to have “tens of millions of Daydream devices on the market” by Christmas 2017. “The question is how you make the content compelling and refreshing enough so that people know they have to come back to your app to watch it again and again,” she said.

“Games are going to drive [virtual

reality] – and porn will, if I’m honest,” said Kelly.

Echoing Blakeslee’s earlier comment, Kelly added that virtually reality would remain a niche until viewers could wear comfortable VR glasses, instead of today’s headsets.

Technology, agreed the panel, was developing rapidly. “Look at the number of patents out there for various different types of contact lenses and glasses” said Graham. “We’ll be laughing at the headsets that we’ve got at the moment in two or three years’ time.”

With the launch of the Sony PlayStation VR and Daydream in 2016 – and with an Apple virtual-reality device likely to follow at some point in the next couple of years – Graham argued that virtual reality was poised to grow fast.

Making money from VR, however, lies in the future. “Right now, where we are in virtual reality, we’ve no idea at what point it will be monetised, but we are confident in the technology, content and experience,” said Graham. “At the point at which the monetisation model becomes clear, we want to have been doing it for a long time so that we can get the content right.”

The RTS early-evening event ‘Virtual reality and 360° storytelling’ was held on 1 November at The Hospital Club in central London, and produced by Terry Marsh.

OUR FRIEND IN THE WEST

‘M’ists and mellow fruitfulness” means festival season in Bristol. This is when the city’s creative sector comes together to celebrate its talent and share a sense of belonging.

A festival is all about entertainment. Those festivals with a specific focus on cultural groups often seek to inform community members of their traditions and involve elders who share stories and experiences.

That couldn’t be a more fitting description for the creative-industry family that calls Bristol home.

We welcomed the autumn with the Encounters short film and animation festival, along with the Bristol International Festival of Cinematography and Wildscreen, the world’s largest gathering of natural history producers.

This month, we’re staging an RTS Futures Festival. This is aimed at the hundreds of creative-industry students who study in the city and surrounding region. When they graduate, the vast majority stay in Bristol and provide an important seam of emerging talent for the industry.

Who can blame them for wanting to remain here? It’s said that Bristol is a disproportionately creative city: it has more than 140 small, medium and large companies involved in content creation. The city is the leading tech hub outside London.

Bristol now has a thriving film studio, The Bottle Yard. *Broadchurch*, *Poldark* and *The Lost Honour of Christopher Jefferies* were made there.

Our success has evolved organically over more than 80 years and began when BBC Radio first arrived in Whiteladies Road. It was followed by the Natural History Unit, which celebrates its diamond anniversary

The Bristol media festival season is in full swing and **Lynn Barlow** is in her element



Jon Craig

next year. Aardman Animations planted its roots here 40 years ago and helped to fuel a highly successful local film, TV and animation community.

Both the BBC and Aardman are generous elders in the production, planning and delivery of Bristol’s festival season.

At Encounters this year, Aardman Executive Chair David Sproston premiered a world-first – a 30th anniversary, re-mastered version of that iconic Peter Gabriel track *Sledgehammer*. Remember the fruit on the ex-Genesis front man’s head?

Other treats were journalist Paul Mason’s “Desert island flicks” and a conversation with renowned author and screenwriter David Nicholls. His most recent novel, *Us*, is being adapted for television.

Set that alongside 500 young filmmakers and animators from across Europe showing us why short-form is

so exciting, and our season was off to a great start.

On the other side of the city’s floating harbour, at the cinematography festival, Bond director Roberto Shaefer was discussing light and pictures.

Meanwhile, Philippa Lowthorpe, still the only woman to win a Bafta for fiction direction, was unpicking that special relationship between director and DoP with her DoP, Matt Gray.

A retrospective with double Oscar winner and festival patron Chris Menges was the icing on the cake. *The Killing Fields*, *The Mission*, *Local Hero*, *Kes...* I could go on.

Netflix made the journey to Wildscreen for the European premier of *The Ivory Game*. Leonardo DiCaprio was an executive producer on the project but, no, he wasn’t in town.

Sir David Attenborough talked to Chris Packham about the future of our fragile planet, while the “wildlife Oscars” – the Panda Awards – filled 1,000 seats at the Colston Hall.

Comedian John Bishop was among the winners. His *Gorilla Adventure*, made by Bristol company Tigress, won the Panda for Popular Broadcast.

These glorious festivals are great news for everyone in the sector, including the city’s brilliant technical specialists. They encompass camera crews, editors, producers, musicians, researchers and the burgeoning digital teams.

Festival season is our chance to show each other and the world why Bristol is the first choice for anyone who wants to learn from the very best and why it is such an inclusive, exciting place to work.

Lynn Barlow is a journalist and documentary producer, as well as director, creative industries, at the University of the West of England. She chairs the Bristol Centre and recently joined the RTS Board of Trustees.

Sunday Night at the London Palladium, with Bruce Forsyth (right) and Sammy Davis Jnr



ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

The man who put Brucie on the box

It's only fair that I start with a confession. Given the personal support that Brian Tesler gave me at crucial times in my career, I would have found it very hard to write a critical review of his autobiography, even if it had been a pile of junk written by an 87-year-old, long past his best.

Thankfully, I didn't face that dilemma. The book isn't junk – it's a fascinating account of one person's journey from the earliest days of television at the BBC through to his retirement. This coincided with the takeover of London Weekend Television (LWT) by Granada in the mid-1990s.

And although it is true that Brian is now well into his eighties he looks 10 years younger. His memory is fine

The Best of Times: A Personal History of Television 1952-1994 by Brian Tesler is published by Kaleidoscope, priced £24.99



Book review

Greg Dyke says the memoir of one of British TV's pioneers is essential reading for today's TV generation

and, if this book is anything to go by, his judgement is as sharp as ever.

In fact, the book should be essential reading for people under 40 working in television today. Then, they would understand not only how the industry started in the 1950s, but just how much it has changed in a relatively short period of time – and not necessarily for the better for programme-makers.

Let me explain. Brian Tesler played a major part in advancing my career back in the 1980s and 1990s, when he successfully supported my candidature, first to be director of programmes at LWT and later to be his successor as the company's Chief Executive. So, I do owe him big time.

I found the first two-thirds of the book, covering the period when I wasn't

in television and didn't know Brian, the most interesting part. Largely, this was because Brian was one of the pioneers of television entertainment. He was the man who first put the likes of Wilfred Pickles, Roy Castle and Petula Clark on the box in the early 1950s.

Brian put the band leader Billy Cotton on television at around the same time and also helped his son at the beginning of his BBC career – young Bill Cotton ended up running the whole of BBC Television.

Bill Cotton used to say of Brian: "He taught me everything I know about television. Unfortunately, he didn't teach me everything he knew."

Furthermore, Brian was the man who launched Bruce Forsyth's career, when he gave him the job of hosting ITV's *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. Bruce, of course, went on to have a television career even longer than Brian's.

Before I worked directly for Brian, I was always told that, while he wasn't a business genius as the Managing Director of LWT, he was the best judge of a programme. In the time that I worked with him that was certainly true.

If Brian watched a pilot and said that he thought it would work he was usually right. He had an eye for detail, which meant that when he added, "but this or that would improve the show", you listened and took notice.

Having been one of the early entertainment producers at the BBC in an era when being sent to work in television was still seen by some at the corporation as a demotion, he switched to ITV to work for ABC.

Today's producers and directors would read Brian's account of those early years at both the BBC and ITV with envy. You had an idea, suggested it to your boss and, within just a few weeks, it was on the screen.

No months of audience research, no maybe and months of waiting, no interfering by pain-in-the-arse commissioning editors, no messing around by schedulers. There was a slot, you had an idea and you filled the slot. It was that simple.

The book is full of wonderful stories and anecdotes. How Sammy Davis Jr decided that he wasn't going to do a show just minutes before he was due in the studio; how *The Avengers*, starring Diana Rigg and not Nyree Dawn Porter, became a worldwide hit; and how Tesler nearly went to jail because LWT's

Weekend World offended Scottish judges. Instead, he was fined £5,000.

It also covers the history of the various ITV companies in great depth. From Tesler's account of a whole series of franchise rounds, you understand that, when the IBA Chair Lord Thomson said, "There must be a better way" of allocating ITV franchises, he was not wrong.

Whichever way government and the television authority of the moment tried, there were always cock-ups and injustices. ITV companies that should have lost, instead, survived. Meanwhile, ones that should have survived, lost.

Reading again the details of the last franchise round – when I was Chief Executive of LWT and we won with a bid of £7.5m and our only opponent lost by bidding £34.5m – you realise once again what madness it all was.

Personally, I was fascinated to discover how close I was to *not* becoming the Chief Executive of LWT – the job nearly went to a bicycle manufacturer from the Midlands. He not only knew fuck all about television but was proud of the fact. Thank you, Brian, for getting rid of him.

Do I have any criticisms of the book? First, I'd say that there are just too many names in it – names that will mean nothing to most people in television today. Second, it doesn't really get into the ridiculous industrial relations that dominated ITV for most of its history until the early 1990s.

It doesn't ask the question: why did the ITV companies' boards and senior executives put up with such nonsense for so long? After all, when they did finally take on the unions, they collapsed like a pack of cards.

But these are small points about a book rich in history, anecdotes and colour. This is a book that tells the story of the development of a glamorous industry and the glamorous people who worked in it.

During my time in television, I was always critical of the "old men" – and they were almost exclusively men – who spent their lives telling us how wonderful the early days of television had been.

Having read Brian's account of those years, maybe I was too critical. He makes them sound a lot of fun.

Greg Dyke was formerly Chief Executive of LWT, Chair of Channel 5 and Director-General of the BBC.



Paul Hampartsoumian

The naked adventurer

Ed Stafford is more than an adventurer. The first man to walk the length of the Amazon is also a film-maker of some repute. At an RTS Futures event, he presented a self-shooting masterclass illustrated by clips from his survival programmes.

In 2008, equipped with cameras from Ginger TV (the company that hired him), Stafford set out from the Peruvian Andes to begin a 9,700km quest to walk the Amazon.

Two years and four months later, he reached the mouth of the river with enough footage for his first series, the two-part *Walking the Amazon*, shown on Channel 5 and Discovery in 2011.

Liz McIntyre, director of Sheffield Doc/Fest, interviewed the former British Army captain at the RTS Futures event. In a previous job, as a Discovery

RTS Futures

Matthew Bell hears how ex-army captain Ed Stafford learnt to film his own survival stories for TV

commissioner, she had green-lit Stafford's shows for the channel, including 2013's *Naked and Marooned*, made by Tigress Productions.

The concept for this survival series was simple but forbidding. "If you were dropped off stark-bollock-naked on an island, without a knife, without food, without any contact with the outside world for 60 days, would you be able to survive?" asked Stafford.

On the Pacific Ocean desert island, the only equipment – other than a camera – allowed was a medical kit and a satellite phone to send texts in the event of an emergency.

Stafford survived and made a compelling series, but he was not afraid to admit that it had been a gruelling experience.

"It's all well and good to have ideas," he said, "but I didn't think it through. It was an utter baptism of fire. I'd never spent more than two days on my own and now I had 60 days."

The production company used a drop-box system on *Naked and Marooned* to send replacement camera batteries and any filming instructions to Stafford. Twice a week, a boat would leave the production base on a nearby island, pick up dead batteries and make a drop – no actual contact was allowed with Stafford.

"I've never said this in public before, but I once snuck down to the drop box when [the boat] was coming in to pick it up, which I wasn't meant to do.

"I literally hid in the bushes because I just wanted to see [people]. They didn't know I was there," Stafford confessed.

The adventurer wrote a book, also called *Naked and Marooned*, about his experience on the desert island, in which he admitted that he received psychological help after leaving the island.

During his ordeal, Stafford felt that "I was losing my mind, while trying to document the whole thing at the same time – it was the most extraordinary thing I've ever done in my life.

"This is not in the remotest sense a sob story, because [there] couldn't have been a more intense period when I learnt more about myself."

Discussing a production company's duty of care to people appearing in its programmes, he warned against putting "people who have a lust to make a name for themselves on TV into ridiculous situations. Essentially, they are a guinea pig and you're watching someone's mind unfold on camera."

Stafford told the RTS Futures audience that he was "not blaming anyone and took full responsibility for what I [had] signed up for", but added that other people could be more vulnerable.

In all the places he films, Stafford meets local, often indigenous, inhabitants first to learn about their way of life. "It would be arrogant and crass for an ex-army bloke to come into each environment and just do his thing without paying respect to local people," he said.

Looking back over the series he has made, Stafford said: "The thing that I am now genuinely proud of in these shows is that they're not just about killing a snake or crossing a river – they have an emotional depth to them.

"I'm learning stuff about myself and how to live my life. Discovery has given me the opportunity to turn that into a TV programme.

"That the audience can go away and learn the same thing is great – we have almost managed to transcend the [survival] genre."

The RTS Futures event, 'Self-shooting masterclass with Ed Stafford', was held at the Cavendish Conference Centre in London on 12 October. It was produced by Phil Craig, Iestyn Barker and Jack Oliver.

The art of shooting a survival series



Discovery series *Lone Survivor*

Discovery

Ed Stafford revealed at the RTS Futures event that his inspiration for *Walking the Amazon* was Bruce Parry, an earlier TV adventurer.

Parry had filmed and presented *Cannibals and Crampons* (an episode for the 2002 BBC One series *Extreme Lives*), about his ascent of a mountain in the Indonesian part of New Guinea.

"I thought that if I could go away and do something like [that], take a camera and make a film about it, then I would be able to make a career for myself in TV," said Stafford. "It was always [my] strategy; it wasn't just this romantic notion of walking the Amazon and being completely purist about it."

Stafford made *Walking the Amazon* after just 'half a day's film training on Streatham Common', he recalled.

No amount of UK training, though, would have prepared him for shooting in South America. "I was held up at gunpoint three times, at arrowpoint three or four times, I was arrested for murder once and drugs trafficking another time – and I didn't get any of it on camera because I was scared," he said.

Since making *Walking the Amazon*, Stafford has come on leaps and bounds as a film-maker. "[Now], I am very much aware of the exact moments that I need to film. The moment I get scared, the camera's on; any extremes of emotion and I know that I need to record it, but that came through the experience of being extraordinarily frustrated with

myself for not fully capturing that [Amazon] expedition."

For Tigress Productions' *Marooned with Ed Stafford*, shown in 2014, the adventurer spent 10 days alone in some of the world's remotest areas.

Armed with a selection of GoPros and hand-held cameras, Stafford returned with stunning footage from, among other places, Patagonia and Guatemala. "There were two projects going on: the first was getting enough food in order to survive; the second was making a cool film about it."

Stafford has embraced the opportunity 'to be artistically creative' and admitted that film-making 'is more interesting to me now than the survival part'.

His role, however, finishes with the filming: Stafford is not involved in the edit. "I've been really lucky in having amazing editors," he said.

"When we started making these survival shows I was really worried, especially [on *Naked and Marooned* and] spending 60 days on that island. It was such an emotional journey that I thought, "How on earth are they going to be able to take that and turn it into even a close representation of what happened?"

Stafford saw a rough cut, however, and 'couldn't believe how close it was to what I went through'.

He added, to audience laughter: "They make you look like a hero, despite all the shit footage."

Yorkshire chuckles at TV brothers

Comedy duo the Chuckle Brothers celebrated 50 years in television at a Yorkshire Centre event in mid-October. Their children's show for the BBC, *Chuckle-Vision*, ran for 21 series from 1987 to 2009.

The brothers, Paul and Barry, were interviewed on stage at Holy Trinity Church in Leeds by author and light entertainment aficionado Louis Barfe.

The brothers' father, Gene Patton, was a well-known *Gang Show* performer who worked with a teenage Peter Sellers. Indeed, the brothers think that some of the characters later performed by the chameleon-like Sellers bore a striking resemblance to their father.

Their own careers started when they won *Opportunity Knocks* in 1967. They went on to triumph in another talent show, *New Faces*, in 1974.



The Chuckle Brothers with interviewer Louis Barfe

However, further TV appearances were hard to find and they spent most of the 1970s and 1980s touring pubs and working-men's clubs.

In the mid-1980s, their talent for clowning was spotted and they were offered a

regular TV slot – in dog costumes – with the BBC pre-school show *The Chuckle-Hounds*, their first television incarnation.

Paul Chuckle revealed that the idea for their comedy dog characters came when

the brothers were given the run of a warehouse containing props and costumes left over from *Opportunity Knocks*.

They selected two dog costumes and the rest is television history. For the next 25 years, the Chuckle Brothers were a mainstay of UK children's TV.

The Chuckles retain a loyal following – indeed, many of their fans turned up at the event in Leeds, including one young man who had had his photo taken with them as a child in the 1990s. Super fan Shaun Hope, who claims to have spent more than £25,000 on Chuckle Brothers memorabilia, was also in the audience.

At the end of the night, it became clear why the entertainers are held in such affection – the duo stayed around for almost an hour posing for photographs and signing autographs.

Lisa Holdsworth

ONLINE at the RTS

■ Talent agents have long suffered from a negative reputation, and are often seen as cynical and manipulative. 'I thought I had a reputation as a ferocious old bag – which I don't mind,' agent Vivienne Clore told Ed Gove in the latest in our *Face to Face* interview series. Clore, whose clients include Jo Brand and Sandi Toksvig, shared her experiences of running a talent agency, from the long hours to the ferocious negotiations fuelled by diminishing budgets. An honest insight from an agent with more than 30 years in the industry (www.rts.org.uk/vivienne-clore).

■ For the past couple of years, the RTS digital team has visited all kinds of industry insiders, from dubbing mixers to science correspondents, for our *Tips in 60 Seconds* video series. We are now resting the format, and have launched a brand new stream – *Tea Break Tips* – still offering great advice, but now in more detail, to watch with a brew. Human rights film-maker Louise Orton, who has directed short films for BBC World, is the first person you can stick the kettle on to watch for her tips for reporting human rights issues at www.rts.org.uk/reporting-human-rights.



Ed Stafford at the RTS

Paul Hampartsoumian

■ It's amazing what you learn attending RTS events. Speaking to adventurer Ed Stafford ahead of his recent RTS Futures event, the digital team discovered that the *Naked and Marooned* star likes

nothing more than kicking back and watching *Made in Chelsea*. You can watch his tales of being arrested for murder, learning how to shoot documentaries and the psychological strain of isolation at www.rts.org.uk/ed-stafford.

■ If you missed out on tickets for the phenomenal 'The Night Manager: Anatomy of a hit', you can watch it at www.rts.org.uk/TNM. Sir David Attenborough's sell-out conversation with Andrew Marr, which took place at the House of Commons last month, can be found online at www.rts.org.uk/Attenborough. **Pippa Shawley**

The onward march of technology is gathering pace – and the broadcast media industry has to keep up.

This was the key message from RTS London's review of this year's IBC technology exhibition, held jointly with the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) at the latter's sumptuously refurbished HQ on the banks of the Thames.

Amsterdam's annual media technology event welcomed nearly 1,600 exhibitors and more than 55,000 visitors to its exhibition halls and conference sessions. The RTS and IET are two of the six partners behind IBC.

"Everything is changing so fast with the arrival of IP [internet protocol] and the Cloud, and we, as an industry, are having to innovate at the same pace – and a show like IBC has to reflect that," said Decipher MD Nigel Walley, who chaired the RTS/IET event in mid-October.

Walley continued: "It's likely that IBC will be radically different every year – and the challenge for the management of IBC is to put in place the wi-fi, apps and social media to enable the live discussion during the show to match the pace of the innovation of the technologies and the breakthroughs revealed in the conference."

A consensus soon emerged at the London discussion that the rapid growth in the use of IP and the Cloud was changing broadcasting infrastructures fundamentally. SDI (serial digital interface) was now completely absent from IBC, argued Vodafone media and broadcast business development lead Craig Buckland.

New at IBC 2016 was an IP interoperability zone, where more than 30 companies



From left: Nigel Walley, Tom Marshall, Craig Buckland, Stephanie Scheller and Graham Turner

Raw Pictures

London revisits IBC

showed how their technologies could work together.

The zone demonstrated the work of the Joint Taskforce on Networked Media, which has been developing a roadmap for the implementation of IP in broadcast environments. The manufacturers' association, the IABM, and the Alliance for IP Media Solutions also contributed to the exhibition.

At its heart was a live production studio based on one developed by Belgian broadcaster VRT, which has been on air for several months as part of the LiveIP Project, a collaboration between the European Broadcasting Union and VRT.

Tom Marshall, creative director at Captive North, produced the "What caught my eye sessions" at IBC, which gave leading technologists a chance to seek out and report on the show's most interesting exhibits.

He screened clips of these video packages, including one showing how companies were taking full advantage of what they could achieve using IP and the Cloud.

Forbidden Technologies' in-the-Cloud editing system, Forscene, is well established. But the company is now moving towards a fully virtualised post-production system in the Cloud, highly secure and integrated with suppliers such as Amazon web services. This will allow the processing of pictures at every stage of production, from the camera to the screen to be done through an online browser.

Graham Turner, Chair of IET's Multimedia Communications Network, has a particular interest in content protection and piracy issues.

He spoke of the constant battle to protect copyright content in the IP arena: "On the Nagra stand, there was a tall column of pirate set-

top boxes; with the growing interest in VR, how do you protect that content?"

Looking further into the future, Buckland reminded the audience that none of the top 20 internet companies in the world are European – 11 are from the US, with the rest from Asia. "And Google is bigger than all the European media companies combined," he added. "Who will be the broadcasters of the future? I suspect the platforms."

Stephanie Scheller, head of business development at Appiness, cited the opportunities offered by the sophisticated exploitation of metadata in the rise of multi-device consumption of video.

"Make more of your metadata – using it creatively can make advertising more interesting to engage with," she said. "In the multi-screen world, metadata will fuel the future – its potential is vast."

Nick Radlo

Help for young talent in Wales

The annual Wales Centre event “Meet the makers” once again proved to be a huge hit, attracting a healthy audience of freelancers keen to learn from the panel of producers and commissioners assembled for the event.

The high-level panel included commissioners, managing directors of production companies and the Chief Executive of Ffilm Cymru Wales. Broadcasters and indies represented at the event included BBC Cymru Wales, Boomerang, Wild-flame Productions, Green Bay Media, Wales & Co and ie ie Productions.

“Meet the makers”, which was held in late October at The Waterguard in Cardiff Bay, gave freelancers the

opportunity to meet the people behind television productions in Wales – and the chance to quiz them about their shows in the pipeline for 2017.

Director of BBC Cymru Wales Rhodri Talfan Davies talked in detail about the broadcaster’s programme plans and its move to purpose-built headquarters in the city centre.

The evening was conceived partly to strengthen the links between producers and commissioners, and partly to open opportunities for freelancers based in and around the Welsh capital.

RTS Wales hopes to organise a similar event in the new year, targeted at the film and drama side of the industry.

Cath Tudor



Rhodri Talfan Davies

James Davies/Alamy Stock Photo

■ Daniel Cripps was once told that only one person in his year at college could expect to get a job in television – ‘I was determined that would be me.’

Originally from Shropshire, Cripps graduated in media production at the University of South Wales.

During his college years, he produced video showcases for actors at Bristol’s Old Vic Theatre and worked as a first assistant director on short films shown at Cardiff’s Iris Prize Festival.

The dedication paid off when his final-year short film, *Between Viewings*, won the 2011 RTS Wales Centre Student Television Award for Fiction.

Getting work after leaving university proved to be tough.

‘You have to be prepared to be flexible and realistic about



Daniel Cripps

Hywel Wiliam

what work you’re going to get straight after uni and, more likely than not, you’ll need a part-time job outside the

industry to support yourself in the early stages,’ he told *Television*. For Cripps, this included working as a night

community-centre caretaker in a rough part of Newport. ‘The unusual hours gave me time to think and to write,’ he said.

Cripps sought a wide range of production experience, which he gained on three BBC One shows: *Crimewatch*, *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*.

At last year’s ‘Meet the makers’ event, run by RTS Wales, Cripps had a conversation with Sam Grace, director of programmes at the Cardiff-based indie Boomerang.

After submitting his CV, he was interviewed by Grace, initially gaining a two-month development contract, before being promoted to the role of development assistant producer.

‘I owe a lot to my college and to the RTS for my career success to date,’ said Cripps.

Hywel Wiliam

Specialist aerial camera operator and director of photography David Baillie discussed the pros and – mostly – cons of mini-flying cameras at a North East and the Border Centre event, “Drones or helicopters: truth or lies?”, in mid-October.

As someone who has won awards for his stunning helicopter footage of Antarctica for the landmark BBC One series *Frozen Planet*, Baillie is not convinced about the desirability of using drones and GoPro cameras in so many programmes.

At the RTS event, which was held at the Northern Counties Club, Newcastle, Baillie recalled an enthusiastic producer on a polar shoot unpacking his drone as the ice-breaker ship reached its destination.

He was secretly amused when, on its first flight, the drone disappeared out of range and crashed.

Baillie argued that using a drone to track the length of the research base delivered worse results than his own static camera mounted on a

North East debate pits drones against helicopters



hydraulic tower. He does, on occasion, use drones.

He explained that a drone, could, for example, take shots that would be impossible – due to the noise and excessive down-draft – for a helicopter.

He added that, although a helicopter could fly for three hours without having to refuel, a drone would have to return to ground in as little as 10 minutes to recharge its batteries.

Worse still, a producer can't load the presenter and crew on to a drone to fly to the next filming location – five minutes away by air, but an hour by road.

Graeme Aldous

Dublin previews new drugs doc

Journalist and broadcaster Shane Kenny discussed his hard-hitting and highly personal documentary *Benzodiazepine Medical Disaster* at a Republic of Ireland Centre event in October.

Kenny was prescribed a benzodiazepine drug in 2001 to treat Ménière's disease, a rare inner-ear condition. In the documentary, he argues that prescribed drugs turned a manageable, relatively mild condition into a disabling, long-term illness.

The event at RTÉ Television

Centre drew a large audience of RTS members and guests, including people who claimed that their health had been adversely affected by the use of benzodiazepines, which include Valium, Xanax and Ativan.

In the documentary, an excerpt from which was shown at the event, health professionals talk about the side effects of benzodiazepines and how difficult it is to stop using them.

Kenny's film quotes the British Medical Association as



Shane Kenny speaking at the Dublin event

Charles Byrne

saying that the drugs can cause harm if their prescription and withdrawal is not carefully managed.

Kenny has yet to find a broadcaster for the film.

In a varied career at RTÉ, Kenny launched the broadcaster's flagship radio news

programme *Morning Ireland*, anchored radio's *News at One*, served as business editor and had a stint as an investigative reporter on current affairs programme *Seven Days*. He also served as the Irish government's press secretary.

Charles Byrne

Scottish arts TV in the spotlight

BBC Scotland's arts programming was dissected by the RTS at Glasgow's Pacific Quay in October.

Executive producer Pauline Law (BBC Two's *The Marvellous World of Roald Dahl*) and Jack Cocker, who was named Best Director at the RTS Scotland Awards in May, talked about their work and craft.

Cocker discussed *Richard Flanagan: Life after Death*, an acclaimed episode of BBC One's arts strand *Imagine* about the 2014 Man Booker Prize-winning author.

"Beginnings and endings are difficult," said Cocker. "The idea was to try and grab people's [attention] and to

hint visually at what was to come later. Richard's books are all set in Australia and there were elements that deal with the genocide of aborigines and stories his father told him about being in a concentration camp."

Flanagan's father survived forced labour on the Burma railway as a prisoner of war during the Second World War.

Cocker praised Dave Arthur – "the best editor I've ever worked with" – and presenter Alan Yentob: "Alan pushes you to be more cinematic." Law added: "[Yentob] has been a film-maker, so he really brings something to the editing suite." He also spoke about programme



From left: Pauline Law, Jack Cocker and James Wilson

Ilisa Stack

development, admitting: "There's a lot of waiting with bated breath."

Audience members fired questions at the duo. Subjects included the dynamic between a director, presenter and subject; soundtracks; and the ratio between men and women in TV.

Based on his own experi-

ences, Cocker did not believe that the ratio was awry:

"There are a lot of directors on *Imagine* – I think I'm the only male. I've only ever had one male boss in my career."

Law agreed, but added: "I find it frustrating that the top level of commissioning is very male-dominated."

Rebecca Robertson

RTS launches new centre in Norwich

■ The Society's new East Centre launches at the end of this month with a look at the AniMotion touring exhibition.

The event is on Wednesday 30 November at The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich, starting at 7:00pm.

"We have formed a brand new RTS Centre here in the East to celebrate the thriving creative media industry in our region," said RTS East Chair Nikki O'Donnell. "We want to create an environment where everyone can come and share their ideas and inspiration, and learn from the most experienced professionals, as well as the newest innovators."

If you would like to be a part of RTS East, please email rtseast@rts.org.uk.



Kate Thomas

Ellie Kynaston

■ More than 170 students attended the first RTS Bristol Futures Festival. Held at the Watershed, Bristol, on 1 November, the fair provided an opportunity to meet local indies, BBC Bristol Popular Factual, ITV News West Country and post-production houses.

In a buzzing atmosphere and to the backdrop of a DJ, students were encouraged to chat to the experts – from shooting researchers to managing directors – about how

Bristol offers advice on getting started

to break into the industry. Executives also gave a series of talks.

BBC talent manager Sas Bonser discussed CVs: "Don't make it too wordy, use bullet points and don't go crazy with the graphic design." On preparing for interviews, she said: "Research and watch the content; be armed with examples and always come with an idea."

Hugo Pettitt, an RTS West of England Student Awards winner in 2014 and now a researcher/assistant producer at BBC Studios/BBC Docs, offered advice on making the leap from academia to the industry.

He encouraged students to make use of university facilities to create a taster tape.

Freelance development producer Kate Thomas and BBC producer Mel Rodrigues delivered a double-hander on pitching ideas. The duo discussed what makes a good pitch – "idea, access, talent, treatment and taster" – and offered tips for getting ahead: "Research the commissioner and the channel/slot, know your competition and your strengths, and build relationships."

RTS award-winning editor Glenn Rainton discussed post-production and how his first boss had challenged him: "He said to me, 'Right, what music do you not like – I want you to cut to that and make it emotional and compelling?'"

Suzanne Lambert

■ Writer and director Steven Knight and Birmingham-born actor Martin Shaw – best known for his roles in *Judge John Deed* and *Inspector George Gently* – were each awarded a Baird Medal at the RTS Midlands Awards this month.

Knight is the creator of BBC Two's Birmingham-set gangster series, the RTS-award-winning *Peaky Blinders*.

The Baird Medal recognises Midlands' contribution to TV. The awards were presented by *ITV News Central* anchor Sameena Ali-Khan at the National Motorcycle Museum in Solihull.

Claire Goose won Best Acting Performance for her role in BBC Birmingham drama *The Coroner*. Best Fictional Television Programme went to another BBC drama, *Father Brown*.

BBC Birmingham's Jonathan Gibson was named Television Journalist of the Year for the second year running.



Peaky Blinders: created by Baird Medal winner Steven Knight

BBC

Midlands honours Knight and Shaw

Guy Martin, best known for Channel 4's *Speed with Guy Martin*, which is produced by North One Television, was named Best On-screen Personality. North One also picked up the Best Factual Programme award for C4's *Travel Man: 48 hours in ...*

Other winners included

ITV News Central, which was named Best News Programme for *Leicester Champions' Parade*, and BBC East Midlands Current Affairs for *Investigating Sports Direct: An Inside Out Special* (Best Current Affairs Feature). Anita Ramdharry was named Best New Talent for her work on

kids' series *Chico Chugg*, which is made by TaDaKids.

Staffordshire University students picked up a number of awards in the student categories. Andrew Pasquale Bell won for *The Oval Portrait* (Animation and Craft Skills: Production Design); Richard Binnington, *Searching for Signatures* (Comedy & Entertainment and Editing with Sam Woodhall); and Jack Kelly, Josh Clarke and Alex Daly, *Buses* (Drama).

Yue Liu from the University of Derby took the Factual and Camera Work prizes with *A Girl's Story*; and Steve George, Ryan Sibanda, Joshua LA Baggott and LJ "Stark" Greenwood from the University of Wolverhampton won the Short Feature prize for *Si*.

Midlands Vice-chair Dorothy Hobson said the range of awards had highlighted the richness of both existing talent and that coming through from colleges. **Matthew Bell**

Kids masterclass in the North West

An RTS North West event in October – "From concept to screen" – looked at how the best kids' shows are made. The region is a centre of excellence for children's drama: CBBC is based at MediaCity and local productions include *Hank Zipzer*, *The Evermoor Chronicles* and the new version of *The Worst Witch*.

"Relatability", suggested the panel, is crucial to making a hit drama because kids want to see their lives reflected on screen – even if it is at one step removed from reality, through aliens or witches.

A sense of mystery that keeps the audience coming

back is one key ingredient. Disney Channel's *The Evermoor Chronicles*, made by Lime Pictures, features a different "baddie" in each episode.

Senior drama producer for CBBC independents Amy Buscombe stressed the importance of the "kid's eye-line". She said that she receives too many pitches in which the story is not told from a child's view.

Hank Zipzer producer Jim Poyser said that, for comedy to work, alongside the jokes there needed to be an emotional reality and characters that viewers cared about.

CBBC's *Zipzer* features a lot of custard pies but, at its



From left: Poyser, Hodgson, Buscombe, Bullough and Wilson

Claire Harrison

heart, the programme is about how a boy deals with his problems at school.

Worst Witch executive producer Marcus Wilson said there was a tendency to underestimate kids' ability to stick with a story. From his time on *Doctor Who*, Wilson recalled a maxim: "Make it simple enough for the adults but complicated enough for the kids."

Lime Pictures drama chief

Rebecca Hodgson revealed the origins of the idea for the untitled horse show she was making for Netflix. A teacher friend told a writer that she had overheard her female students discussing what sounded like their boyfriends, but later realised they were talking about their horses.

The panel was chaired by head of CBBC production Helen Bullough.

Usman Mullan

OFF MESSAGE

List shows may be out of fashion, but few of us can resist a list, especially when the list in question enumerates the greatest TV shows of all time.

Rolling Stone magazine recently published its verdict on the top 100 TV programmes ever. No surprise that it was almost entirely taken up by US shows. Nevertheless, a handful of British TV gems made the cut.

Yes, you guessed correctly that *Monty Python* and *Fawlty Towers* featured. So, too, did *Doctor Who* and *Downton Abbey*. But the highest-placed British show? Take a bow, David Brent: the original version of *The Office* took 21st place.

And the number-one show? HBO's matchless *The Sopranos*. No complaints about that.

■ Talking of high-end TV drama – and, these days, is there any other kind? – in case you hadn't noticed, Netflix's costume saga *The Crown* is finally available for streaming.

Off Message was privileged to attend a London premiere of the first two episodes of this über-expensive royal TV marathon.

For once, the hype was justified; on the basis of episodes 1 and 2, *The Crown* appears to set a new benchmark for television period drama.

■ The series could turn out to be a *Brideshead Revisited*/ *Jewel in the Crown* moment for Netflix's poor relations over at New Broadcasting House.

Remember, back in the 1980s, ITV beat the BBC at its own game. The commercial network won huge praise and numerous awards for those two brilliant Granada shows.

In the wake of *The Crown*, expect still more scripted collaborations between British broadcasters and American producers.

■ At *The Crown* launch, the man who wrote the series, Peter Morgan, suggested that, in terms of rocketing TV drama budgets, we ain't seen nothing yet.

"Think back 10 years to where we were in terms of broadcasters and the way we consumed programmes. If you look 10 years ahead [from now], I think we'll be talking about TV shows being made for £300m to £500m," opined the screenwriter. "I think that the Bonds, the *Star Wars*, will all have TV versions of themselves. That's not to say that the theatrical experience is dead, but I do think the appetite for storytelling [is growing]."

It's hard to disagree.

■ Congratulations to BBC TV, which earlier this month celebrated the 80th anniversary of the world's first regular, domestic television service.

Glad to see *The Daily Mail* entering into the spirit of the occasion by publishing a double-page spread reflecting on programme schedules since, gulp, 1936.

In an accompanying essay, cultural historian Dominic Sandbrook argued

that BBC TV was at its most serious and genuinely entertaining in the 1960s and 1970s. Needless to say, Sandbrook's conclusion was that, compared with former triumphs, Auntie has lost its way.

This is not exactly an original view and doesn't really bear scrutiny. In the past three months alone, the BBC has given us shows as original and challenging as the waspish comedy *Fleabag* and Adam Curtis's near-three-hour documentary, *Hyper-Normalisation*. Not, of course, forgetting the most successful season yet of *The Great British Bake Off*.

It is interesting, however, that two of these three shows started out online. Are commissioners now happier to experiment digitally than within the confines of a linear line-up?

■ Since leaving ITV almost a year ago, little's been heard of the network's erstwhile director of television Peter Fincham.

Could the man who famously green-lit *Downton Abbey* be about to re-emerge and return to his roots in independent production?

Fincham and Tim Hincks occasionally tread the boards together in *No Expectations*, a band that, for some unknown reason, is absent from Spotify.

But are the duo about to form a professional alliance along the lines of Alex Graham and Michael Jackson's *Two Cities Television*?

Just don't call the company *No Expectations*.



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